



Power, gender, and relative income: negotiating domestic labour in female breadwinning households in the United Kingdom

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by

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ABSTRACT

In the United Kingdom, the decline of the ‘male breadwinner model’ resulting from structural changes in the economy and gender relations over the past decades has led to an increase of female breadwinning households – understood in this thesis as households where women earn more than their male partners. I present chapters examining the processes and power relations underlying the negotiation and division of domestic labour implemented in some of these households. The thesis highlights the interactions between the structural and individual levels by paying attention to the meso-level of the household and to the emotional and relational processes underlying the division of domestic labour.

I present a qualitative account of these phenomena based on several types of data collected by interviewing 26 female breadwinning couples and seven individual female breadwinners. I first used a combination of two methodological tools, the Household Portrait and a time schedule inspired from time-use studies, to assess both the quantitative and qualitative division of labour in the participants’ households. I then used joint and individual face-to-face in-depth interviews to grasp both the participants’ subjectivities, and the interactions between women and men in these couples.

Despite women’s relative economic power and couples’ professions of ‘gender equality’, these couples reproduced some aspects of traditional gender roles in relation to domestic labour. I argue that a ‘marital contract’ tacitly defined women’s roles as household managers and carers of the emotional sphere, leading to an unequal division of mental load and emotion work. A fundamental content of the participants’ female breadwinning marital contract was the devaluation of women’s labour. Overall, there were asymmetries of positions and power between women and men that characterised their negotiation of domestic labour. Within this context, change was restricted to specific conditions in which women’s agency was framed by their partners’ inertia.

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Chapter 1. From the household to female breadwinning: contextualisation and conceptualisation of women and labour in contemporary United Kingdom

The end of the 20th century and the first decades of the 21st century have been characterised by the emergence of the idea of progress towards ‘gender equality’ in Western countries. Many writings, both in popular culture and in academia, choose to emphasise the gains in women’s rights compared to the period before the 1970s’ second wave of modern feminist activism. Some authors have claimed that Western countries have entered a “postfeminist” (Moi, 1985) era in which traditional inequalities between the sexes have been eradicated, or almost, and that there is no more need for an active push towards more equality (Sommers, 1995). However, the idea that inequalities between women and men have been eradicated has been challenged by a large quantity of academic literature (Faludi, 1992; Hall & Rodriguez, 2003). Some authors have shown that the achievement of legal rights for women coexist with ongoing inequalities between women and men in other areas (England, 2010; Ridgeway, 2011). The nuanced state of equality between women and men has also led some authors to argue legal solutions are not enough to solve the problem of inequality between women and men, since power relations between women and men seem to remain partly unaffected by changes in the law (Gouws, 1999).

Findings presented in this thesis contribute to the academic literature on persisting inequalities in a context of legal equality by analysing power relations taking place between women and men within the household. I provide a qualitative account of how inequality can be produced and reproduced in the negotiations between women and men within the 21st century heterosexual household despite women’s greater economic power relative to their male partners. Although the earlier stage of this project was more focused on how couples in which women earn more “undo gender” (Deutsch, 2007) and implement equality

in a non-traditional economic setting, the participants' answers and ways of dividing domestic labour at home led me to focus on the various mechanisms underlying their division of domestic labour. The fact that most couples I interviewed reproduced traditional gender roles in the household, with women doing more domestic labour than their male partners, has shifted my focus from studying the ways women's economic power influences the possibility of 'undoing gender' to the ways traditional gender roles and inequalities in domestic labour persist despite women's non-traditional role in relation to paid work, as well as both women's and men's professions to 'gender equality'. Based on my findings, I highlight the gap between the participants' ideologies of 'gender equality' and their practices in the household.

The shift towards legal equality between women and men which took place in the 20th century in Western countries cannot be denied: most or all explicitly discriminatory laws against women have been abolished in these countries, and the states and international institutions have passed laws and conventions which guarantee 'women's rights' and 'gender equality'. One of the most significant area of progress throughout the last century can be found in the law regulating the labour market. This shift in the law was preceded by women's mass entry in the labour market, while also accompanying the integration of women to various spheres of paid labour. This context, combined with the de-industrialisation of most Western countries and various economic crises that have affected male-dominated sectors and increased male unemployment, has caused to emerge a significant number of heterosexual households in which women earn as much or more than their male partners. The socio-economic structure of these heterosexual couples is usually approached with curiosity in popular culture as it appears to exemplify the decline, or even disappearance, of traditional structures. In some feminist narratives, the working woman

and the female breadwinners are the epitome of ‘female empowerment’ (Mavin & Grandy, 2019; Sandberg, 2013) . The underlying idea is that women are empowered when they gain access to the labour market, especially to higher positions providing economic power. The figure of the working woman is often glamourised in the media (Leonard, 2008) and tends to be presented as the liberating role modern women of the 21st century should embrace. The perfect and balanced life of the “Cosmo Girl” (Ouellette, 2016), emblem of the women’s magazine *Cosmopolitan*, is one of the woman who ‘can have it all’ and find happiness in juggling managerial positions, femininity, motherhood, and heterosexual coupledness (Adkins, 2001). There is a strong class element to this rhetoric as Douglas and Michaels (2005) point out, with middle-class women being reminded that they must never forget their roles as mothers despite their position in the labour market, while poor and non-working mothers tend to be represented as ‘lazy welfare queens’.

Meanwhile, academic literature on persisting inequalities between women and men in all areas of society (England, 2010; Ridgeway, 2011) has long pointed out that progress towards ‘gender equality’ is stalled, especially within heterosexual households (Ridgeway, 2011). Many researchers find that the rose-tinted idea saying that equality has been achieved overlooks persisting and modern forms of discrimination against women in all spheres of society (England, 2010; Jónasdóttir, 1994; Ridgeway, 2011). Some feminists have argued that the 1990s were actually a decade of backlash against the progress made by the feminist movement in the 1970s and 1980s (Faludi, 1992). One major sphere usually considered as having made at best minor progress compared to the middle of the 20th century is domestic labour within the heterosexual household. Here, women’s economic empowerment through the labour market and legal equality does not seem to have spurred radical change in women’s situation at home concerning unpaid labour. Women in general, and women I interviewed, tend to contribute more to domestic labour than their male

partners. This thesis unveils certain mechanisms underlying domestic labour inequality within heterosexual households.

Jónasdóttir (1994) examines the situation of women in contemporary Western societies by starting with the puzzling question: “Why, or how, do men’s social and political power positions with respect to women persist even in contemporary Western societies, where women and men are seen as formally/legally equal individuals, where almost all adult women are fully or partly employed, where there is a high proportion of well-educated women, and where welfare state arrangements, which obviously benefit women, are relatively well-developed?” (Jónasdóttir, 1994, p. 1).

It is with this puzzle in mind, between narratives of progress towards equality and facts of persisting inequalities, that I decided to research domestic labour in heterosexual households in which women have the highest relative economic power: female breadwinners – understood in this thesis as women who earn more than their male partners.

In this chapter, I present and discuss the contextual and conceptual background to this research. Firstly, I contextualise the involvement of women in the household and in the labour market in the contemporary United Kingdom by presenting trends and analyses concerning the division between paid labour – in the labour market – and unpaid labour – more specifically, domestic labour in the household – and by presenting the concept of female breadwinning (section I below). Secondly, I introduce my theoretical framework regarding domestic labour and present the research questions that guide the following chapters of this thesis (section II).

I. Contextualising the involvement of women in the household and in the labour market

In this section, I contextualise my research by highlighting contemporary changes in gender relations in the United Kingdom. I first present the main features of the past and existing sexual division of labour (sub-section A below) before addressing the concept and reality of female breadwinning (sub-section B).

A. The sexual division of labour

In order to better understand contemporary gender relations and women's labour in both the household and in the labour market, I start my analysis with the concept of sexual division of labour (Benería, 1979), highlighting the specific categorisation and hierarchies made between women and men, unpaid and paid labour, and the private and the public sphere (point 1 below). I then discuss the involvement of women in the labour market (point 2) and in the household (point 3) in the 20th and 21st centuries in the United Kingdom.

1. Contextualisation of the sexual division between paid and unpaid labour

While labour has long been understood through androcentric lenses of paid labour in the labour market, thus minimising the role of women, various feminist writings have for several decades highlighted the existence of unpaid labour, largely done by women, within the domestic realm. The dichotomy between paid and unpaid labour in Western societies is usually associated with another one, between the public and the private sphere. While men are associated with paid labour in the public sphere of the economic and political community, women are restricted to unpaid labour in the private sphere of the household (Héritier, 1996). To understand these divisions further, it is necessary to historicise their emergence.

Benería (1979) provides context to the concept of the sexual division of labour, which she sees as being “one of the most pervasive forms of human exploitation, rooted in the personal interactions between the sexes and in basic social institutions, such as the family, and supported by economic and political structures” (Benería, 1979, p. 205). She argues that the sexual division of labour is the basis of “a complex system of power relationships between the sexes” (Benería, 1979, p. 205). This division assigns “production” to men and “reproduction” to women. Reproduction encapsulates the basic reproduction of the human species and the “perpetuation of social systems”. She points out three aspects of reproduction: “social reproduction”, i.e. the reproduction of society, “reproduction of the labour force”, i.e. the “daily maintenance of agents and the allocations of agents to positions within the labour process”, and “human or biological reproduction”, i.e. “childbearing and the physical development of an individual” (Benería, 1979, p. 205). While only childbearing is necessarily done by women due to biological differences between the sexes, Benería argues that patriarchal society assigns two other aspects of reproduction to women: childcare and daily maintenance of the labour force through domestic labour. Domestic labour is how men as a sex class exploit the labour of women as a sex class (Delphy, 1984, 2013b; Delphy & Leonard, 1992). From a macro-level and structural perspective, this means that when it comes to social reproduction, men as a group tend to share commonalities and interests with each other by exploiting women as a group, therefore forming a sex-based class of individuals. It is through the sharing of some interests tied to some social activities, roles, and the sexual division of labour, that men can be conceptualised as forming a social group which upholds a society in which women are assigned labour and roles that are not intrinsically tied to their sex, while having their reproductive physical ability controlled. Due to this socially constructed continuity between childbearing and other aspects of reproduction, “the focal point of women’s work becomes

the household, since it is there that activities related to physical reproduction are concentrated” and “domestic activities are seen exclusively as women’s domain” (Benería, 1979, p. 209). Including the concept of power in her analysis, Benería contends that in systems organised around this sexual division of labour, the household “becomes the very root of patriarchy”, where “the primary relations of subordination/domination between the sexes is located” (Benería, 1979, pp.209-210). In this understanding, the “traditional domestic division of labour” becomes the “most immediate manifestation” of such power dynamics between women and men (Benería, 1979).

It is because reproductive activities in the household have historically been assigned to women based on their unique biological reproductive physical ability that I use the concept of sexual division of labour and that I make a distinction between ‘sex’ and ‘gender’. This does not exclude the term ‘gender’, but this term needs to be precisely defined, not merely used as a synonym for ‘sex’ (A. Sullivan, 2020). I understand gender in this thesis as the socially constructed hierarchy and roles between women and men, manifested on the individual level as ‘femininity’ and ‘masculinity’ (Oakley, 1974). Oakley (1974), who was one of the first sociologists to use the term ‘gender’ in her study of domestic labour, argues that women are not biologically or innately made for labour in the household, but that this type of labour was instead a role socially assigned to them based on their sex. Other authors such as Delphy (2013) argue that ‘gender’ is a useful concept when it pertains to the ways society creates hierarchies and meanings based on sexual differences between individuals. Gender is therefore a social structure (Risman, 2004) which creates two groups or classes of individual according to their sex, and a hierarchy between these two groups, with the group of men at the top of this hierarchy, and the group of women at the bottom. In this framework, the sexual division of labour is understood as a manifestation of the social structure called ‘gender’.

The hierarchical dimension of gender is particularly important concerning the labour done by women and men. H ritier (1996) argues that in almost all known societies, there is a “differential valence of the sexes” (H ritier, 1996, pp. 45-46) based on feminine/masculine binaries and hierarchisation. Feminine/masculine binaries are attached to a specific sex, which means that some concepts, activities, roles, and feelings are either seen as ‘feminine’ and attached to women, or ‘masculine’ and attached to men. Hierarchisation always takes place between the two terms of these binaries, since men are socially placed above women: ‘masculine’ activities or traits tend to be admired and praised, while ‘feminine’ activities tend to be devalued, ignored, and despised. Feminine/masculine binaries concerning labour differentiate between on the one hand, the ‘public’ domain of the ‘outdoor’, ‘work’ and ‘politics’, all associated with men, and on the other hand, the ‘private’ domain of the ‘indoor’, the ‘home’, all associated with women. In this sense, the whole domain of domestic labour heavily weighs towards femininity and roles assigned to women. Most tasks and activities in the household fall on the feminine side of the binary, whereas only a few occasional tasks and activities are usually labelled ‘masculine’. In the specific cases of domestic labour, a hierarchy is usually visible since less desirable activities tend to be both done by women and considered feminine: the more tedious, repetitive, and uncreative a task is, the more ‘feminine’ it is considered. Moreover, even though not all stereotypically feminine tasks are experienced as a chore or a burden, all tasks done by women tend to be devalued and ignored (H ritier, 1996).

The contemporary sexual division of labour and devaluing of women’s labour is rooted in historical processes. Federici (1998) argues that the emergence of capitalism greatly influenced the reshaping of women’s labour while rigidifying the sexual division of labour, as well as the hierarchy of values given to different types of labour. She argues that the

stage of “primitive accumulation” of capital from the 16th and 17th centuries was based on the development of a new sexual division of labor subjugating women’s labor and women’s reproductive function to the reproduction of the workforce” and on the “construction of a new patriarchal order, based upon the exclusion of women from waged-work and their subordination to men”, thereby transforming women into “a machine for the production of new workers” (Federici, 2004, p. 12). Moreover, the emergence of an economy based on monetary exchange drew a clear line between the unpaid reproductive labour within the household and paid work in the labour market. By tying the value of one’s labour to monetary measures, the emergence of this economic system has also crystallised paid labour, from which women were largely excluded, as the only form of labour with value, hence the subsequent move toward the devaluation of women’s reproductive labour. She argues that while domestic labour was often treated similarly than other types of labour in the feudal economy, it is no more “viewed as real work” (Federici, 2004, p. 25) in a capitalist economy.

2. The involvement of women in the labour market in the 20th and 21st centuries in the United Kingdom

As I show in the following paragraphs, the rigid traditional sexual division of labour between men in the labour market and women in the household went through wide and long-term changes during the 20th century. Working-class women were already working in the labour market in the 19th century, and women from various socio-economic conditions also entered the labour market as part of the two world wars’ national efforts. However, it is from the second half of the 20th century that women became permanently settled in the workforce across many workplaces. Sex-disaggregated data on employment since the 1960s show a global trend greater involvement of women in the labour market. Moreover, economic changes which occurred at the end of the 20th century have been challenging the

traditional male breadwinning model, whereby men are the sole or main earners of the heterosexual family. Nonetheless, as I also argue in the following paragraphs, such challenging changes against the rigid traditional sexual division of labour did not result in a complete disappearance of a sexual division of labour, nor led to the full end to traditional roles between women and men. Instead, I argue that the sexual division of labour has evolved and shifted at the same time as the traditional division between men in the public sphere and women in the private sphere has eroded.

The public sphere of the labour market went through significant changes in the 20th century. Crucial changes were capitalism's shift from being industry-based to being service-based, the strengthening of financial capitalism, and the opening of the labour market to mass numbers of women who were previously excluded from it. The latter change is particularly meaningful for women, since it made a relative economic independence from their male family members an option available for them, an option most women had been deprived of for centuries.

The United Kingdom saw an increase in women's participation in the labour market from the end of the first world war towards the 1970s, based on the entry of married women aged over 35 (Razzu et al., 2020). Joshi et al (1985) note the important role of maternity rights as part of the welfare state, enabling mothers to participate in paid work. But it is only during the last decades of the 20th century that we can describe women's participation in the labour market as mass involvement. Indeed, women's participation rate in 1960 was comparable to that of 1850, stabilised at around 35-40% of all women in Great Britain (Razzu et al., 2020). However, Roantree and Vira (2018) demonstrate that there has been an "almost continual rise in the proportion of women in employment" since the 1970s-1980s, with an employment rate among women aged 25-54 increasing from 57% in 1975

to a “record high” of 78% in 2017 (Roantree & Vira, 2018, p. 2). Women’s full-time employment largely followed this trend, at 29% in 1985 against 44% in 2017. Another important change in women’s participation in the labour market is that they are less likely to drop out of the labour market after having their first child. Indeed, the proportion of working-age mothers in paid work went from 50% in 1975 to 72% in 2015 (Roantree & Vira, 2018). Women’s participation in the labour market is therefore combined with motherhood, and having a job is much less of a temporary option preceding child rearing than it was before the 1970s. Subsequently, the structure of the heterosexual family, traditionally characterised by the male breadwinner model in the 19th century and through most of the 20th century, has widely shifted to dual-earner couples. Whereas the proportion of couples with children where only one adult was in employment was 47% in 1975, it decreased to 27% in 2017, while the share of dual-earner couples increased from 49% to 68% in the same period (Roantree & Vira, 2018).

The phenomenon of women’s entry and stability in the labour market has led to a decrease in what Razzu et al. (2020) call the gender employment gap (GEG) between the beginning and the end of the 20th century. This decreasing gap of inequality between women and men continued as we entered the 21st century, with the GEG being reduced from 39 to 10 percentage points between 1971 and 2016 in Great Britain (Razzu et al., 2020).

Such trend towards greater participation of women in the labour market results from both lifestyle and structural changes. In terms of lifestyle, an important factor lies is that heterosexual women born in the 1970s tend to get into cohabitation with a male partner and have their first child much later in life than women from previous generations (Roantree & Vira, 2018). From a structural point of view, the economic shift from industrial capitalism to a service capitalism changed the demand for skills and the structure of occupations

(Razzu et al., 2020). At the end of the 20th century, the decline of manufacturing jobs increased male unemployment, as well as fuelling demand for female labour in the services sector, ultimately playing to the “comparative advantage of women” (Razzu et al., 2020, p. 479). As Razzu et al. (2018) note, changes in the content of emerging occupations in the services sectors require “the more intensive use of ‘brain’ and interpersonal skills or tasks, as opposed to those associated with ‘brawn’ ” in the industrial sector (Razzu et al., 2020, p. 479). In addition to reproducing traditional gender stereotypes that accord physical strength to men and interpersonal skills of caring to women, such favourable changes for women were also spurred by other structural factors such as women’s increased education, reduced hours of work in the economy, technological changes, decreased fertility, and the social evolutions concerning women’s role (Razzu et al., 2020).

Although the rigid traditional sexual division of labour was considerably challenged during the 20th century, I argue in the following paragraphs that it has evolved and shifted, due to the creation of the new divisions of labour between women and men in paid work. The labour market is not equally accessible for women and men. Indeed, women’s access to the labour market is still segregated: in terms of upward mobility and income – referred to as vertical segregation (Charles, 2003; Griffin, 2017) and the glass ceiling (Griffin, 2017) – as well as in the types of occupations they are involved in – referred to as horizontal segregation (Charles, 2003; Griffin, 2017). The data showing these two phenomena of occupational segregation based on sex (Charles, 2003; Griffin, 2017) vary according to factors such as region (Alonso-Villar & Río, 2020), educational attainment (Pearlman, 2019), and ethnicity/race (Alonso-Villar & Río, 2020). But in the following presentation of the inequality between women and men in the labour market, I present general trends illustrating these phenomena.

In 2019, the gender pay gap between employed women and employed men was 17.3% in the United Kingdom (ONS, 2019). The proportion of women in managerial positions was 37.9% in 2017, only two-point higher than 2012 (ONS, 2019) When taking into account the full-time equivalent employment rate, there is inequality of access to full-time employment – usually associated with higher employment stability, higher income, and higher welfare provisions –, since this type of employment is held by 44.2% of women but 60.9% of men (EIGE, 2019). Moreover, there is an “uneven concentration of women and men in different sectors of the labour market”, with 37% of women working in education, health, and social work, compared to 11% of men (EIGE, 2019, p. 2). While 28% of men work in science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) occupations, only 5% of women are found in these sectors. Such figures show that women’s entry in the labour market has shifted the traditional sexual division of labour from the household to the labour market. These uneven concentrations reproduce traditional gender roles, with women concentrated in jobs involving care and interpersonal skills and under-represented in jobs involving technical and technological skills.

Beyond the economic inequalities observed above, it can be argue that the workplace does not treat women and men equally (Ridgeway, 2011). Indeed, women’s entry into the public sphere has also been synonymous with the emergence of new forms of inequality, with common sexual assaults and sexual harassment against women in the workplace (Fielden et al., 2010; Samuels, 2003), along with intersecting discriminations against pregnant women (Hanlon, 1995; Reuter, 2006), lesbians (Wright et al., 2006), and women of colour (Fielden et al., 2010). Women’s ideas and innovations are sometimes minimised, and other times appropriated by their male colleagues, leading to phenomena such as “mansplaining” (Briggs et al., 2018; Turesky & Warner, 2020) and the “Matilda effect” (Knobloch-

Westerwick et al., 2013; Lincoln et al., 2012) whereby women's discoveries and work are attributed to their male colleagues.

This inequality of opportunity, treatment, and access to the labour market curtails its potential to build economic independence for women. As a result of the sexual division of domestic labour and the increase of low-paying and precarious jobs in the labour market means, many women do not escape poverty – in 2019, 22% of women had a persistent low income, compared to 14% of men (ONS, 2019). Many of these inequalities are reflected in the household, as I discuss in the following paragraphs.

3. The involvement of women in the household in the 20th and 21st centuries in the United Kingdom

Women's entry into the realm of the public sphere and paid labour during the second half of the 20th century was not concomitant with a withdrawal from the realm of the private sphere of the household. More precisely, their entry in the labour market has generally been conditioned to their ability to fulfil their roles in the household. Such dual involvement in paid and unpaid labour marked the emergence of a generalised double shift (Hochschild & Machung, 2012) for women. The involvement of women in the household has been one of the factors limiting further progress towards 'gender equality' in the labour market, and has led to many personal dilemmas in trying to find the right 'work-family balance'. It is not to say that there has been no change in statistical trends regarding the division of domestic labour between women and men – as I show in the following paragraph. However, the reality of the double shift for contemporary women remains one of the shared experiences of women who participate in the labour market. The absence of an equivalent burden for men illustrates some general aspects of today's gender relations, as I argue subsequently.

In their analysis of 50 years of data on the division of core housework tasks between women and men such as cleaning, cooking, and clothes care, Altintas and Sullivan (2016) show that there has been a “cross-national gender convergence in housework”. Overall, women’s time spent on these tasks has gradually and slowly decreased since the 1960s, while men’s time spent on these tasks has slowly increased, but not enough to compensate for women’s decreasing involvement. In the United Kingdom specifically, considered by the authors as one of the countries where the gender convergence has been particularly halting since the 1990s, while women spent on average 198 minutes per day doing these tasks in 1974, the figure decreased to 122 minutes in 2005, compared to respectively 27 minutes and 48 minutes for men. Despite greater involvement of men, women on average still spent 154% more time on these tasks each day than their male partner (Altintas & Sullivan, 2016).

The specific situation of the United Kingdom in Altintas and Sullivan’s (2016) research may be partly explained by a specific national context of state welfare policies. Because gender as a structure is both autonomous and intertwined with other structures and institutional contexts (Risman, 1998), its exact configurations and manifestations on the micro-level varies according to national contexts, hence the large body of literature on the impact of welfare states’ policies and national cultures on gender roles and the division of domestic labour (Orloff, 1993; Treas & Drobnič, 2010). In her comparison of time spent on housework by women and men in “liberal, conservative, and social-democratic welfare state regimes” (Esping-Andersen, 1990), Geist (2005) argues that “equal sharing of housework by both partners is rare in conservative countries, regardless of their relative resources, time availability and gender ideology, suggesting that the division of labour at home is [...] also shaped by contextual factors”. The United Kingdom has a liberal welfare state regimes in which there is a “passive support for egalitarianism” in the sense that its policies and culture of citizenship focuses on individuals without actively promoting

‘gender equity’. The state’s withdrawal from the labour market has tended to lead to a “strong male breadwinner” (Lewis, 1992, p. 162) model, in which female part-time work is important.

The study of time spent on domestic labour has been a prolific area of research in academia since the 1970s. When looking at it from the lenses of ‘gender equality’ and convergence, researchers’ assessments have been divided between evidence of change and progress, and evidence of lack of change and stagnation, sometimes described using the metaphor of the half-full or half-empty glass. Researchers who tend to focus on short-term assessments, the overall shares, as well as the fixed division of domestic labour argue that the gender revolution is stalled at a level of inequality, which can be understood as a ceiling that the march towards equality has not been able to break through. England (2010) states that the ‘gender revolution’ is uneven, stalled, and has led to asymmetrical change in which women’s lives have changed much more than men’s. She points out the “persistence of traditionally gendered patterns in heterosexual romantic, sexual, and marital relationships” (England, 2010, p. 150), including a lack of significant change in the domestic division of labour. Researchers who tend to focus on long-term assessments and on the changes in the division of domestic labour argue that instead of a stall, there is a slow movement towards equality across generations. As Sullivan et al. (2018) argue, “gender equality should always be regarded as a long-term, uneven process” (Sullivan et al., 2018, p. 264). Data shows that both mothers and fathers have increased their time spent on childcare tasks and activities and that there is a general trend towards a shared housework burden, spurred by generational changes in gender ideologies and attitudes and by states’ welfare policies. The generational dimension of change is crucial in understanding what is actually taking place in the households in the long run: there is an interplay between what Sullivan (2006) calls the individual resources, gender consciousness, gendered interaction, negotiation, and the

wider discursive sphere. This interplay takes place in the context of embedded interactions between the levels of the individual, the family, and the institutions (Sullivan, 2006). Such changes towards ‘gender equality’ on all these levels involve “recursive processes that stretch over generations”, there is thus a “lagged generational change” explaining why and how gender convergence is slow but real in the long term (O. Sullivan et al., 2018, pp. 264-266).

Whether one considers that the change towards equality between women and men has stalled or is a question of lagged change, the fact that, in addition to their involvement in the labour market, women still did on average 60% of the core domestic labour tasks in the United Kingdom in 2016 (ONS, 2016) is a significant characteristic of contemporary gender relations. Indeed, while men’s involvement in labour is mostly reduced to the sphere of the labour market, women tend to be torn between imperatives coming from both the public sphere of the labour market and the private sphere of the household. Even though welfare states have implemented various policies to make women’s work and family life compatible, the burden of finding the right balance between the often-contradictory demands from the labour market and their households largely falls on women. The economic independence from male family members provided by investing in the labour market is fragile, or almost non-existent in the case of many women, especially mothers living in poverty. While most governments and institutions have integrated some principles of ‘gender equality’ in their policies and recommendations, the arrival of right-wing and conservative parties in power in several Western countries over the last few years has started an overt legal backlash on some women’s rights that were previously thought of as granted once and for all (Grossman, 2020; Mann, 2016; Stark, 2017). The emerging academic literature on the consequences of the recent outburst of the COVID-19 virus

worldwide on inequalities between women and men tends to point towards a reinforcement of traditional and rigid gender roles (Clark et al., 2021; Craig, 2020; Fisher & Ryan, 2021). Far from confirming the march towards equality and the emergence of a ‘post-feminist’ era in which inequality between women and men would be an antique from the past, gender relations of the first decades of the 21st century seem to be characterised by complex and seemingly contradictory phenomena of slow equalisation and entrenching inequalities.

B. Female breadwinning in the United Kingdom

While “women have always worked” (Kessler-Harris, 2018) and have sometimes been the main or sole breadwinner (Horrell et al., 2021) of their households, women’s mass entry and involvement in the labour market as well as various structural and conjunctural economic changes from the second half of the 20th century paved the way for an expansion of dual-earner heterosexual couples, in which both women and men work. While the general trends regarding these couples point towards women working part-time and men still earning more than their female partners, there has been an increasing number of dual-earner households in which women earn relatively more. In this sub-section, I present and discuss the concept of female breadwinning and its realities in the United Kingdom.

The expression ‘female breadwinning’ directly stems from another expression, ‘male breadwinning model’, the model that characterised the dominant economic setting for heterosexual families since the advent of early capitalism in the West. The ‘male breadwinner model’, in which men work and financially support their family by bringing home – to their housewives – the money needed to buy food and live (Bernard, 1981; Secombe, 1986), was tied to the emergence of the capitalist labour market in the United Kingdom and the overall exclusion of women from this area of the public sphere that has

gradually dominated work relationships and economic production since the 18th century. From the 19th century to the second half of the 20th century, this model was both an institution and an ideal for all parts of society, as well as a nuanced reality – which could be observed much more in upper- and middle-class than in working-class households (Horrell et al., 2021). The male breadwinner model was organised and supported by various institutions such as welfare states (Esping-Andersen, 1990; Lewis, 1992). Ideologically, male breadwinning was seen as a man's duty to financially support their family, and a crucial component of masculinity, while women's duty was directed towards domestic labour and happiness in the household as a cornerstone of femininity.

While the male breadwinner model reached cultural hegemony in the 20th century and its golden age in the 1950s nuclear family (Ehrenreich, 1983; Parsons, 1949; Ruggles, 1994), the contemporary situation is characterised by more pluralism concerning economic settings within the household and their wider institutional and ideological support. The decline of the male breadwinner model (Crompton, 1999) and of the “family wage” (Fraser, 1994; Land, 1980) is now a well-established phenomenon in the United Kingdom, and more broadly in Western European and Northern American societies. Although the percentage of male breadwinner households remains quite substantial – 70.05% in the UK in 2010/2011 if we take a broad definition of “male breadwinner households” as households in which men are the main earners – equal-earner and female breadwinner couples are encroaching on this ‘traditional’ pattern, amounting to respectively 16.43% and 13.53% of households (Vitali & Arpino, 2016).

The decline of the male breadwinner model has been accompanied with the emergence of female breadwinner households. The expression ‘female breadwinner’ tends to be presented as the female equivalent of ‘male breadwinner’, since it encapsulates women who earn the money and “bring home the bacon” (Pappenheim & Graves, 2005). While some

studies restrict the definition of female breadwinning to women who are the sole breadwinner of their families, several other studies take a broader definition to also include women who are the main earners, i.e. those who are in dual-earner economic arrangements but earn relatively more than their male partners (Adkins & Dever, 2014; Kowalewska & Vitali, 2020; Meisenbach, 2010; Vitali & Arpino, 2016; Warren, 2007). For example, Kowalewska and Vitali (2020) incorporate the “female-breadwinner model” in their study of work/family arrangements across the OECD. They identify two types of female breadwinning households that they call the “pure female breadwinner couples” and the “one-and-a-half female breadwinner couples” (Kowalewska & Vitali, 2020, p. 125). The first type of households is made of couples in which the woman is in employment, but the man is not, while the second type is made of women in full-time employment partnered with men in part-time employment.

In this thesis, female breadwinning encapsulates a wide definition which includes households in which women are either the sole or the main breadwinner (i.e. they earn more than their male partners). It seems particularly important to use this wide definition of female breadwinning given that my research question concerns the ways women and men negotiate their division of domestic labour within the specific context of women higher economic power compared to men. Some of the literature on the division of domestic labour explains women’s overall higher share of unpaid work in the household by the fact that women generally earn less than their male partners – I present this “economic perspective” (Sayer, 2010, p. 21) in more details in Chapter 2. As a result, I wanted to question the link between income and involvement in domestic labour by observing households in which women earn more, as all participants of this research did, although the range of female breadwinning situations and gap of economic power between women and men I

interviewed varied: women's share in total household income went from 55% in only one case to 100% in the cases of the 12 sole female breadwinning couples.

An important section of the academic literature on female breadwinning which emerged in the 2000s has highlighted from a quantitative perspective several factors of emergence of female breadwinning families in Western countries. The reversal of the gender gap in education (Esteve et al., 2016; Grow & van Bavel, 2015; Khamis & Ayuso, 2021; Klesment & van Bavel, 2015) to the advantage of women seems to be an important factor contributing to the emergence of female breadwinning families, since it involves increased educational hypogamy among some women, who 'marry down' men with lower relative educational attainment (Klesment & van Bavel, 2015). Given the relatively strong intertwining relationship between higher educational attainment and higher incomes, women's higher educational attainment is therefore understood as an important factor underlying female breadwinning. But this is not the only driver behind female breadwinning since it does not sufficiently fully account for structural and conjunctural changes in the economic structure of capitalism. Using a broad definition of female breadwinning, including women as main earners, Vitali and Arpino (2016) show that the main driver for the emergence of such households is economic necessity rather than ideological commitment towards 'gender equality'. A major factor of economic necessity stems from an increased rate of unemployment since the 1980s, mostly in male-dominated industries such as manufacturing. Financial and economic crises also disproportionately affect men (Harkness, 2013; Hoynes et al., 2012) – who tend to become unemployed while women's jobs become more precarious and with fewer hours – and this creates an economic necessity which is behind the emergence of female breadwinning households. As Vitali and Arpino (2016) note, since female breadwinner households tend to be a result of economic necessity,

some of them represent a temporary rather than a permanent arrangement (Drago et al., 2005). By this account, female breadwinning as an increasing statistical phenomenon seems to be cyclical and dependent on the male unemployment rate. Female breadwinning couples I interviewed tended to be characterised by women's higher educational attainment compared to their partners, suggesting a more permanent reality of female breadwinning than resulting solely from economic crises and male unemployment – although several couples I interviewed had such trajectory too.

Although a great part of the popular culture on female breadwinners tends to highlight women in successful careers and managerial or executive positions, female breadwinning is an economic setting that is found across the socio-economic spectrum in the United Kingdom. Kowalewska and Vitali (2020) argue that female breadwinners are stratified by class, as sole female breadwinners tend to have a lower educational attainment than main female breadwinners in dual-earner couples. The economic reality behind female breadwinning therefore encapsulates a wide range of situations, from poor female workers in precarious jobs to women in high socio-economic positions. Overall, cohabiting heterosexual relationships with sole female breadwinners are some of the poorest of all family types in the United Kingdom, and their total income relies on an important share of social transfers from the state (Dotti Sani, 2018; Harkness & Evans, 2011). On the other end of the socio-economic stratification, Meisenbach's study (2010) of white-collar female breadwinners shows that the identities of this type of female breadwinners are rooted in narratives of "being a strong woman", while remaining uncomfortable at the idea of having economic "control" of their male partners (Meisenbach, 2010, p. 9), which is a point I discuss in Chapter 7. Adkins and Dever (2014, p. 51) dissect "the category of the female principal breadwinner in financial capitalism", which they claim is celebrated by a range

of authors and commentators in the mainstream media. In their feminist critique of the phenomenon of female principal breadwinners, they argue that it participates in a “reconfiguring of relations of privilege and subordination in recessionary post-Fordist capitalism, particularly relations of privilege and subordination between women” (Adkins & Dever, 2014, p. 52), pointing at the phenomenon of underpaid labour of female domestic workers recruited in relatively privileged female breadwinning households. The same changes in the labour market, level of wages, and job conditions that have accompanied the decline of the traditional male breadwinner model have also created a gap between most women who earn low wages and a few privileged women who reach the top of the hierarchy in the labour market. As I show in Chapter 3, couples I interviewed tended to be part of the middle or average socio-economic category, but the overall sample covers a wide range of female breadwinning socio-economic realities, which I discuss on several occasions in this thesis.

The overall economic poverty of female breadwinning households compared to male breadwinning households endorses the idea that female breadwinning does not mirror male breadwinning. Kowalewska and Vitali (2020) show that female breadwinners earn much less than their male equivalents, which means that households where women are the breadwinner tend to be poorer than those where the man is the breadwinner. The authors argue that these findings show there is a “female breadwinner earnings penalty” (Kowalewska & Vitali, 2020, p. 127), and that breadwinning remains gendered despite recent transformations in the traditional model of breadwinning. In summary, individual female breadwinners earn relatively more than their male partners, but from a structural point of view, female breadwinners as a group are still economically disadvantaged compared to men in the same economic setting. I argue that this context as well as these facts point to the limits of the parallel between female and male breadwinning, which is

particularly important to keep in mind when studying female breadwinning households. The question of why and how breadwinning is a gendered phenomenon receives several elements of answer across chapters in this thesis.

In this section, I have provided historical, contextual, and conceptual elements concerning the sexual division of labour in the United Kingdom, and the contemporary emergence and study of female breadwinning. I continue this chapter with a section detailing the theoretical framework and research questions that have guided (and sometimes emerged) from the stages of data collection, data analysis, and writing-up of the thesis.

II. Conceptualisation of domestic labour: theoretical framework and research questions

In this section, I present several theoretical frameworks I used as heuristic tools for data collection and analysis (sub-section A below) before introducing my research questions and thesis outline (sub-section B).

A. Theoretical framework

In this sub-section, I explain how I understand domestic labour as a type of reproductive labour (point 1 below) which is influenced by daily processes and structural gender relations (point 2) that shape the differentiated power of women and men in their negotiation about the division of domestic labour (point 3). The following theories are not hypotheses to confirm or refute, but rather general lines guiding the analysis and the writing-up of this thesis. I discuss them, as well as other relevant theories, further whenever necessary in the chapters presenting my findings.

1. Working definition: domestic labour as a multifaceted type of reproductive labour

The main working definition of this thesis concerns domestic labour. I explain in the following paragraphs how I understand domestic labour as a multifaceted type of reproductive labour which includes housework, childcare, mental load, and emotion work.

Building on Benería's (1979) aforementioned conceptualisation of domestic labour, I consider domestic labour as one of the main types of reproductive labour in contemporary society. However, this does not mean that domestic labour is foreign to 'production'; as Šikić-Mićanović (2001) notes, "domestic labour is productive, involving many different types of work" (Šikić-Mićanović, 2001, p. 731). There are indeed what could be considered 'goods' and 'services' which are produced by domestic labour, that are similarly commodified in the labour market: meals and their preparation, cleaning, decorating, and so on. Domestic labour can thus be viewed as the foundation on which other activities and overall economic production takes place in a society organised between 'private' and 'public' spheres. As domestic labour concerns the satisfactions of the most basic human needs of individuals, such as eating, sleeping, and feeling safe and cared for, no other activities would be possible without this labour, which ultimately enables the reproduction of human beings. Therefore, domestic labour is necessary for the socially constructed institution of the nuclear family to maintain and reproduce itself in the 'private' sphere of the household.

With these core definitions in mind, it is important not to reduce domestic labour to a few housework tasks, but to understand it as work which is unpaid (Delphy, 1984; Delphy & Leonard, 2019). Domestic labour encapsulates the different types of work and the specific relationships between women and men in the household. Delphy and Leonard (2019) write that domestic labour includes "economic and practical productive work (on things or

people), cultural work, emotion work”, as well as “sexual work and reproductive work (childbearing and childrearing)” (Delphy & Leonard, 2019, p. 50). The theoretical framework of this thesis builds such conceptualisation of domestic labour to include all tasks and activities of housework, childcare, the mental load associated to these tasks and activities, and emotion work – also developed by Hochschild (1979, 1983, 1989) as I show in my analysis of the mental load and emotion work in Chapter 5. While quantitative studies tend to either study the ‘core’ housework tasks or childcare, this research encapsulates both of them, as well as other aspects. This does not mean that housework and childcare are the same things and involve the same processes. Indeed, they need to be theoretically and analytically approached in different ways (O. Sullivan, 2013a), because childcare is “more than tasks and more than time allotments” (Doucet, 2015, p. 237). The notions of domestic and parental responsibilities (Doucet, 2001, 2015), involving “feelings, cognition, and behaviors” (Leslie et al., 1992, p. 199), are critical to understanding emotional dimensions of the division of domestic labour within households. While the notion of ‘parental responsibilities’ enables the inclusion of the relationship between parents and the outside world, the notion of domestic responsibilities provides new insights on the processes and reasons behind a specific division of domestic labour. Indeed, some authors argue that there are socially constructed gendered patterns of emotional behaviours, and that these differences are a basis for the sexual division of emotion work (Duncombe & Marsden, 1993), and the construction of “gendered selves” (Erickson, 2005, p. 3).

Finally, there are different ways of accomplishing domestic labour, and being ‘responsible for’ is not limited to simply implementing a demand or helping. As DeVault’s (1991) study on feeding the family illustrates, being ‘responsible for’ involves an ongoing largely invisible work of planning, strategising, and adjusting to specific needs, which is mostly done by women. Besides, DeVault (1991) argues that as long as the underlying principles

of domestic labour are not made visible by communication, sharing tasks which require ongoing conceptualisation becomes a pragmatic problem. Even couples who are willing to share parental and domestic responsibilities tend to perceive men's contributions as 'help' (Coltrane, 1989), thus confirming women's position as managers of the household. This literature echoes findings I present in Chapters 5.

Going further in the conceptualisation of domestic labour as reproductive labour and family work, the next points discuss some theoretical frameworks that have attempted to explain why domestic labour is largely done by women.

2. The unequal division of domestic labour: both a daily process of doing gender and an outcome of the reproduction of structural gender relations within the household

I understand the unequal division of domestic labour found within heterosexual households as a manifestation of the daily processes of "doing gender" (West & Zimmerman, 1987), and as an outcome of the reproduction of structural gender relations within the household. I aim to bridge the gap between micro and macro phenomena, between the individual and the structural levels, to better grasp the actual agency that women and men I interviewed have concerning the division of domestic labour in their household.

Domestic labour has historically fallen, and still continues to do so, on women's shoulders, as the first section of this chapter showed. One explanation for this phenomenon is that, as Šikić-Mićanović (2001) argues, domestic labour "is about constructing 'proper' and 'appropriate' gender relations" (Šikić-Mićanović, 2001, p. 731) between women and men in a cohabiting relationship. This argument echoes a larger theoretical framework which has been dominant in the study of domestic labour over the past decades, the "gender perspective" (Sayer, 2010, p. 22). This framework emphasises the daily interactions

between women and men, as well as the ways they give gendered meanings to their selves by associating womanhood and manhood with activities of domestic labour. Far from being places of gender neutrality, households operate as gender factories (Berk, 1985), in which the domestic division of labour and the processes of “doing gender” (West & Zimmerman, 1987, 2009) are deeply embedded. In this sense, gender is created and produced in the everyday choices and behaviour of women and men. In her in-depth qualitative study of dual-earner couples in the United States, Hochschild (1989) emphasises that, regardless of their gender ideologies and employment statuses, men and women display gender by taking responsibility for – or avoiding – some household tasks. The home is thus a place for the routine production of gender (Coltrane, 1989). Some proponents of this perspective have put forward the hypothesis of “gender-deviance neutralization” (Greenstein, 2000) by arguing that even when women earn relatively more than men, gender differences in domestic labour are reinforced due to compensation mechanisms. Economically dependent men do less housework than other men in order to display (Brines, 1994) their masculinity by avoiding as much as possible the ‘feminine’ activities of cooking, cleaning and caring, thereby neutralising doubts about their manhood in a context of a ‘deviant’ household economic situation (Greenstein, 2000). I further discuss some empirical findings supporting the gender perspectives in Chapter 2.

A contribution of my theoretical framework is to include the ‘doing gender’ framework within the larger structures in which the households are embedded. Indeed, instead of considering that the unequal division of domestic labour as a product produced in the household ‘factory’, I consider it more helpful for this research to examine how gender as a hierarchy between women and men is reproduced from larger structures of inequality to the smaller unit of the household. Such understanding makes it possible to pinpoint the actual agency of women and men in the way they divide domestic labour as well as

highlighting other dimensions of domestic labour concerning deeper and more unconscious processes than performing femininity or masculinity for the sake of confirming one's 'identity' to oneself and others. In order to bridge the gap between interactional and structural phenomena, my analysis also builds upon another theoretical frameworks: marriage – and to a great extent, heterosexual cohabitation (S. Thompson et al., 2018) – as a type of “domestic labour contract” (Pateman, 1988, p. 121), which I call ‘marital contract’ in the remainder of the thesis.

As Carole Pateman (1988) argues, modern liberal democracies based on a social contract guaranteeing individual's freedom and equality have been historically built on the idea that only men are individuals and that women are excluded from this category and relegated to a status of second-class citizens. She considers that the type of society which has emerged from the 18th and 19th centuries is a “modern form of patriarchy” (Pateman, 1988, p. 1) organised on a structural sexual contract guaranteeing the law of “male sex-right” to access women's bodies and labour (Pateman, 1988, p. 2). In this framework, the marriage contract is a “domestic labour contract” that tacitly guarantees the modern division of the public and the private sphere and its association respectively to men and women – a worker is a husband, a man who supports/protects his wife, an economic dependent (subordinate). That is to say, a worker is a ‘breadwinner’ ” (Pateman, 1988, p. 121). She considers that working-class families who could not survive on just one wage did not adopt the strict male breadwinner model, but the woman's wage was treated as the ‘supplement’, the secondary income. From this perspective, marriage (and this argument can be extended to contemporary heterosexual cohabitation) is not a simple union between two free and equal individuals, but implies a certain quality of life for men, based on asymmetrical power and on women's unpaid labour in the household. As I highlight in Chapter 2, some authors have since used the concept of the “marital contract” (Tichenor, 2005a; Vijayasiri, 2011) to

account for the tacit roles and power dynamics underlying the negotiation of the division of domestic labour within heterosexual households.

From a structural and materialist perspective, Delphy and Leonard (2019) argue that the economy is not just capitalist and organised around the labour market. Patriarchy (Walby, 1989) has its own economic structure in which the “domestic mode of production” (Delphy, 2013, p. 7) dominates, especially in the heterosexual household. This exploitation is enabled by institutions such as the welfare state and the labour market, and by heterosexuality – as it is organised and institutionalised through coupledness and marriage –, and because women and men are socialised into different roles from birth. Gender as a hierarchy between women and men therefore relies upon specific roles that are not natural but learned from childhood to adulthood. To women, the roles of the wife, housemaker, and mother are particularly important, and they are subordinated to men’s roles as husband, worker, and father.

Such theoretical framework, being concerned with structures and macro-level phenomena, was built to analyse the dominant male breadwinner model from a feminist standpoint, but I argue that they are useful for this research, since the couples I interviewed are part of these wider structures. The roles of the wife, housemaker, mother, are still very much influential for heterosexual female breadwinners, even though their content and the way women navigate these roles may vary, which is one of the objects of research of the thesis.

3. Power and negotiations about the division of domestic labour within heterosexual households

On the micro-level of the interactions between women and men in a cohabiting relationship (or marriage), power dynamics greatly influence the way the form, the content, and the

outcomes of negotiations over activities and task of domestic labour. In the following paragraphs, I present the definition and theoretical framework concerning power and negotiations that I use in this thesis.

Looking at the mechanisms underlying the daily division of domestic labour between a woman and a man within a household requires to understand power dynamics involved in such labour. Women's and men's contributions to domestic labour usually reflect and reinforce explicit and implicit power dynamics. Discussions, tensions, conflicts, and the strategies to solve the latter, are all phenomena which make power imbalances between women and men at home more visible. An important contribution towards understanding power dynamics in heterosexual households comes from Komter (1989), who studied different types of power, as well as the power mechanisms underlying the willingness of women and men to change dynamics in the areas of domestic labour (including childcare), sexuality, leisure activities, and finances. She presents an enriched definition of power: it is "the ability to affect consciously or unconsciously the emotions, attitudes, cognitions, or behavior of someone else" (Komter, 1989, p. 192), in addition to processes underlying a desire for change (or lack of thereof). She distinguishes "five elements in the process of change": "desires for, or attempts at, change; structural or psychological impediments; the partner's reaction to change; conflicts that might arise in the process of change; and strategies to realize or prevent change" (Komter, 1989, p. 192). This comprehensive analysis of the different mechanisms of power expression within heterosexual households leaves room for an understanding of different types of power, based on different conflict-solving strategies that are overt or covert, explicit or implicit, conscious or unconscious. Manifest power "surfaces in visible outcomes such as attempts at change, conflicts, and strategies", while latent power pertains to cases of covert conflicts and lack of change,

which either manifests as anticipation of the other's "needs and wishes" or as resignation facing the failure to negotiate change without "jeopardizing the marital relationship" (Komter, 1989, p. 192). Invisible power plays out in unresolved implicit dissatisfaction and conflicts, leading to "systematic gender differences in mutual and self-esteem" and "differences in perceptions of [...] everyday reality" (Komter, 1989, p. 192).

This thesis builds upon this theoretical framework of power to grasp the various ways women and men negotiate their respective contribution to domestic labour. All these dimensions of power are expressed in the way domestic labour is negotiated in the household, and challenge the idea that the 'negotiation' pertaining to domestic labour follows a transparent process without power dynamics. According to the online *Cambridge Dictionary*¹, the verb 'to negotiate' is a polysemic term. The most common definition of this verb is "to have formal discussions with someone in order to reach an agreement with them". It is a term widely used in areas of business and law, where contracts are negotiated between two supposedly consenting and equal individuals. This aspect of negotiations is sometimes present in households when women and men explicitly discuss and find an agreement over their respective contribution. However, 'to negotiate' also means "to manage to travel along a difficult route", "to deal with something difficult", "to move carefully or with difficulty past, through, or along something". In these definitions, 'to negotiate' also encapsulates all the situations where domestic labour is not explicitly discussed, or agreed upon, and where it is even a topic of open disagreement and conflict. Such understanding of negotiation also highlights the various challenges the individual

¹ <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/negotiate>

(women in the context of this thesis) doing most of it faces when they have to juggle domestic labour and involvement in the labour market.

While an abstract understanding of negotiations is based on the idea that two gender-neutral individuals freely come to an explicit agreement, the negotiation over domestic labour involves in practice many implicit processes and a differential of power between women and men. Both women and men have their own resources which can influence the negotiation, such as absolute and relative time availability outside paid work, absolute and relative incomes, personal standards regarding household maintenance and quality of intimate relationships, age, previous relationships, and so on. However, each of these resources plays out differently for women and men. For example, while several of the economic perspectives scholars (which I discuss further in Chapter 2) tend to argue that money and lack of time are decisive elements enabling men in male breadwinning families to refuse and/or avoid doing domestic labour, previous research on female breadwinning households show that the link between power and money, as well as between power and lack of time, is not as obvious and direct for women (Tichenor, 2005a, 2005b). I present findings supporting this argument in Chapter 4.

From a qualitative lens, 'to negotiate' also involves phenomena of change (and lack of thereof) in the division of domestic labour, described by two important concepts: conflict and "marital conversations". Differences of behaviours in conflict between women and men within the household have long been documented to follow different interactional patterns of demand/withdraw (Christensen & Heavey, 1990). In this model, the 'demander' is the proactive person who asks for change in the resolution of an underlying conflict, while the 'withdrawer' tends to avoid discussion of the problem. When it comes to negotiating change in women to improve men's situation, both women and men are equally likely to either demand or withdraw but the reverse is not true. Indeed, the prevailing pattern when

negotiating change in men to improve women's situation is the unequal and traditional "wife-demand/husband-withdraw" interaction (Christensen & Heavey, 1990, p. 73).

Conflicts therefore take place in a micro-structure that mirrors broader structures of inequality between women and men.

Concerning "marital conversations" in the negotiation of the division of domestic labour (Berger & Kellner, 1964; Coltrane, 1989), Benjamin and Sullivan (1996) stress the importance of their plurality in achieving more equal and flexible arrangements in the home. Marital conversations take place on a continuum (Coltrane, 1989) structured by individuals' involvement in intimacy work. Such conceptualisation includes both 'closed' marital conversations, i.e. conflict avoidance whereby women are solely responsible for intimacy, and 'open' marital conversations, i.e. an equal and cooperative dialogue orientated towards problem-solving in which both partners' feelings are expressed and considered (Benjamin & Sullivan, 1996; Coltrane, 1989). In their mixed-methods research on middle-class professional women, Sullivan and Benjamin (1996) find that open marital conversations are a crucial factor in achieving change, and that these conversations themselves depend on women's willingness to move away from patterns of anger repression by adopting "alternative modes of emotional work" (Benjamin & Sullivan, 1996, p. 246) based on acquired skills such as anger control and clear communication. In her qualitative study of U.S couples, Deutsch (1999) argues that communication is key in the process in negotiating equality and in changing gender roles. In this process, women's sense of entitlement (L. Thompson, 1991) to equality during the negotiation is crucial: the stronger their feeling of entitlement is, the higher the standards and demands are, and the more likely some type of change may take place – either towards more equality or towards an end to the relationship (Gershuny et al., 2005). In Chapter 6, I examine the content and precise role of such marital conversations and conflict in bringing about change.

In this sub-section, I have clarified my theoretical framework and explained how domestic labour is a type of reproductive labour and family work that tends to be done by women due to both daily interactional processes of doing gender as well as the reproduction of wider structures of inequalities and gender roles. I have also argued that, in order to understand how domestic labour is negotiated within female breadwinning families, it is important to use an extended definition of power, as well as the way gender influences the different resources women and men may use in this negotiation. I now conclude this section, and this chapter, by presenting the research questions and outline of the thesis.

B. Research questions and outline of the thesis

The overarching research question of this thesis attempts to uncover the mechanisms and processes underlying the ways women and men in female breadwinning households divide the unpaid domestic labour at home:

How do women and men negotiate their division of domestic labour in female breadwinning households?

In order to better answer this overarching question, each chapter presenting the findings of my research examines a specific dimension by attempting to reply to the following sub-questions:

- 1. How do women and men in female breadwinning households divide and perceive domestic labour?**
- 2. How do differences in mental load and emotion work between women and men affect the negotiation of the division of domestic labour?**

3. How do women and men negotiate change in their division of domestic labour?

4. What positions and power do women and men hold in the negotiation of the division of domestic labour?

After going deeper in the academic literatures on domestic labour and female breadwinners in Chapter 2 and presenting my research methods in Chapter 3, I address these sub-questions in four steps: I first show in Chapter 4 that despite perceptions of equality, participants tend to implement an unequal division of domestic labour in which women contribute more than men in two thirds of my sample. I then analyse in Chapter 5 the various gendered processes concerning emotion work and the mental load which lead to such an unequal division of domestic labour, as well as women's attempts to balance their and their partners' contributions. In Chapter 6, I argue that these attempts at change in the division of domestic labour are either met with failure or success, and that there are specific conditions for change within several boundaries that frame the negotiation. Finally, I provide a deeper understanding of these findings in Chapter 7 by analysing the asymmetrical positions and power of women and men in the negotiation of the division of domestic labour.

Chapter 2. Literature review: From ‘explaining’ to understanding the division of domestic labour in female breadwinning heterosexual households

In Chapter 1, I presented a specific part of the literature review on female breadwinning which contextualised this economic setting in heterosexual households (and more precisely, its emergence and main characteristics). In this chapter, I delve deeper into the literature to present the main empirical and theoretical findings concerning division of domestic labour in female breadwinning heterosexual households. This allows for a more precise understanding of both the reality of female breadwinning and of the contributions of this thesis.

The division of domestic labour is a major theme of the academic literature on female breadwinning, along with women’s and men’s subjectivities in navigating such a non-traditional economic setting, as well as the question of family stability and marital satisfaction within it (Blom & Hewitt, 2020). Past research on these themes has added many elements to the puzzling questions related to why, how, and to what extent inequality in domestic labour at the expense of women takes place in various types of heterosexual households. In Chapter 1, I presented a structural account of the sexual division of labour to answer these questions. However, this understanding of the division of domestic labour within female breadwinning heterosexual households must be complemented with more recent and general research into the division of domestic labour. Several causal relationships were found between some variables, or factors, and the quantity of time spent on domestic labour by each partner. Moreover, there has been some emphasis on the mechanisms and processes concerning the individuals’ subjectivities as well as the symbolic meanings and processes underpinning the division of labour. Some evidence and theories explain the variations between an equal and an unequal division of domestic

labour, as well as the variations between degrees of inequality, due to factors such as incomes and wealth, time availability, and gender ideology. As Coltrane (2000) writes in his review of 200 scholarly articles and books on household labour, the research has seen a proliferation of hypotheses and theories aiming at explaining the division of domestic labour, and more precisely why women do more of it. From this mainly quantitative literature emerged one of the most recent, and still ongoing, debates opposing economic perspectives and gender perspectives (Sayer, 2010, p. 21). On the one hand, the economic perspectives stress the role of determinants of the division of domestic labour which are understood as gender-neutral individual resources, i.e. these resources provide individuals with more or less power regardless of their sex, gender socialisation, and the structural hierarchies between women and men. On the other hand, the gender perspectives highlight processes in which individuals behave ‘as women’ and ‘as men’ in the context of the daily division of domestic labour. I discuss these perspectives in regard to the specific economic setting of female breadwinning in section one below and throughout this chapter.

Lachance-Grzela and Bouchard (2010) observe that researchers specialised on the topic of the division of labour have since the 2000s stepped away from looking for the ultimate theory to instead examine the division of domestic labour from an understanding based on an “increasingly global view of the situation [that] generally concur[s] that a multitude of factors come together to maintain the traditional distribution and that micro and macro theories all have a role to play” (Lachance-Grzela & Bouchard, 2010, p. 778). They also note that between 2000 and 2009, only a few qualitative studies attempted to unveil the processes and mechanisms behind the unequal division of domestic labour as well as the meanings domestic labour carries for women and men, a gap I aim to reduce with this research and literature review.

I call this chapter “from ‘explaining’ to understanding the division of domestic labour in female breadwinning heterosexual households” to draw attention to two different traditions of research in sociology, and more precisely on the topic of the division of domestic labour. While one tradition of research aims at empirically finding one or the main causal factors ‘explaining’ women’s and men’s time spent on domestic labour, the other attempts to reach a deep sociological understanding of the phenomenon. The goal of explaining causal relationships between sociological phenomena dates back to one of the founder of the discipline, Durkheim (2017), but it has also long cohabited with the goal of understanding the meaning individuals give to their action, thereby providing intelligibility and nuances to statistical phenomena (Hollis, 1994; Weber, 2019). Firstly, I present the various factors, processes, and theories which can explain the division of domestic labour, and I apply them to female breadwinning households (section I below). Then, I move on to empirical sociological findings about female breadwinning in order to gain understanding of this phenomenon in the light of the present literature (section II). Finally, in relation to this literature, I introduce the theoretical contributions of my research (section III).

I. Explaining the division of domestic labour: factors, processes, and theories applied to female breadwinning households

In this section, I first present the factors and theories – i.e. individual resources from the economic perspectives as well as key elements from the individuals’ gender ideologies concerning the roles women and men adopt – which would predict female breadwinners’ lower relative share of domestic labour (sub-section A below). I then highlight the processes and theories that would predict female breadwinners’ higher relative share of domestic labour with key elements from the literature using gender perspectives (sub-section B).

A. Factors and theories predicting female breadwinners' lower relative share of domestic labour

Factors and theories in the current research on the division domestic labour that would predict female breadwinners' lower relative share of domestic labour stem from two main bodies of literature: the literature highlighting the role of individual resources when negotiating the division of domestic labour – the economic perspectives –, and the literature spotlighting the role of individuals' gender ideologies and attitudes.

The main original inspiration of the economic perspectives was initially framed by the neoclassical New Home Economics movement, which argues that women and men aim at rationally maximising the welfare of the family by specialising either in home production, i.e. domestic labour, or in the labour market (Becker, 1965, 1981), depending on their respective skills and efficiency in those productions. Given that women's prospects in the labour market tend to be lower than men's, and that they tend to be more efficient in home production due to gender socialisation, the rational choice for women is supposedly to be responsible for the home production (van der Lippe & Siegers, 1994). In the case of female breadwinners, the argument would be that these women tend to have a comparative advantage over their male partner in the labour market – either because the men have particularly low prospects and/or because the women are themselves more qualified and integrated into the labour market than their male partners. Women in this situation would therefore be expected to be less engaged in home production while their male partners would specialise in it.

The bargaining models inspired by this perspective are also based on the assumption of rationality, but replace the New Home Economics' joint utility function by two separate individual utility functions to explain the unequal domestic division of labour by the inequality of individual economic resources within the couple (Lundberg & Pollak, 1996).

Men and women equally want to avoid housework but their own power and the outcome of the negotiation strictly depends on their economic earnings. From this perspective, the division of domestic labour follows an economic and gender-neutral rationality: if women earned more money than their husbands, they would devote relatively less time to domestic labour. This economic explanation of the division of domestic labour paved the way for the widespread academic attention to the link between women's relative incomes and their time spent on domestic labour. In this logic, female breadwinners have more economic power than their male partners due to the very fact that they earn relatively higher incomes, and thus have more relative power to negotiate a lower share of domestic labour.

Another version of these perspectives, the time availability approach (Shelton, 1992), argues that the time spent on domestic labour depends on individuals' commitment to paid labour and time available outside paid labour. Since men are more likely to have full-time jobs than women, they are less available for domestic labour. In their multi-level analyses of the European Social Survey, van der Lippe et al. (2018) show that, in accordance with this approach, both women and men perform more housework when unemployed. Therefore, according to this view, men – especially those who are unemployed – in female breadwinning households should spend relatively more hours on domestic labour than their female partners.

From these rational choice perspectives, gender-neutral economic resources such as skills, efficiency, income, and time tend to play against women in general in the negotiation of division of domestic labour, whilst at the same time should advantage female breadwinners in heterosexual households. Broadening these perspectives to less strictly economic factors, researchers have shown that education, and more precisely individuals' relative educational attainment, also influences the division of domestic labour. Women's higher relative educational attainment – or human capital (O. Sullivan & Gershuny, 2016) – decreases

domestic labour inequality to the advantage of women (Bianchi et al., 2000). As a result of women's higher educational attainment, their male partners' contribution to domestic labour is expected to increase (S. N. Davis & Greenstein, 2004). Female breadwinners, especially those I interviewed, tend to have a higher relative and absolute educational attainment, and would therefore be expected to do relatively less domestic labour. As for men, those with higher levels of education are shown to do more housework than men with lower levels of education (Gershuny & Sullivan, 2003; O. Sullivan & Gershuny, 2016). What this means for female breadwinners households is that those with highly educated men should be characterised by a greater contribution from men.

Each of these economic determinants of the division of domestic labour point to a common underlying logic: individual women and men have a specific quantity and quality of external (or externally-validated) resources that can be used in the negotiation over the division of domestic labour to make their own contribution as small as possible (Knudsen & Waerness, 2007). Mannino and Deutsch (2007) bring out the issue of power in these perspectives, since all of these economic resources provide the individual with a certain amount of relative power in the negotiation. Women's contribution to domestic labour is higher than their male partner because the latter tend to have relatively more structural power from the labour market, not because they are biologically programmed to do so – as traditional biological deterministic ideologies would argue (Mikkola, 2022). Therefore, labour market skills and efficiency, income, time, and education should play to the advantage of female breadwinners. But these factors cannot be understood in a vacuum, since they are themselves deeply intertwined with individuals' gender ideologies and attitudes. There is indeed a close relationship between educational attainment, career opportunities, and gender ideologies (Fan & Marini, 2000).

According to the gender ideology framework, the more individuals hold traditional ideologies of gender and marital roles – i.e. how individuals should behave according to their sex and in accordance with the male breadwinner model (Baxter, 1993; Morehead, 2005) – the more unequal the division of domestic labour is, and vice versa in the case of egalitarian gender ideologies (S. N. Davis et al., 2007). Research shows that women with egalitarian gender ideologies do less housework than women with traditional gender ideologies and that men with egalitarian ideologies spend more time on housework than men with traditional ideologies (Arrighi & Maume, 2000; S. N. Davis et al., 2007; Fuwa, 2004; Knudsen & Waerness, 2007; Parkman, 2004). Although female breadwinning *per se* does not automatically go along with egalitarian gender ideologies (Hochschild & Machung, 2012), this perspective is useful to consider here because, willingly or not, female breadwinning households implement a non-traditional role reversal of the male breadwinner model which goes against traditional gender ideologies. Furthermore the couples I interviewed mainly had egalitarian views on the roles and positions of women and men in society, as I show in Chapter 4.

Economic individual resources, as well as education and gender ideology, have been anchored in the literature as main factors explaining variations in the division of domestic labour. Applied to female breadwinning heterosexual households, and more precisely to those I interviewed, these individual characteristics can be reasonably thought of as increasing female breadwinners' power in negotiating a relatively lower share of domestic labour. However, the literature is not unanimous on the scope and the nature of the relationship between these factors and the division of domestic labour. Moving away from finding a causal explanatory framework, the gender perspectives use the 'doing gender' theory to understand how the meaning women and men give to domestic labour shapes the way they divide tasks and responsibilities at home. As I show in the next sub-section, these

perspectives unveil processes and develops theories that would predict a higher relative share of domestic labour for female breadwinners.

B. Processes and theories predicting female breadwinners' higher relative share of domestic labour

The gender perspectives were initially framed to tackle the theoretical and empirical limitations of rational and individual resources approaches. As I presented in Chapter 2, the gender perspectives are rooted in the idea that households are gender factories (Berk, 1985), rather than units where gender-neutral individuals meet their and their family's needs. This is because the division of domestic labour and the "doing gender" processes (West & Zimmerman, 1987) are deeply embedded. Individual women and men behave in ways that are understood as 'masculine' and 'feminine'. One's contribution to domestic labour in terms of time spent, as well as the division of tasks and responsibilities, is a platform for women and men to conform to sex-based expectations and to show others that they conform to these expectations (Chesters, 2012; Coltrane, 1989; Hochschild & Machung 2012; West & Zimmerman, 1987).

The work of "doing family" largely depends on individuals showing various "displays" of meanings, behaviours, and actions (Barnwell et al., 2021; Dermott & Seymour, 2011; Finch, 2007). The gender perspectives also encapsulate ideas of gender display and gender-deviance neutralisation. More specifically, proponents of these perspectives also argue that even when women earn relatively more than men, gender differences in domestic labour are reinforced due to a compensation mechanism called gender-deviance neutralisation, a type of gender display. Economically dependent men do less housework than other men to display (Brines, 1994) their masculinity by avoiding as much as possible 'feminine'

activities of cooking, cleaning and caring. Some have argued that men's avoidance of certain tasks underlies a willingness to neutralise doubts on their manhood in a context of 'deviant' economic situation – a process that Greenstein calls “deviance neutralization” (Greenstein, 2000, p. 322). Empirical findings challenge bargaining models by suggesting that the relationship between relative economic individual resources and time spent on domestic labour is not linear but curvilinear (O. Sullivan, 2011; O. Sullivan & Gershuny, 2016): money is an important asset in the negotiation of domestic labour as long as men out-earn women, but “gender trumps money-based bargaining” whenever women's income is higher than their male partners' (Bittman et al., 2003, p. 202).

Empirical findings using these perspectives shed light on both women's and men's gender-deviance neutralisation. In their comparison of the division of domestic labour between the United States and Sweden, Evertsson and Neramo (2004) show that although in both countries the division of housework is unequal at the expense of women, there are two different explanations for these two different national contexts. While the authors argue for an explanation based on the economic perspectives regarding Sweden, they find that women in the United States increase their time spent in housework as their husbands earn relatively less. According to the authors, it is because women seek “to neutralize the presumed gender deviance on the part of their spouses” (Evertsson & Neramo, 2004, p. 1272). Bianchi et al. (2000) further explain this phenomenon of gender-deviance neutralisation by the idea that women who out-earn their male partners do relatively more domestic labour as a result of “choosing not to use their relative power to negotiate out of housework in order to protect their feminine identity” as wives and mothers – traditional constructs of femininity also highlighted by Greenstein (2000). Understanding behaviours whereby women align themselves with roles of femininity then requires a specific analysis of childcare (Doucet, 2015; O. Sullivan, 2013), especially as women's subjectivities are

deeply tied with motherhood when they are mothers. The theory of “maternal gatekeeping” (Allen & Hawkins, 1999; De Luccie, 1995) also provides elements in understanding the idea of women’s and gender-deviance neutralisation by putting forward “the ways in which mothers restrict or support father’s involvement with children” (Puhlman & Pasley, 2017, p. 824) as processes contributing to traditional gender roles about childcare (Allen & Hawkins, 1999; Fagan & Barnett, 2003; McBride et al., 2005; Stevenson et al., 2014).

Men’s gender-deviance neutralisation in non-traditional economic settings has also been documented within this literature. In their study of American men facing challenges to their masculinity in the workplace, Arrighi and Maume (2000) find that these men were more avoidant of housework because they perceive this type of labour as “women’s work” (Arrighi & Maume, 2000, p. 464). Avoiding housework means avoiding significant and symbolic activities attached to womanhood, which is particularly important for these men who are in a context in which their amounts of power and control – core elements of masculinity – are weakened in the labour market. Overall, men’s gender-deviance neutralisation is a main theme of the empirical literature on the division of domestic labour in female breadwinning households which I discuss in the next section.

II. Empirical findings on the division of domestic labour in female breadwinning heterosexual households

A review of the empirical – mostly qualitative – findings on the division of domestic labour in female breadwinning households shows two main axes of discussion. I present in the first sub-section the debate on whether these households ‘do’ or ‘undo gender’ in the way women and men subjectively negotiate between traditional and egalitarian gender roles (sub-section A below). I then present the discussion on how female breadwinners’ and their

male partners' subjectivities are intertwined with motherhood and fatherhood (sub-section B below).

A. The division of domestic labour in female breadwinning households: between 'doing' and 'undoing gender'?

Recent literature on female breadwinning and the division of domestic labour tends to be discussed from the theory of 'doing gender'. Female breadwinning households are often seen as sites of potential re-negotiation of gender roles and subjectivities since they constitute a non-traditional and minority economic setting,

It is worth noting that the early literature on female breadwinning heterosexual households actually predates current debates, and specifically focuses on sole female breadwinning households where men are unemployed. As Morris (Morris, 1985) demonstrates, the Great Depression in the 1930s aroused academic interest in the coping strategies of working-class men facing unemployment (Jahoda et al., 1933). Along with a rigid gendered division of domestic labour (Bakke, 1933), findings illustrate that men who were the most attached to their monopoly on breadwinning had a stronger sense of humiliation and a lower self-esteem (Komarovsky, 1940). Even when a few men helped around the home, and despite men's loss of economic power, power relations between men and women remained unaffected (Penlington, 2010).

Despite the significant social and economic changes that have since taken place, some findings on male unemployment in the 1930s tend to converge with later findings on both sole and dual-earning female breadwinning households in Western countries. In their study of "wife-emphasized" marriages, i.e. where women's careers are more important than men's, Atkinson and Boles (1984), find both high emotional and social stress, as well as "deviance neutralization techniques" (Atkinson & Boles, 1984, p. 865): husbands and

wives de-emphasised female breadwinning by both hiding it and emphasising some aspects of traditional gender roles. Drawing on this framework, Tichenor (2005b) reveals how “men’s dominance” is maintained even among couples in which women earn more. Inspired by “conventional conceptualisation of masculinities and femininities” (Tichenor, 2005b, p. 192), both women and men participate in preserving the woman’s identity as a mother and the man’s identity as the breadwinner. In their study of white, religious, and working-class couples experiencing long-term male unemployment in the United States, Legerski and Cornwall (2010) highlight the processes underlying the persistence of a traditional gender order, which can be summarised by a lack of good jobs for women – explaining why couples perceive women’s incomes as secondary – and a lack of new ideologies – illustrated by a persistence of conventional ‘gender identities’ in the daily routines and interactions. A key process is that “women seemed more concerned about preserving their husbands’ health and sense of masculinity than adjusting demands on their time” (Legerski & Cornwall, 2010, p. 466). Therefore, men’s psychological distress – also pointed out by quantitative findings on unemployment and subjective well-being (van der Meer, 2014) –, which result from a threatened sense of masculinity caused by a loss of economic power, hinders change at the interactional level.

However, findings on male unemployment and female breadwinning are not clear-cut concerning the reproduction of traditional gender roles through ‘doing gender’ performances. Indeed, while not denying the presence of both identification to rigid norms of masculinity and femininity as well as men’s inertia to domestic labour, some authors also argue that a non-traditional economic structure can spur changes in domestic labour and subjectivities (Morris, 1985). Although unemployment causes major disruptions, some men try, and to a certain extent succeed, to reframe their gender strategies (Hochschild & Machung, 2012) and their masculinity by interpreting their domestic labour participation

as “viable manhood acts” (Demantas & Myers, 2015, p. 658). In her qualitative study of a rural community in the United States, Sherman (2009) demonstrates that a third of her sample of unemployed men displayed rigid patterns of masculinity, but two-thirds exhibited flexibility towards gender roles and fatherhood. Whilst the coping strategies of the unemployed men displaying rigidity led to anger and dissatisfaction within their families, ‘flexible’ unemployed men were rewarded by greater family stability.

In light of the expansion of the theory of ‘doing gender’ and the proliferation of empirical studies situated within this framework, some researchers have argued that sociology should go further by considering the possibility of “undoing gender” in times of progressing gender equality and emergence of new family patterns (Deutsch, 2007). If gender is not something we are but something we do, as suggested by the theory of ‘doing gender’, then individuals should also be able to undo it in their daily interactions. As Risman (2009) argues, “we need to be able to differentiate when husbands and wives are doing gender traditionally and when they are undoing it” (Risman, 2009). In this perspective, Deutsch (2007) suggests paying attention to the processes leading to undoing gender in interactions, while avoiding to see these processes as merely different ways of doing gender. Only a few empirical studies on the division of domestic labour have led to strong conclusions validating the theory of undoing gender. In their qualitative research on non-traditional division of domestic labour interviewing 28 Spanish childless dual-earner couples – including 15 where women earn more – Domínguez-Folgueras et al. (2017) illustrate the various configurations of individual resources and subjectivities leading to what they consider “undoing gender”, defined as “social interactions that reduce gender difference” (Deutsch, 2007, p. 122). ‘Undoing gender’ is then understood not in absolute but in relative terms – compared to other couples doing gender more rigidly – and within a broader context of the unequal division of domestic labour in Spain – hence the choice of the authors to consider

households in which women do 60% and men 40% of housework as ‘non-traditional’, thereby including quantitative inequality in their category. They find that women’s higher relative resources and lower time availability were key factors framing processes of undoing gender, especially in cases where “men show resistance to giving up male privilege in practice” (Domínguez-Folgueras et al., 2017, p. 439), but they were not an absolute condition. The other key element lied in women’s and men’s shared “beliefs in the fairness of domestic equality” and agreement on “standards in practice” (Domínguez-Folgueras et al., 2017, p. 439).

Exceptions aside, most research looking at the intertwinement between gendered subjectivities and the division of domestic labour in female breadwinning households conclude that there is a mix of, or sometimes conflicts between, ‘doing’ and ‘undoing’ gender. Such intertwinement sometimes lead to new gender roles combining traditional and ‘modern’ aspects of femininity and masculinity (Jurczyk et al., 2019; Sherman, 2009). For example, Demantas and Myers (2015) argue that, rather than a sign of ‘undoing gender’, unemployed men’s significant involvement in domestic labour involved a broadening of experiences included in the category of masculinity, thereby confirming their willingness to distance themselves from women’s roles and positions and to assert themselves as men. For example, some of the men they interviewed did not detach from ideals of masculinity but, rather, reframe activities of domestic labour such as cleaning the floor without a mop as “manhood acts” that are vital for the “family’s wellbeing” (Demantas & Myers, 2015, p. 655). In her study of middle- and upper-class female breadwinners in the United States, Medved (2016) concludes that they simultaneously ‘do’ and ‘undo’ gender in the way they constructed their discourse on their identities and tasks. Some women she interviewed framed their position as “career-primary” and tended to subvert traditional roles of femininity by prioritising their careers and presenting their personality as compatible with

the “competition” and “control” mindset required in their male-dominated careers (Medved, 2016, p. 241). But in the meantime, most of these women interviewed were also “perpetuat[ing] men’s power in the home” by giving them some managing and controlling power over finances (Medved, 2016, p. 246)

B. The intertwinement of female breadwinners’ and their partners’ subjectivities with motherhood and fatherhood

Beyond the question of whether or not, and how, female breadwinning households do or undo gender, a main focus of the literature on female breadwinners over recent years has been to identify how they and their male partners’ subjective experiences of female breadwinning are intimately intertwined with subjectivities and ideals about motherhood and fatherhood when they are parents.

In the context of fatherhood, Sherman’s (2009) “flexible men” also reconstructed “the masculine ideal in order to make it more attainable for themselves” on the basis of “active fathering” and “being a good father” (Sherman, 2009, p. 612). The latter was conceived of in non-economic terms and was based on standards such as “help[ing] with homework, attend[ing] sports matches, and teach[ing] their children to hunt, fish, camp, and understand the value of hard work” (Sherman, 2009, p. 612). Some “traditional masculinities” can cohabit with a step towards “alternative masculinities” when stay-at-home fathers considered “caring as masculine” (J. Y. Lee & Lee, 2018, p. 49) . In the United States, Latshaw and Hale (2015) have developed the idea of a “domestic handoff” resulting from gendered uses of time in female breadwinning families with stay-at-home fathers. They suggest that some couples “continue to ‘do gender’ in more conventional ways during evenings and weekends” (Latshaw & Hale, 2015, p. 97), with stay-at-home fathers swapping domestic responsibilities when breadwinner mothers are home.

Women's and men's subjective ideas about motherhood and fatherhood have an impact on the (in)equality implemented in female breadwinning households. Chesley (2011) argues that even though at-home fatherhood is rarely independent from men's increasing job instability, this economic setting "can promote change toward greater equality even in couples that initially hold entrenched, gendered beliefs" (Chesley, 2011, p. 642). At-home fathers she interviewed gave "value [to] their increased involvement in children's care" and developed a "stronger bond" with their children, whilst providing significant "work support" that enabled their female partners to succeed in their career (Chesley, 2011, p. 661). However, she argues that there are also different relational and interactional processes that can also prevent change towards 'gender equality'. She indeed suggests that women's feelings related to intensive mothering ideals can be strengthened when women compare themselves to their stay-at-home partner, leaving some mothers feeling guilty and not good enough for not being as involved as the fathers. On the other hand, she also highlights that men's breadwinning ideals and gendered behaviour can be reinforced through interactions with wives who espouse male breadwinning ideals. Illustrating this point, Chesley (2011) gives the example of a case where the man's return to paid employment was partly motivated by his female partner's negative feeling about his unemployment.

The important influence of motherhood ideals on female breadwinners' subjectivities and overall experiences is also highlighted in several other empirical findings. In their qualitative study of female breadwinning heterosexual households in West Germany, Jurczyk et al. (2019) point out the crucial element in understanding the coexistence between a "modernization of gender roles and arrangements in everyday life" and "traditional gender concepts and practices": "the relationship between gender self-concepts and factual income arrangements" (Jurczyk et al., 2019, pp. 1731-1732). Looking at the interactions between how women and men conceptualise themselves – as 'woman', 'mother', 'man',

and ‘father’ – and their factual arrangement – “high-earning woman”, “stay-at-home father,” “unemployed man,” “man in precarious self-employment,” “low-earning man” (Jurczyk et al., 2019, p. 1742) –, the authors find four patterns of subjectivities. Among those four patterns, two were characterized by an alignment between the woman’s gender self-concepts and her perception of her partner’s, and two were characterized by a misalignment between the partners’ gender self-concepts. In the first pattern, characterized by a misalignment between women who identify with traditional gender roles and their partners they perceive as being content and therefore adhering to “countercultural gender self-concepts” (Jurczyk et al., 2019, p. 1743), the authors find that women who tended to see their female breadwinning position as a burden feel a strain between their career and their willingness to embrace motherhood. In these cases, women were less likely to use “money as an instrument of control and power” (Jurczyk et al., 2019, p. 1743), for example in the negotiations over the division of domestic labour. In the second pattern, characterized by a misalignment between women adhering to “countercultural gender self-concepts” and their partner identifying with traditional gender roles and perceived as experiencing the situation as “problematic” (Jurczyk et al., 2019, p. 1744), the authors find women who tended to be proud of their female breadwinning position but were faced with resistance from their male partners whom female breadwinners perceived as feeling the most strain between modern and traditional roles of fatherhood. In the third pattern, the authors find an alignment between women’s and men’s negative feelings about the female breadwinning situation, and note that these couples tended to wish to come back to a more traditional male breadwinning setting. In the fourth pattern, the authors find an alignment between women’s and men’s positive feelings and adherence of the female breadwinning situation. But, even in this latter pattern, men were praised by their female partners for their unique, and sometimes “superior” (Jurczyk et al., 2019, p. 1745), parenting and domestic skills.

They analyse this positive bias towards men in the economy of gratitude of these couples as a mechanism of:

elevation of the men [that] reestablishes the women's inferior positions, which appears to coincide more neatly with traditional gender roles. Although the ability to look after children is initially associated with femininity, it was transformed to construct the man's superiority. (Jurczyk et al., 2019, pp. 1745-1746)

This elevation of the men through their participation in traditionally feminine activities echoes Héritier's (1996) concept of the "differential valences of the sexes" (presented in Chapter 1) according to which socially valued activities are assigned to men, and that the activities men do tend to be valued. This would explain why, overall, when men take on traditionally feminine and therefore devalued activities, these activities tend to gain value and can be presented as compatible with a sense of manhood.

Motherhood, breadwinning, and womanhood intersect in unique ways compared to the experiences of breadwinning fathers. Chesley (2017) argue that the meanings attached to being a breadwinning mother share similarities and important contrasts with the experiences of breadwinning fathers in the United States. Most women she interviewed rejected the label of 'primary financial provider' for their families despite earning at least 80% of the family income. An explanation which contributes to partly explaining these women's rejection of the label lies in their "sense of conflict between their role as the primary financial provider and their mothering role" which "may lead breadwinner mothers to downplay the importance of their employment" (Chesley, 2017, p. 2614). There are high levels of conflict between breadwinning and mothering for full-time working mothers (Johnston & Swanson, 2007) which are particularly difficult to resolve for female breadwinners since this sense of conflict "may be exacerbated both by fathers' primary carer role" and "by a general difference in social judgement breadwinner women perceive that suggest that breadwinner mothers should be more involved with children than

breadwinner fathers are” (Chesley, 2017, p. 2614). Breadwinner mothers indeed tend to be expected to be more involved with children than breadwinning fathers are (Brescoll & Uhlmann, 2005; Gaunt, 2013).

The empirical literature looking at the division of domestic labour in female breadwinning households has highlighted the importance of women’s and men’s subjectivities in the ways they negotiate daily tasks and responsibilities around the household. Gender roles in these households tend to be reframed in a tension between traditional and egalitarian ideals of femininity and masculinity, and the content of this reconfiguration itself depends on women’s and men’s subjectivities and ideals regarding motherhood and fatherhood when they are parents.

III. Discussing the literature and research theoretical contributions: understanding the gendered domestic labour bargain in female breadwinning heterosexual households

In this section, I present the theoretical contributions of my research, referring to the aforementioned literature and theories on domestic labour. I first argue for an integration of the economic and gender perspectives by highlighting research that has shown that individual resources are not gender-neutral but deeply gendered (sub-section A below). I focus on the concept of ‘doing gender’ and its empirical and theoretical scope, relevance, and validity to my research (sub-section B). Finally, I propose the concept of the ‘marital contract’ as a meso-level theoretical tool to better understand the interplay between gender as a structure of inequality and hierarchy and individuals’ agency in gendered bargaining (sub-section C).

A. Integrating the economic and gender perspectives

Despite limitations in their explanatory scope, theories about factors – such as relative income, time availability, relative educational attainment and gender ideologies – which would predict female breadwinners' lower relative share of domestic labour presented in the first section should not be discarded, since they provide a context of potential individual power for women and men in the bargain involved in the negotiation of their division of domestic labour. So far, I have argued that the main limitation of these factors in understanding domestic labour lies in their conceptualisation as gender-neutral. I show in this first sub-section that money, time, education, and ideologies are gendered in the sense that they do not have the same effect, or do not provide the same amount and quality of power, when these individual characteristics belong to women rather than men. I then argue for an integration of the economic and gender perspectives.

There is a “hidden power in marriage” (Komter, 1989) which prevents any type of heterosexual household from automatically “subvert[ing] the cultural link between money and power for women” (Tichenor, 2005b, p. 192). While the traditional link between power and money applies to male breadwinners in the sense that money provides them “higher status”, as well as “greater power and privilege within marriage” (Tichenor, 2005b, p. 192), this is not the case for women. Findings from the gender perspectives and empirical research on female breadwinners presented earlier in this chapter support this argument. Women and men give different meanings to money (Blumber & Coleman, 1989; Zelizer, 1989). Tichenor (2005b) argues that among her sample of couples where women out-earned men, the latter were still defined as providers and had authority in their homes. These men were therefore very much in charge of defining the terms of what she calls “the marital contract”, thus reinforcing their “traditional power within marriage” (Tichenor, 2005b, p. 192). Moreover, she argues, earning more than their male partners sometimes diminished

women's power. This resulted from the interactions between "gender ideology at the institutional level, specifically conventional conceptualization of masculinity and femininity and gender identity constructions of spouses", which all led to the reproduction of "men's dominance within marriage" (Tichenor, 2005b, p. 192). Although her findings validate to some extent the theory of 'doing gender', she uses two key concepts to highlight interactions between the institutional and the individual levels: "marital power" and "gender as structure" (Tichenor, 2005b, p. 193).

Tichenor (2005b) takes the concept of marital power from Blumberg and Coleman (1989) who argue for analysing women's absolute earnings, relative earnings, their "independent control over [their] earnings" (Tichenor, 2005b, p. 193), as well as the gendered meanings of money. The inclusion of women's absolute earnings to better account for how much power this individual resource provides women resonates with later findings highlighting limitations of the relative resources approach. Gupta (2006, 2007) argues that there is a gendered relationship between earnings and contribution to housework and that women's time spent on housework does not depend on their relative but on their absolute earnings. His findings demonstrate that higher-earning women spend less time on housework than lower-earning women and that there is no association between men's earnings and women's or men's housework time (Gupta, 2006, 2007). Moreover, women and men spend money differently, and women's money contributes more to household and childcare spending than men's money, further emphasising the gendered nature of 'his' and 'her' money (Brandon, 1999; Gupta & Ash, 2008; Hu, 2019; Lauer & Yodanis, 2014; Lundberg et al., 1997).

The link between lesser relative time availability and power to reduce one's contribution to domestic labour is also gendered in the sense that it is weaker for women than for men. While van der Lippe et al. (2018) show that both women and men increase their time spent

on housework when unemployed, they also highlight that the increase is much more important for women than for men in. Not only do women spend more of their free time on domestic labour and less time on leisure (Vagni, 2019), but there are also “gendered experiences of domestic time” (O. Sullivan, 1997; Vagni, 2019). Management and responsibilities of gendered tasks tend to fall on women, and women and men have different experiences of the “pressure of time”: women are more prone to “multitasking”, i.e. combining several activities simultaneously, and “their leisure time is more likely to be interrupted by domestic labour than men’s” (O. Sullivan, 1997, p. 222). In their anthropological ethnography of indoor leisure activities of middle-class dual-earning parents in Los Angeles-area, Beck and Arnold (2009) find that men had more leisure time than women on average and among three quarters of their participants, echoing previous similar findings (Bianchi & Mattingly, 2003; Sayer, 2005). Craig and Brown (2017) argue that there is a gender contrast in subjective experience of time, with mothers feeling more rushed than fathers due to more interrupted leisure time and more multitasking than fathers.

The relationship between egalitarian gender ideology and egalitarian division of domestic labour also must be taken cautiously. Indeed, it is not because men espouse ideals of gender equality that they actually implement these ideals. Previous findings point out the gendered link between gender ideology and power. The gap between egalitarian gender ideologies and actual behaviours of equality in the division of domestic labour seems to particularly be true of men. Bianchi et al. (2000) show that both men who have an egalitarian ideology and male partners of women who have an egalitarian ideology do not tend to spend more time on housework than their female partners.

Understanding the negotiation of the division of domestic labour therefore requires taking into account the gendered content of this bargain between women and men in the household.

B. Women's and men's subjectivities and doing gender mechanisms in the gendered bargaining

In this sub-section, I discuss the scope, relevance and validity of the theory of 'doing gender' when applied to sociological research on the division of domestic labour. I highlight the limits of the theory of 'doing gender' and argue for understanding this concept as one mechanism amongst others in the relation between the gendered subjectivities and behaviours of women and men in the "gendered bargain[ing]" (Tichenor, 2005a, p. 33) underlying the negotiation of the division of domestic labour. Based on findings presented in the following chapters, one of the theoretical contributions of this research is to unveil subjective gendered mechanisms which are different and independent from mechanisms of doing gender in the sense of performing identities as women and men. A further contribution is to highlight the analytical and empirical importance of the relational level between women and men's subjectivities and behaviours.

The limitations of the theory of 'doing gender' are twofold: first, some of the quantitative research on the division of domestic labour has questioned the validity of the hypothesis of gender display and, second, there are significant theoretical difficulties in the way most of the sociological research has used 'doing gender' in explaining inequalities in the household.

In her review and reassessment of the hypothesis of gender display through the performance of housework, Sullivan (2011) argues that on the one hand, "the original identification of

gender display in relation to housework among women may have been the result of a misinterpretation of data” (O. Sullivan, 2011, p. 2), and on the other hand, that empirical evidence of men’s gender display remain limited in scope. Gupta’s (2006, 2007) findings on women’s absolute earnings question both the relative resources theory and gender display. Given that women with higher relative earnings tend to actually have low absolute earnings, the gender perspectives confuse acts of gender-deviance neutralisation with a limited financial capacity for outsourcing domestic tasks. Women’s share of domestic labour is linked to their own earnings since this is what provides the opportunity to exchange money with time (Gupta, 2006). In her analysis of the domestic division of labour in Great Britain, Kan (2008a) concludes that hours of housework are more likely to be explained by economic bargaining and individuals’ gender ideology than by gender-deviance neutralisation. She nonetheless leaves the door open by specifying that a “doing-gender effect” (Kan, 2008a, p. 63) might be observed in the divide between ‘feminine’ household and caring activities and flexible household chores. Sullivan (2011) casts doubts on the idea of gender display coming from men by putting forward three main arguments: 1) men’s gender display initially argued by Brines (1994) has a scope limited to long-term unemployed working-class men (Gupta, 1999), 2) men who are relatively more involved in domestic labour than other men and who have traditional gender ideologies may underreport their actual time spent on housework (Deutsch, 1999; Kan, 2008b), and 3) qualitative research tends to show that working-class men, even those with traditional gender ideologies, have been and are more flexible in their involvement in domestic labour and in their responses to their female partners’ employment status than initially thought (Deutsch, 1999; Hochschild & Machung 2012; Morris, 1987; Pyke, 1996; Shows & Gerstel, 2009; Wheelock, 1990).

Secondly, the concept of ‘doing gender’ may often itself be misinterpreted in its theoretical scope, relevance and validity. In their case studies of the broader sociological appropriation of the concept of ‘doing gender’ originally rooted in ethnomethodology, Wickes and Emmison (2007) and Nentwich and Kelan (2014) argue that most theoretical and empirical developments using this concept have only used a “fairly general interpretation” (Nentwich & Kelan, 2014, p. 121), in line with an academic practice called “ceremonial referencing” (Adatto & Cole, 1981). According to Wickes and Emmison’s (2007) review of 149 academic publications using this concept from 2001 onwards, 73% of them fall in the category of “ceremonial citations” because these publications use ‘doing gender’ in a way that “does not play any role in the chosen conceptual framework, methodology or analysis” (Wickes & Emmison, 2007, p. 327) and that does not enable proper engagement and deeper understanding of the theoretical underpinning of the concept and observed phenomenon. Moreover, they argue that, although ethnomethodologists themselves, West and Zimmermann’s presentation of their concept of ‘doing gender’ in the 1987 article parted from the ethnomethodologist tradition of research based on “empirical enquiry” (Wickes & Emmison, 2007, p. 321) by heavily focusing on theoretical considerations. Davis (2017) argues that this move away from empirical enquiry may have misled non-ethnomethodologist sociologists into regarding this concept as “a theory for why gender inequality is being reproduced” (S. N. Davis, 2017, p. 3), for instance in the division of domestic labour. Looking back at West and Zimmerman’s (1987) conceptualization of ‘doing gender’, she points that this concept was never intended to be a theory but rather a concept highlighting the mechanisms through which inequalities are reproduced. In her view, ‘doing gender’ is too often misunderstood as “gender is a thing that is done” – and therefore could be undone – whereas it should actually be understood as “a verb phrase, a process” to spotlight “the doing of doing gender” (S. N. Davis, 2017, p. 3). Since the

relevance of the concept of 'doing gender' is rooted in describing mechanisms of action, she argues that this concept "is useful for explaining the reproduction of inequality when incorporated as a mechanism into broader theoretical explanations" (S. N. Davis, 2017, p. 4). Referring to the way previous authors (Chafetz, 1990; Ridgeway, 2011) have used the concept of doing gender as mechanism that "reinforce patriarchal norms at the micro level", at the crossroads of structure and individual agency, Davis (2017) argues that 'doing gender' "is one of the [mechanical] explanations for how gender inequality is reproduced through everyday interactions" (S. N. Davis, 2017, p. 4).

An important theoretical contribution of my research is to unveil mechanisms and explanatory processes underlying the unequal division of domestic labour and gendered bargaining which are related to women's and men's gendered subjectivities but independent from mechanisms of 'doing gender' such as gender display and gender-deviance neutralisation. I argue that 'doing gender' in the sense of performing identities of 'woman' and 'man' in alignment with what the individual more or less consciously identifies as the social and cultural norms and expectations based on her or his sex category can be seen as just the tip of the iceberg of women's and men's gendered subjectivities. The rest of the iceberg contains emotions, gaps between thoughts and practices, contradictions among the individual's own subjectivities, and deep-rooted unconscious habits of doing and thinking inherited from gender socialisation as well as experiencing life as women or men in societies framed by gender as a structure of inequality and hierarchy. All these elements which influence the gendered subjectivities of women and men have already been studied by the literature, but independently from each other concerning their impact on the division of domestic labour. I combine them to analyse my findings on domestic labour in the remainder of the thesis.

Another theoretical contribution of this research therefore lies in the inclusion of emotions and the way they differentiate between women and men, as well as function as mechanisms of inequality. The sociology of emotions is not recent, but remains a relatively niche field in the discipline in spite of its valuable insights. As Lively (Lively, 2016) notes:

the sociology of emotion draws attention to the ways in which emotions – phenomena that have historically been viewed as inherently personal – are socially patterned. Although emotions are typically seen as micro-events or constructs, sociologists routinely illustrate the degree to which emotions are not only related to one’s position on the social structure, but also how emotions, particularly through their management and their expression, serve to reproduce the society in which individuals are embedded. Thus, the study of emotions has become crucial in explaining the reciprocal relationship between individual agency and social structure.²

Sociologists have provided evidence that there are differences between women and men in both the expression of emotions and the way they are experiencing some emotions (Simon, 2014; Simon, 2020). In the United States, women tend to report more ‘negative’ emotions such as anxiety, sadness, anger, and depression than men who are themselves more likely to report ‘positive’ emotions such as calm and happiness (Rosenfield & Mouzon, 2013).

Emotions “act as a signal function” which “tell us how we are faring in a particular social interaction” (Lively, 2016). Furthermore, there are structural theories arguing that individuals’ emotions are directly affected by their position in wider social structure (Simon, 2020). The higher the individuals’ position in the social hierarchy is, the more likely they are to experience ‘positive’ emotions (Kemper, 1978). Applied to differentiated emotional experiences between women and men, structural theories about emotions argue that “gender differences in negative and positive feelings reflect gender differences in status and power in social interactions” in the sense that “women have a lower status in the

² <https://www.oxfordbibliographies.com/view/document/obo-9780199756384/obo-9780199756384-0018.xml>

workplace and family than men, and are therefore more likely than men to experience unjust social interactions in the family and workplace” (Simon, 2014, p. 200). Social structures of class and gender play a role in determining whose and what type of individual emotions should or shouldn’t be felt and expressed (Hochschild 1979).

A theoretical contribution of my research is to highlight the relational aspect of emotions and gendered differences in emotions. The focus given by the ‘doing gender’ theory on the interactional level does not fully allow for a comprehensive understanding of emotions and their relationality because the interactional level zooms in on actions, whilst emotions are more difficult to observe for the individuals themselves and the researchers. I argue that the relational level allows better understanding of how power dynamics between women and men takes place in the emotional sphere.

In the last two sub-sections, I revisited the scope of the main perspectives and theories used in the general literature on the division of domestic labour, and in the more specific literature on female breadwinning households. In the next sub-section, I propose the theoretical tool of the ‘marital contract’ as an intermediary between broader structures of inequality and individual agency to deepen the understanding of the gendered bargaining taking place in female breadwinning couples I interviewed.

C. Understanding the gendered bargaining and individuals’ agency as part of a marital contract

In this research, I propose the ‘marital contract’ as a theoretical tool enabling a more precise understanding of how the interactions between macro-, meso-, and micro-level phenomena play in my participants’ behaviours and their subjectivities about domestic labour.

Few 21st century empirical studies on the division of domestic labour have tried to develop theories that go beyond the individual resources vs. ‘doing gender’ performances of domestic labour. In her development of the concept of “marital power” within female breadwinners households she interviewed, Tichenor (2005a) argues that there is an “unwritten contract [...] that divide[s] responsibilities between spouses” while “reiforc[ing] men’s power within marriage”, which she calls “the conventional marital contract” (Tichenor, 2005a, pp. 12-13). In her quantitative analysis of United States heterosexual households and their division of domestic labour between 1987 and 2003, Vijayasiri (2011) argues that her findings “reveal the inadequacy of economic models and the gender display theory to account for men’s housework behaviour”, and therefore introduces “the marital contract hypothesis as an alternative theoretical framework” (Vijayasiri, 2011, p. 155). In order to pinpoint gender display taking place in the division of domestic labour, she takes into account “gender attitudes” and the “sex typicality of occupation” (Vijayasiri, 2011, p. 162) to examine the link between women’s and men’s gender deviance (or conformity) in paid labour and their time spent on housework. Overall, she finds no relationship between women’s and men’s gender deviance at work and their time spent on housework. Moreover, she finds a “limited influence” between men’s gender attitudes and time spent on housework “and a lack of association between a man’s relative earning and his housework behaviour”, leading her to argue that “irrespective of their gender beliefs, men are reluctant to give up their tangible privileges that accompany the current marital arrangement” (Vijayasiri, 2011, p. 173). She then hypothesizes that:

It is likely that, upon marriage, just as parties undertake certain legal obligations and rights, they undertake certain implicit obligations as to the apportionment of the production functions of a household. These implicit obligations possibly have the force of custom and the social control pressures of social norms. (Vijayasiri, 2011, p. 172)

These implicit obligations may all form an “implicit marital contract” which “dictates that the final obligation for maintenance of the household lies with the woman, while the man is primarily responsible for economic provision and decision-making”. (Vijayasiri, 2011, pp. 172).

Vijayasiri (2011)’s hypothesis of the “marital contract” strongly echoes Pateman’s (1988) domestic labour version of the sexual contract based on the idea of tacit obligations and roles underlying the heterosexual marriage and implementing broader structures of inequality and hierarchy between women and men (as presented in Chapter 1). Far from being a simple union between two free and equal individuals of the opposite sex, marriage and heterosexual cohabitation are based on an asymmetrical power at the expense of women and on women’s free labour in the household. In this sense, I propose the concept of the ‘marital contract’ as a tool “for analyzing institutionalized power relations” (Fraser, 1993, p. 178) between women and men. I argue that female breadwinning does not automatically lead to the disappearance of core elements of the traditional domestic labour contract identified by Pateman (1988) between women and men in a context of the hegemonical male breadwinner model. While taking into account structural changes in gender relations that have taken place since the 1980s, I highlight in this thesis a specific configuration of Pateman’s (1988) theory of the sexual contract applied to female breadwinning heterosexual households who reproduce structural inequality between women and men despite their non-traditional economic setting.

Using the ‘marital contract’ as an intermediary tool of analysis between the macro-level of gender as structure and the micro-level of women’s and men’s agency also allows better understanding of the scope of the concept of “marital power” (Blumber & Coleman, 1989; Tichenor, 2005a, 2005b) I presented earlier in this chapter. Marital power in female breadwinning households lies in a contract that remains framed by structural inequality and

hierarchy between women and men. That is ultimately why I call the bargain taking place ‘gendered’. While sociologists have generally used the theory of ‘doing gender’ to introduce the notion of individual agency and move away from structural and deterministic theories (S. N. Davis, 2017; West & Zimmerman, 1987), I argue that women’s and men’s agency is better understood when explicitly taking into account the structures they evolve in and which sometimes limit the quantity and quality of the options available to them.

To understand the division of domestic labour and subjectivities of the female breadwinning heterosexual couples I interviewed, it is necessary to look at the meso-level, the intermediary between gender as a structure and individual framed agency. I argue that the theoretical tool of the ‘marital contract’ provides a way to understand how inequality between women and men is reproduced in a female breadwinning context.

Conclusion

In this literature review chapter, I have presented and discussed the main theoretical and empirical findings on the division of domestic labour between women and men in general, and between female breadwinners and their male partners more specifically. I first presented explanatory factors, processes and theories that would predict female breadwinners’ lower or higher relative share of domestic labour compared both to their male partners and to women in other economic settings within their heterosexual households. I then highlighted two main topics of discussions in the empirical literature on female breadwinners: the question of whether they ‘do’ or ‘undo gender’, and the way female breadwinners’ and their partners’ subjectivities are intertwined with ideals of motherhood and fatherhood. I then discussed the limits of the economic and gender perspectives in the final section and proposed both an integration of these perspectives and

an original theoretical tool, the 'marital contract', to better understand my participants' gendered domestic labour bargain and subjectivities at the crossroads of gender as a structure of inequality, hierarchy, and individual agency.

Chapter 3. Research methodology: a qualitative account of domestic labour and the ways it is negotiated between women and men in a female breadwinning context

To answer my overarching research question, “How do women and men negotiate their division of domestic labour in female breadwinning households?”, I used qualitative research methods that enabled me to collect and analyse data on the various mechanisms and processes underpinning the daily life, power dynamics, and subjectivities of women and men in female breadwinning households. While quantitative methods are best suited to answer questions such as “How much domestic labour do women and men contribute in female breadwinning households?”, and to make empirical generalisations based on statistical findings, my aim was different. As Creswell and Creswell (2018) explain, “qualitative research is an approach for exploring and understanding the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem” (Creswell & Creswell, 2018, p. 3). Besides, Small (2009) argues that “how or why questions about processes unknown before the start of the study” are better answered by “a case study logic” rather than by a “sampling logic”, the latter being more efficient when it comes to answering “descriptive questions about a population” (Small, 2009, pp. 24-25). A case study logic seeks to uncover mechanisms and trace processes behind observed phenomena. In this research, I used an in-depth empirical case-study logic (Flyvbjerg, 2006) by paying attention to details and comparing individuals and couples, which helped me to discover and explain the similarities and differences between female breadwinning couples I interviewed. Inspired by the case study logic to move beyond quantitative sampling logic, my methods also included several types of qualitative insights and tools of recruitment for participants, data collection, and data analysis, as I show in the remainder of this chapter.

Whilst my choice to focus on the topic of the negotiation of domestic labour in female breadwinning couples was undeniably related to many academic puzzles that I have presented in Chapters 1 and 2, it was not entirely foreign to my own personal interests as a woman. My choice of topic, theoretical frameworks, and methods also built on insights from the now well-established feminist tradition of research in sociology. My research methods aimed at unveiling power dynamics between women and men. As Taylor (1998) writes, feminist research is about “mak[ing] women’s experiences visible [...] and us[ing] them to correct distortions from previous empirical research and theoretical assumptions that fail to recognise the centrality of gender to social life” (V. Taylor, 1998, p. 360). My choice of topic and my focus on inequality, power, and subjectivities within female breadwinning couples in this thesis stemmed from a willingness to show these women’s lives as they are and to name some of the challenges they face in the heterosexual household.

In this chapter, I provide details on my methods of recruitment and the characteristics of participants (section I below) before presenting my methods of data collection and data analysis (section II). Along the way, I write as explicitly as possible about my own reflexivity as a researcher, the various contributions, and limits of my methods, as well as how these limits might impact the scope of my findings.

I. Recruitment and characteristics of the participants

In this section, I present my strategies for recruitment (sub-section A below) and the demographic and socio-economic characteristics of the participants (sub-section B). The purpose of this section is to precisely situate the participants I interviewed and to contextualise their lives. I also discuss some methodological considerations regarding the

recruitment of participants: the decision to use a variety of entry points for recruitment and the inclusion of individual women whose partners did not take part in the research. Another contribution lies in the participants' diversity of age, parental status, educational attainment, and in the possibility of comparisons between different types of female breadwinning situations. I also point out the main methodological limits of this research by highlighting the problems I faced when looking for participants and some of the biases I fell into during the recruitment of participants. More precisely, the sub-section on the participants' demographic and socio-economic characteristics shows that my final sample is overall limited to specific kinds of female breadwinning women, which limits the scope of my findings as they tend to be biased towards a largely white and middle-class female breadwinning phenomenon.

A. Recruitment of the participants

1. Ethical considerations

I conducted the first couple of interviews in March and April 2017 in order to test my questions and the format of my interviews. I then carried out my fieldwork from November 2017 to July 2018.

I was allowed to recruit participants by the University of Oxford's Central University Research Ethics Council (CUREC). At each step of the process of recruitment, I had in mind several ethical challenges concerning the participants' consent and privacy. More specifically, I was informed by the literature on ethical challenges and considerations concerning qualitative research in social sciences (Israel & Hay, 2006). The main rationale I kept in mind all along in the conduct of this research can be summed up by the following sentence: "protecting others, minimizing harm and increasing the sum of good" (Israel &

Hay, 2006, p. 2). I considered that protecting my participants' intimacy, despite entering their households and asking personal questions about their lives, was a necessary condition to "ensure trust" and "research integrity" (Israel & Hay, 2006, pp. 3-5). For this reason, I complied with research ethical guidelines on several aspects of recruitment of participants. In my research advertisements, I was as transparent as possible on the topic and aim of my research, as well as on the nature of the participation I was looking for. When individuals demonstrated interest, I sent them an informed consent form and a document explaining further the aim of the research, how the data would be used, and how the interview would be carried out. I also told them that they could refuse to answer any of my questions without giving any justification. Regarding ethical issues of privacy, participants were informed that their names would be changed when quoted in this thesis to guarantee their anonymity, and that individual interviews would take place beyond earshot of each other, wherever the participant would feel safe to speak freely.

2. Strategies of recruitment

My strategies for recruitment followed to some extent a logic of purposive sampling (Battaglia, 2008). My intent to unveil mechanisms and processes, as well as describing subjective experiences, called for a theory-driven purposive sampling. This type of sampling is also called 'theoretical sampling', and refers to "sampling on the basis of concepts that have proven theoretical relevance to the evolving theory" (Corbin & Strauss, 1990, p. 176). This means previous empirical and theoretical research inform the recruitment process and the variety of female breadwinning contexts I was looking for. This method of recruitment follows the idea that "we sample social relations, not individuals" (Silverman, 2013, p. 146). The ultimate goal is to collect rich and diverse enough data to

propose theoretical generalisations about observed mechanisms and processes. I therefore targeted specific places and online groups to recruit a diversity of socio-economic and ethnic situations. For example, several online groups of professional and working women were specific to some occupations, such as engineers, nurses, lawyers, and teachers. Several online groups were also ethnicity-based and focused on black or Asian women or parents for example. This strategy however had limited results in terms of the diversity of the participants, as I show in the next sub-section. These results might partly come from my own position as a researcher who is white and from a (lower) middle-class background, and partly from my own difficulties in finding better ways of recruiting a wider diversity of participants within the prevailing material and time constraints. Academics have pointed out that both universities and individual researchers need to structurally adapt their research projects and methods in order to break with the tendency to recruit a majority of participants who are largely white and middle-class (Berger & Guidroz, 2010).

I decided to stop interviewing new participants when I considered that I had reached data saturation (Corbin & Strauss, 1990), considering the time, material, and personal constraints relating to my fieldwork. Data saturation is defined as the point “when no new categories or relevant themes are emerging” and when “the development of categories in terms of their properties and dimensions, including variation, and if theory building, the delineating of relationships between concepts” (Corbin & Strauss, 2008, p. 143) are, given the material conditions surrounding the research, reckoned advanced enough to provide strong contributions. Overall, I interviewed 26 couples and seven individual women who qualified as female breadwinners.

I used several entry points to advertise my research and recruit participants. My initial intent was to solely focus on female breadwinning couples in which men were involuntarily unemployed. I therefore leafleted and talked to people going in and out of various Job

Centres in Oxford and London. Almost all of the people I encountered were single men. This first phase was quite hard for me as a young foreign woman and as a researcher because I could not find anyone in the type of relationship I was looking for and I experienced sexual harassment – in the form of unwanted sexual advances – from some men. Although it is a personally sensitive experience to share, I have chosen to include it in this chapter to challenge some of the traditional views on qualitative research which argue that the power imbalance tends to benefit the(male) researcher at the expense of the participants (Råheim et al., 2016). As the feminist methodology literature has documented, such power imbalance does not apply to all situations, especially when concerning power dynamics between female researchers and male participants. Lee (1997) writes about her own experiences of sexual harassment from male interviewees, and argues that there are “gendered interview dynamics” that point to an “interviewer vulnerability” (D. Lee, 1997, p. 553). There is a “possibility for trouble” (D. Lee, 1997, p. 555) that academia has historically overlooked and which is specific to the female researcher/male interviewee situation that reflects general power dynamics between women and men. Although my experience did not take place in the context of an interview nor did it come from a participant, it did take place when, as a researcher, I went in the field to recruit participants and interact with (predominantly) male strangers who were older than me. The apparent class- and status-based imbalances between me, a PhD researcher at the University of Oxford (as specified in the leaflet I gave them and in the way I approached them), and some of those unemployed men did not protect me, and I had to deal emotionally with these experiences later on.

Following these experiences, an employee in one of the Job centres in London advised me to contact the M3 Job Club in Basingstoke, a community-based work club providing a space for and advice to unemployed people in the city. The organisers of the club were friendly

and let me come to one of their sessions to present my research and talk to the participants, which enabled me to interview one couple. I also advertised my call for volunteers in targeted places in Oxford and London by putting posters in public boards and spaces in nurseries, community centres, children's groups, and streets around Job Centres. The most efficient strategies of recruitment were however online. When I decided in January 2018 to extend my research to dual-earner female breadwinning couples, I advertised my call for volunteers in targeted forums and in about 50 Facebook groups (especially community groups); groups for professional women, parentings groups, groups for unemployed men, all in specific local areas across the United Kingdom (from Brighton to Glasgow). These groups usually gathered thousands of members, and their administrators were often welcoming and open to let me post my call for volunteers. Lastly, another recruitment strategy I used was based on contacts I got from either people I knew as individuals or whom I interviewed – following the logic of snowball sampling (Battaglia, 2008).

Almost all my interviews occurred because women in female breadwinning couples contacted me, were enthusiastic about the research, and were willing to organise the interview and to sometimes convince their partners to take part. The centrality of women's proactivity for taking part could be explained by several reasons. First, the topic itself and the way I advertised it (see Appendix 1), "this research aims at showing how female breadwinners organise their daily activities and work-life balance", may be more likely to interest women, since challenges concerning the right work-life balance is a contemporary challenge in many women's lives. Moreover, women may have recognised themselves relatively more than men in the way I phrased the criteria for participation: "currently involved in a long-term heterosexual relationship where women earn more than their male partners". Overall, women discuss their 'private life' more easily than men, especially those who were unemployed or earning relatively less than their female partners. What goes on

in the household and how it is organised is also a “value-loaded issue” (Purcell, 1996) that men can be more reluctant than women to discuss with a stranger. Generally, “the privacy of the home [...] is often perceived as the woman’s domain”, while “men are more comfortable talking about non-personal issues such as work or leisure” (Mackereth & Milner, 2009, p. 24). Mackereth and Milner (2009) also argue that most of the research on men focuses on men in the public domain, and more precisely in work partly because men, especially those on low incomes and unemployed, are more difficult to recruit for research on private life. The title of their article, “He’ll not talk to anyone”, echoes what several of the seven individual women I interviewed on their own told me to explain why their partners were not taking part. I have also faced problems similar to those MacKereth and Milner (2009) describe, especially when I was solely looking for unemployed men in female breadwinning situations and while interviewing men from lower socio-economic categories.

A second reason that may explain the importance of women in achieving the interviews is my own position as a female researcher. This factor might have influenced the degree to which women and men were willing to trust me and talk to me about their family life. This phenomenon has been documented by a part of the literature on qualitative research that brings to the table a whole range of considerations including the non-neutrality of the researcher as an individual embodied in wider structures based on sex, race, and economic class (Mackereth & Milner, 2009; Riessman, 1987; Williams & Heikes, 1993). Such lack of neutrality influences the rapport between the researcher and the interviewee, who is herself or himself embodied in those wider structures, and therefore shapes the qualitative processes of recruitment and data collection. MacKereth and Milner (2009) argue that one reason that might explain the non-participation of men on low incomes in their study “may be that the researcher was a female professional worker and therefore very different in many

aspects to the male interviewees” (Mackereth & Milner, 2009, p. 26). It is however difficult to conclude to general certitudes based on this knowledge. The main insight I draw from this literature is that it is likely that, as a white French female researcher under 25 at the time of the fieldwork, my research from recruitment to data collection went in different directions – at least on some aspects – than it had been carried out, for example, by an older black British female researcher or by a white British male researcher.

Thirdly, it seems that women were in general more aware of being part of a group of ‘female breadwinners’, contrary to men who rarely expressed feelings of belonging to a group of ‘unemployed men’, or ‘partners of female breadwinners’, or ‘stay-at-home dads’ (although the men who were stay-at-home dads more easily identified as such, but they were not systematically in touch with other men in this position). This was especially visible in the intent behind their participation several female participants made explicit during their individual interviews. For example, Zarifah (main breadwinner) concluded the individual interview by stressing the importance “to talk about female breadwinners, especially for those who feel isolated in that position and do not have anybody to talk to”.

As I wrote earlier in this sub-section, it seemed particularly important and valuable in terms of the research contribution to include female breadwinners who could not participate with their male partner but wanted to take part in the research individually. Out of seven individual women, four of them had mentioned the study to their male partner, but the latter either refused or simply forgot to confirm their answer. Three individual women said that they did not even mention the study to their male partner since domestic labour was a contentious topic in their relationship. Individual women’s interviews added several interesting elements which raised issues of social desirability bias (Babbie, 1983) in the

joint interviews. Initially coming from the literature on surveys, the concept of social desirability bias highlights the conscious and unconscious tendency of participants to focus on sounding “nicer, richer, and more desirable to the researcher” (Williams & Heikes, 1993, p. 285). This is particularly relevant in qualitative face-to-face interview because participants “usually have an interest in the topic or some kind of stake in the outcome of the study” (Williams & Heikes, 1993, p. 285). In my research, I found that several women I interviewed on their own were more likely to face greater domestic labour inequality at home and to talk explicitly about the problems and difficulties in their relationship. Also, some of the participants who took part as a couple seemed to have been interested in my research partly because they considered, in their own words, that female breadwinning was an economic setting that is was working for them – as individuals and as a family – and that they were more egalitarian than other households. I was open to interviewing individual men in female breadwinning situations, and I advertised this research in men’s groups, but no man contacted me (compared to 20 women who did so).

B. Demographic and socio-economic characteristics of the participants

In this sub-section, I present some descriptive demographic and socio-economic characteristics of the participants. I focus on characteristics which are usually considered in sociology to be important influences and contexts in understanding family life, division of domestic labour, and subjectivities: age, ethnicity, parental status (number and age of children), socio-economic category, relative income, educational attainment, and time constraints related to paid work hours.

Before going into detail about these characteristics, I show the geographical coverage of my research in Table 3.1 below:

Table 3.1 : Geographical locations of participants

PLACES WHERE PARTICIPANTS LIVED AT THE TIME OF THE INTERVIEWS

PLACES WHERE PARTICIPANTS LIVED AT THE TIME OF THE INTERVIEWS	NUMBER OF PARTICIPANTS
ENGLAND	
GREATER LONDON	9 couples + 4 individual women
SOUTH EAST	6 couples + 1 individual woman
SOUTH WEST	2 couples
WEST MIDLANDS	1 couple
YORKSHIRE	1 couple
NORTH WEST	4 couples + 1 individual woman
NORTH EAST	1 couple
WALES	1 couple + 1 individual woman
SCOTLAND	1 couple

When considering the geographical locations of the participants, a limitation of my research concerning households in the United Kingdom is that almost all of them lived in England. Moreover, more than a third of couples (10 out of 26) and five out of seven individual women I interviewed were based in London. This thesis therefore cannot account for sub-national differences of cultural and geographical contexts (Walthery, 2012). However, the participants still lived in a diversity places, such as big cities, average and smaller cities, and country towns and places. Within England, I covered an important part of the territory from South to North and from West to East.

In the following paragraphs, I present several tables which illustrate the various demographic and socio-economic characteristics of the participants. In some tables, I decided to include a specific line or mention for unemployed men to highlight their context. Out of 26 couples, 12 were sole female breadwinners, i.e. the man was unemployed and was either involuntarily out of the labour market and looking for a job, or a stay-at-home father (and sometimes a mix of both). Including individual women who took part without their partners, the share of women's income in the total household income was 55% to 65%

in eight couples, 65% and 85% in 11 couples, and 85% and 100% in 14 couples. Although the influence of absolute income on the division of domestic labour has been emphasised in the literature (Gupta, 2006, 2007), I did not collect data on this matter because of its known sensitivity.

For better transparency, I have also decided to put separate tables for female breadwinners whom I interviewed individually, without any sort of participation from their partners. The data on men in these cases come from women's answers. For each characteristic, I also discuss how participants were dividing domestic labour. As I discuss further in Chapter 4, participants I interviewed fell into three categories: those who implemented a more or less equal division of domestic labour (10 couples, called Group A in the remainder of the thesis), those where women were doing 56% to 65% of the total household labour (11 couples, called Group B), and those where women were doing more than 65% of the total household labour (9 couples, called Group C).

Out of the 26 couples and seven individual women I interviewed, only five couples were cohabiting but not married. I did not make systematic comparisons based on relationship status in my data analysis and this element was not a core factor of research and recruitment.

→ Age of the participants

Tables 3.2a and 3.2b present participants who took part in the study as a couple (Table 3.2a) and as individuals (Table 3.2b) according to their age in three categories: 18 to 34, 35 to 44 and over 45 years old. The mean age of women was 39, ranging from 23 to 66, and the mean for men is 41, ranging from 24 to 58. In most couples, men were one or more years older than women, but there were also several couples who were the same age and a few in which women were older than men. Overall, the majority of the participants fell in the 35-44 years old category.

Table 3.2a: Age of participants who took part as a couple

	Age		
	18-34	35-44	45+
Women	9	11	6
Men	7	20	11

Table 3.2b: Age of individual women and their partner who did not take part

	Age		
	18-34	35-44	45+
Women	2	4	1
Men	0	5	2

The age of the participants is especially important to take into account when considering the impact of generational differences and life-cycle on the division of domestic labour (Nitsche & Grunow, 2016; Rexroat & Shehan, 1987). In my research, participants in Group C who tended to be older than participants in Groups A and B. However, it is important to note that several participants in the Group A were older than 45. Participants in Group B were on average younger those in Group A.

→ Ethnicity of the participants

Table 3.3a and 3.3b present the participants according to their ethnicity as defined and categorised by the national Census³. Almost all participants were white, with the exception of four women and two men who were in a mixed relationship, since they partnered with a white man/woman. In total, there were six mixed couples out of 33.

³<https://www.ethnicity-facts-figures.service.gov.uk/uk-population-by-ethnicity/national-and-regional-populations/population-of-england-and-wales/latest#by-ethnicity>

Table 3.3a : Self-defined ethnicity of participants who took part as a couple

	Self-defined ethnicity		
	White	Mixed	Asian/Asian British
Women	22 Including: 11 British 7 English 1 Scottish 1 Welsh 1 Australian 1 other European Union	2 Including: 1 White and Black Caribbean 1 Bangladeshi and Asian	2 Including: 1 Asian British (Indian) 1 Indian
Men	25 Including: 10 British 10 English 2 Australian 2 other European Union 1 Scottish	1 Including: 1 Australian and Chinese	0

Table 3.3b: Self-defined ethnicity of individual women and their partners who did not take part

	Self-defined ethnicity	
	White	Black/Black British
Women	7 Including: 1 Irish 1 English 4 British 1 Scottish	0
Men	6 Including: 1 Irish 1 other European Union 4 British	1 Including: 1 Black African

Although the influence of ethnicity on family life and on the division of domestic labour has traditionally been made more explicit in research in the United States (Sayer & Fine, 2011; Wight et al., 2013), there have been recent findings confirming the influence of this ‘variable’ in the United Kingdom (Kan & Laurie, 2018). Wight et al. (2013) find that in the United States, relative resources have “an explanatory power for White women’s housework time but are weak predictors for women of Other race/ethnicities” (Wight et al., 2013, p. 394). Given the predominantly white composition of my final sample, the absence of ‘ethnic minority’ couples, and the presence of only a few mixed couples, the findings presented in this research do not derive from systematic ethnicity-based comparisons and are limited in scope. Regarding the six individuals from an ‘ethnic minority background’, their individual interviews did make some references to the importance of their cultural background. I included these references in my findings whenever relevant.

➔ Parental status of the participants

Overall, the vast majority of participants are parents of children or teenagers living at home. Most couples who did not have children at the time of the interview were between 23 and 34 years old. Two households were made up of individuals in their second marriage who had children from previous marriage, and in both cases the children were adults. In the tables below, I focus on the number (Tables 3.4a and 3.4b) and age of children (Tables 3.5a and 3.5b) couples had together.

Table 3.4a: Parental status of participants who took part as a couple, based on the number of children

Number of children	0	1	2	3 and more
Number of couples	7	7	9	3

Table 3.4b: Parental status of individual women and their partner who did not take part, based on the number of children

Number of children	0	1	2
Number of couples	1	4	2

Table 3.5a: Parental status of participants who took part as a couple, based on children's age, based on the age of children

Age of children	5 and under	6 to 11	12 to 18	19+
Number of couples	8	6	2	4

Table 3.5b: Parental status of individual women and their partner who did not take part, based on age of children

Age of children	5 and under	6 to 11
Number of couples	5	3

In my research, some participants in Group C did not have children while some participants in Group A had three or more children. Couples with the youngest children were more often found in Group B.

I came across a diversity of situations when considering the age of children. This is important, since it may influence the way women and men negotiated their division of domestic labour in a context in which the younger children are, the more time on domestic labour women tend to spend (Zabel & Heintz-Martin, 2013). Most participants who had children together had children under 11.

➔ Socio-economic category of the participants

The socio-economic situations of couples provides very important contexts and cultural frameworks in which the division of domestic labour takes place and how women and men perceive and discuss it (Legerski & Cornwall, 2010; Miller & Carlson, 2016; Press &

Townsley, 1998). For this reason, my initial intent was to recruit participants in a diversity of socio-economic situations in order to avoid solely focusing on middle-class female breadwinning couples. Using the Office for National Statistics' National Statistics Socio-Economic Classification (NS-SEC), and its online coding tool⁴ with the data collected from participants' answers to specific questions on their job, Tables 3.6a and 3.6b present the participants' socio-economic category. Regarding unemployed men, I decided to follow the criteria of the NS-SEC classification by taking into account their previous job. Only a minority of participants were in routine and manual occupations (which I call NS-SEC 3 in the remainder of the thesis), which limited the possibility of systematic, reliable comparisons based on socio-economic background. This element therefore tends to limit the scope of my findings to mainly lower- and upper- middle-class female breadwinning couples.

Women in NS-SEC 1 included, for example, a barrister, managing director, dentist, head of human resources, and senior lecturer. Women in NS-SEC 2 included a translator, specialist nurse, and teachers, and the woman in NS-SEC 3 was a pharmacy assistant. Men in NS-SEC 1 were, for example, a business analyst, army officer, team leader, and account manager. Men in NS-SEC 2 were, for example, a freelance musician, security manager, manager in local council, and clinical assistant, and those in NS-SEC 3 were, for example, a postman, bar tender, and a banking assistant.

⁴https://onsdigital.github.io/dp-classification-tools/standard-occupational-classification/ONS_NSSEC_discovery_tool.html?soc=2426

Table 3.6a: Socio-economic category of participants who took part as a couple

	Socio-economic category			
	Higher managerial, administrative and professional occupations NS-SEC 1	Intermediate occupations NE-SEC 2	Routine and manual occupations NS-SEC 3	Other
Women (26)	14	10	1	1 (funded) PhD student
Men (26 – including 12 who were unemployed at the time of the interview)	5 (4 unemployed)	15 (5 unemployed)	5 (2 unemployed)	1 former student (unemployed)

Table 3.6b: Socio-economic category of individual women and their partner who did not take part

	Socio-economic category		
	Higher, managerial, administrative, and professional occupations	Intermediate occupations	Routine and manual occupations
Women	4	3	0
Men	1	5	1

In total, 14 couples were in the same NS-SEC category, and 19 couples were in a different NS-SEC category, including five cases of where one individual (usually the woman) in NS-SEC 1 was partnered with an individual in NS-SEC 3. Women and men in Group A were more often in different NS-SEC categories than women and men in Groups B and C. Participants in Group C were more often in the same NS-SEC, and women in this group were more often in NS-SEC than women in Groups A and B.

→ Educational attainment of the participants

Educational attainment also plays out as an important ‘variable’ and context in which the division of domestic labour takes place, especially in the case of childcare (O. Sullivan & Gershuny, 2016). Tables 3.7a and 3.7b present participants according to their educational attainment shows. Almost all women had at least an undergraduate degree, and a majority of them had a postgraduate degree. On the contrary, almost none of the men continued their studies past the undergraduate degree level, and an important number of them did not go into higher education.

Table 3.7a: Educational attainment of participants who took part as a couple

	Educational attainment		
	A-level or less	Undergraduate degree	Postgraduate degree
Women	2	9 (including one currently studying for postgraduate degree)	15
Men	11	11	4

Table 3.7b: Educational attainment of individual women and their partner who did not take part

	Educational attainment		
	A-level or less	Undergraduate degree	Postgraduate degree
Women	1	2	4
Men	4	2	1

Women and men had reached the same educational attainment in 10 households, while they had different levels of educational attainment in 23 household. In seven households, one individual (usually the woman) had at least a postgraduate degree and was partnered with an individual who had A-levels at most. Women and men in Group C had similar educational attainment more often than those in Groups A and B, and women in this group

had more often an undergraduate degree at most compared to women in other groups. Women and men in Group A had different educational attainments more often than those in Groups B and C, and men in this group more often had A-levels at most compared to men in other groups. Women and men in Group B were more often highly educated than those in Groups A and C.

➔ Paid work hours of the participants

Differences in educational attainment and NS-SEC category between women and men was to a great extent translated in important differences of time constraints related to paid work hours between women and men. I understand time constraints as the number of hours a week spent on the job, including hours at work and work from home. As I discussed in Chapter 2, such time constraints are particularly important to take into account (Shelton 1992; van der Lippe & Siegers, 1994; van der Lippe et al. 2018) when studying the division of domestic labour.

Restricting time constraints to the number of hours at work does not account for all hours spent on the job, and therefore does not show a comprehensive picture of the participants' actual availability for domestic labour or leisure time. Commuting hours would have been interesting to add, but I did not systematically collect data on this matter. On average, female participants spent 43 hours per week on their job, against 32 hours per week for men who are working in the labour market – 17 hours per week when including unemployed men. Women therefore spent on average 10 more hours a week on their paid work than men in paid work, and the gap was even wider in couples where men were unemployed – most of them reported spending a few hours a week looking for a job (but I did not systematically collect precise data on this matter). Tables 3.8a and 3.8b presents the number of paid work hours of the participants.

Table 3.8a: Paid work hours of participants taking part as a couple

	Number of hours spent on the job per week, including working hours and work from home				
	0 (unemployment)	10 to 30	31 to 37.5	38 to 49	50+
Women	0	2	5	7	12
Men	12	4	6	3	1

Table 3.8b: Paid work hours of individual women and their partner who did not take part in the research

	Number of hours spent on the job per week, including working hours and work from home				
	0	10 to 30	31 to 37.5	38 to 49	50+
Women	0	2	0	2	3
Men	0	2	2	3	0

Overall, when I compare women's paid work hours and their relative contribution to domestic labour, I find that women in Groups B and C tend to have fewer paid work hours than women in Group A. On the other hand, men in Group A tend to have more paid work hours than men in Group C.

The gap between women's and men's paid working hours is much bigger in Group A group than in Group B. Out of 12 sole female breadwinning couples, six were in Group A (out of 10 couples in this group), four were in Group B (out of 11), and two in Group C (out of 9).

Overall, despite the variations of characteristics of participants and female breadwinning contexts presented in this sub-section, the scope of my findings are limited to a mainly

English, white and middle-class female breadwinning phenomenon. It is based on the awareness of these limits that I present my findings in the remainder of the thesis.

II. Data collection and data analysis

In this section, I present my methods of data collection and data analysis. The purpose of this section is to give transparency on the interplay between facts, data, findings, and theory. I also argue that in this regard, the main methodological contributions of this research are: an original combination of methodological tools of data collection, enhanced reliability and validity of the data and findings with triangulation, and a combination of methods of data analysis based on a twofold unit of analysis (couple and individual). I also indicate the main methodological limits and issues I faced in this research, highlighting the non-neutrality of the interview setting and some of the individual challenges I went through during data collection and data analysis.

A. Data collection

The core of this research was based on qualitative interviews, but I also added two methodological tools that are unusual compared to standard interviews based on questions and themes. Although this research aimed at grasping the subjective side of the domestic division of labour, it also acknowledged the importance of identifying the more material and ‘objective’ division of labour taking place in households. I therefore adapted my tools of data collection, and took inspiration from a variety of data collection methods.

My choices of data collection tools took into account the material constraints surrounding the process of data collection. For example, although one of my inspirations was methods of time-use studies based on detailed daily diaries, I also wanted to avoid heavy procedures

by asking too much from the participants given that they would already be committing some of their time to face-to-face interviews.

The procedure I followed to collect data for this research was based on three main steps:

1. Firstly, I conducted joint interviews with the couples (see Appendix 2 for a transcript). In addition to researching women's and men's subjectivities in a non-traditional economic setting, the main argument behind the choice of including both women and men in the search and interviewing them jointly as well as individually was that the division of domestic labour is a daily process involving both women and men. A couple is not a mere sum of two separate individuals, but rather a specific configuration with its own dynamics and a strong element of relationality in the way women and men influence each other's actions and feelings on a daily basis. Women's agency and range of choices of domestic labour are therefore strongly influenced by men's behaviours and choices on this matter.

The joint interview began using the "Household Portrait" technique (Doucet, 1996) with both members of the couples – or with the woman when she was participating without her partner. This method was designed to elicit detail on couples' domestic division of labour, and involves them completing a table on a large sheet of paper, made up of five columns, with a list of tasks written on post-it notes which the participants jointly used to represent their division of domestic labour (see Appendix 3 for an example of completed Household Portrait). The five columns included the possibility of equal sharing, delegation, and help in various domestic tasks with the following format: 1) only the woman, 2) mainly the woman with the man helping, 3) share equally, 4) mainly the man with the woman helping, and 5) only the man. Prior to the interview, I adapted each Household Portrait to the participants by replacing the words 'woman' and 'man' with their names. The joint interviews ended with a few more general questions about domestic labour, how it is

negotiated and organised, and participants' satisfaction (see Appendix 5 for examples of questions and general interview protocol). These interviews lasted between 10 to 65 minutes, with an average duration of 28 minutes. While there was only a few short comments during the completion of the Household Portrait in the 10-minute joint interview, the longest joint interview was characterised by active discussions and debates about the Household Portrait and domestic labour between the woman and the man.

As Doucet (1996, 2001, 2006, 2015) argues, the Household Portrait provides data on several dimensions such as the division of domestic labour between women and men and the type of tasks they do – giving a visual understanding for both the researcher and the participants – as well as interactions, disagreements and negotiations between women and men while completing the Household Portrait. This tool of data collection is particularly dependent on the list of tasks made available by the researcher. My choices for including tasks of domestic labour were based on previous studies (Coltrane, 1989a; Doucet, 2001) and on their relevance for my research. The Household Portrait also gave flexibility to the participants, since they could add or remove tasks to fit their own context. During the completion of the Household Portrait, my main role as a researcher was to observe and sometimes give further explanations about the task themselves or the way to complete the Household Portrait. I sometimes asked participants to further explain what they meant when they commented on specific tasks or made references that I could not fully understand as an outsider to their household. In a few cases, I also regulated some of the tensions and disagreements that emerged between the participants by asking for further explanations.

2. Secondly, I continued the data collection with individual in-depth interviews with each member of the couple – or carried on the conversation with the woman who took part on her own. Interviews were voice-recorded with the participants' informed consent. The

interviews lasted between 22 and 82 minutes, with an average duration of 56 minutes – 61 minutes for women and 50 minutes for men (see Appendix 4 for a transcript).

Although I had already identified the broad topics of discussion and the open-ended questions I wanted to address, my goal was to make the interview take the form of a conversation with a purpose (Oakley, 1981). In addition to questions on demographic and socio-economic characteristics, the broad topics of discussion I had in mind were the following (see Appendix 5 for the interview protocol I used):

- Further questions on the Household Portrait and general division of domestic labour and its evolution
- General and descriptive questions about the socio-economic characteristics of the participants
- Family history
- Work history, current job (or unemployment for unemployed men) and daily life
- Relationship with the partner
- Social life and activities,
- Gender ideology
- Plans for the future

These broad topics helped me and the participants to frame the discussions. I also added a set of open-ended questions for each of these topics in my interview protocol. I often had to ask at least some explicit questions but, in many cases, the participants' answers spontaneously covered several of my questions at a time, so I did not always have to ask every question. These broad topics then informed my process of data analysis.

Regarding the format and configuration of the interviews, I took the decision to mix joint and individual interviews, drawing on insights from the literature. The interview configuration chosen by the research greatly depends on how researchers conceptualise the family and the couple. Historically, sociologists of the family have approached the family as a unitary whole, and therefore used to interview only one member of couples (usually the man) (Ferree, 1991). Later, feminist scholars raised concerns over this type of interview configuration, which ignored women's voices, and argued for separate individual interviews (Ferree, 1991; Oakley, 1981). I therefore conducted separate individual interviews with each member of the couple, beyond earshot of each other, to give space to discordant stories and experiences. Such a configuration could help individuals, especially those who were living difficult experiences, to disclose important information. The individual interviews always started with questions on the Household Portrait and the division of domestic labour in order to give the participants the possibility of nuancing or changing the what they said during the joint interviews – which many participants did, especially women.

Interviews, especially when semi-structured and open-ended, are the most effective qualitative methods to access individuals' subjectivities. They provide the opportunity to hear the rich and complex stories of the participants, without imposing the researcher's own prejudices or theoretical framework (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Silverman, 2013). As Way (1997) argues, that the "semistructured approach to interviewing explicitly acknowledges the interviewer's agenda (e.g., to understand a particular phenomenon or topic from the participants' perspective) and the participant's agency or power (e.g., to introduce important new knowledge that the interviewer had not anticipated)" (Way, 1997, p. 706). However, interviews also raise several challenges that need to be made explicit in order to make a transparent account of my data collection. Indeed, qualitative researchers

have long pointed out the non-neutrality of the interview setting as well as the power dynamics at play. In an article comparing two case studies on male nurses – one carried out by a male interviewer and one carried out by a female interviewer – Williams and Heikes (1993) highlight “the importance of the researcher’s gender in the in-depth interview” and state that there were some differences based on the interviewer’s sex in the way interviewees would phrase or express a similar content in their answers. “The process of constructing a shared understanding during the interview is itself gendered” (Williams & Heikes, 1993, p. 289) argue the authors, although it may sometimes be difficult to clearly determine in which direction the gendered dimension of the interview goes. Indeed, while there are indications that male researchers might create a better rapport with male interviewees on some topics (Mackereth & Milner, 2009), there are also indications of male interviewees’ greater openness to discuss their emotions and express some personal difficulties with a female researcher than with a male researcher. Moreover, “gender is not enough” to create a shared understanding as Riessman (1987) points out in the case of women interviewing women from different ethnic and national backgrounds. Based on two interviews about marriage and separation with one ‘Anglo’ woman and one Puerto Rican woman, Riessman (1987) notes that as an academic ‘Anglo’ woman” herself, she was in a better position to understand the cultural cues of the ‘Anglo’ woman than those of the Puerto Rican woman. She concludes that “the joint construction of an account of marital failure was hindered by the lack of shared cultural and class assumptions” (Riessman, 1987, p. 190).

I faced similar obstacles while interviewing some men who seemed reluctant to answer my questions or to go deeper than a one-word or one-sentence answer. However, some men acknowledged at the end of the interview that although they were initially reluctant to answer my questions, they were surprised to have disclosed so much. Peter (partner of sole

breadwinner) ended the interview by saying: “I’m surprised of how willing I’ve been to share with you, stuff which maybe I wouldn’t share with some of my closest friends”. Overall, a general bond of trust and understanding seemed to come more easily with women, although some of them expressed their discomfort in specific ways, such as initially insisting on depicting a very positive picture of their dynamics with their partners while sometimes nuancing or contradicting their arguments later on. In a contrasting example, at the end of the individual interview, Prisha (sole breadwinner) insisted that even though she had disclosed some of her difficulties with her partner she considered herself to be “very lucky” to have such an “understanding partner”. Another woman, Susan (main breadwinner), said during the interview that she wanted to divorce, but she was scared of leaving her husband because of his previous misconducts with a former female partner, but then ended the interview by emphasising how much she loved him.

3. Finally, all participants were asked to complete an individual two-day time schedule – for housework, childcare, and emotional labour inspired from time-diaries used by the *United Kingdom Time Use Survey, 2014-2015* (Gershuny & Sullivan, 2017) (see Appendix 6 for the time-diary I used in this research). Out of 26 couples plus seven individual women, two couples and one individual woman did not complete this schedule. Participants who took part as a couple received one schedule each and women who individually took part were asked to provide an estimate of their partner’s daily activities in addition their own schedule. Such a tool provided data on time spent on domestic labour over two days while avoiding the bias of questionnaire estimates based on recall (Kan, 2008b). This schedule was made understandable to participants through some explanations at the end of the interviews, aided by the fact that all participants had just completed the Household Portrait with me beforehand. The idea was that they would have in mind the content of the tasks implied by these notions while completing the schedule on their own. Moreover, it was

important to include this tool since the Household Portrait did not provide data on the time women and men spend on completing tasks of domestic labour. Such data were relevant for the research, in order to get a more comprehensive picture of the couples' division of domestic labour.

An important contribution of this combination of methodological tools lied in the possibility of triangulation between the two-day time schedules, the Household Portraits, and the interviews. The comparison of these methods provided a richer understanding of the division of domestic labour, both improving the validity of the information used, and yielding important methodological insights into the comparative value of these methods. The opportunity to compare women's answers with those of their male partner provided unique insights into their subjectivities and the power dynamics taking place within the household.

B. Data analysis

I transcribed all the interviews. I also took notes of tone, reactions (such as laughter), and some non-verbal communication and interactions, such as “non-vocal bodily movements (e.g. hand gestures and gaze)” (Kowal & O’Connell, 2014, p. 67), especially during the joint interview and the completion of the Household Portrait, as well as during individual interviews with individuals (a few men) who were not very loquacious. I have anonymised the transcripts and changed participants' names in the thesis.

Given the theoretical framework underlying the research and the inclusion of a heuristic theoretical framework, my use of theory before the fieldwork was an important guide in both data collection and analysis. However, as Flick (2014) argues, all types of qualitative research need to find a “balance between formalization and intuition” (Flick, 2014, p. 12).

The theoretical framework can efficiently provide some research guidelines, but the data need to get the last say if they do not fit in the framework. I also allowed flexibility all along the research by refining or changing theoretical elements whenever necessary. For example, the first few interviews led me to add further emphasis and questions on the theme of emotion work and the mental load. From this perspective, although the main part of the data occurred after the data collection for convenience, these two steps were not entirely chronologically separated. I paid attention to checking similarities and differences between interviews as I went, as well as relevance and consistency of the sample and data collection. Such a strategy strongly enhanced chances of finding significant results and of providing valuable contributions.

The unit of analysis for this research was twofold: individuals when assessing subjectivities and coping strategies, and the couple as a whole when assessing the division of domestic labour. I first started the data analysis with each methodological tool – the Household Portrait, the two-day time schedules, and the interviews – and then moved on to a more general understanding combining the various insights brought from these tools and from the participants' interviews.

In my analysis, I made systematic comparisons between individuals and couples, which helped to discover and to explain the similarities and differences between the cases. The analysis of the Household Portraits followed four steps: analysis of individuals' Household Portraits, intra-couple comparison of Household Portraits to determine the type of tasks women and men do, inter-individual and inter-couple comparisons based on sex, socio-economic category, and other important contextual elements presented in the former section. Each step leading to a final analysis of the Household Portraits was contextualised

by an analysis of interactions and answers from individual interviews. The analysis of two-day time schedules followed similar steps: analysis of the individuals' two-day schedules, intra-couple comparison of the schedules, and inter-individual and inter-couple comparison based on sex, socio-economic category, and other important contextual elements.

In-depth interviews were analysed following the main elements of thematic analysis. The point was to identify key themes, which were then transformed into codes and aggregated in a codebook (Mihas, 2019) (see Appendix 7 for an excerpt of the codebook). A theme “captures something important about the data in relation to the research question and represents some level of patterned response or meaning within the data set” (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 82). I generated initial themes and codes that I then reviewed, analysed, and named. Such a method of data analysis involved producing and analysing – rather than just describing – coherent and distinctive themes and codes. In order to get a comprehensive analysis, codes and themes were both derived from theory and data, although a clear priority was given to data driven codes and themes if they contradicted theory driven codes and themes.

Because this research also captured subjectivities, my thematic analysis was also inspired by the “voice-centred relational method of data analysis” (Mauthner & Doucet, 1998) to identify individuals' narratives and accounts of their situation. Such a method of data analysis requires attention to the overall story told by the participant and makes explicit the researcher's position in the interview and analysis. It also involves spotlighting “the voice of the ‘I’”, i.e. “how the respondent experiences, feels and speaks about” himself/herself (Mauthner & Doucet, 1998, p. 10), as well as the participant's relationships. Finally, “cultural contexts and social structures” (Mauthner & Doucet, 1998, p. 14) in order to contextualise and situate participants. After identifying the main themes emerging from the interviews during the first reading of the transcripts, I did three more readings to analyse

the individuals' subjectivities, the specific contexts they evolved in, and my own subjectivity as an individual woman and a researcher.

Finally, I used inter-individual, intra-couple, and inter-couple comparative case studies to identify and explain similarities and differences, especially in terms of sex, socio-economic category, and other important contextual elements. During the data analysis and writing up of this thesis, process tracing techniques, based on the identification of causal mechanisms in the light of "hypothesised causal processes" (Bennet 2010, p. 180) helped me both to reach a more general level of understanding by making sense of the various pieces of evidence I gathered during the interviews, and to provide rich descriptions and details about a phenomenon.

During all steps of this research, from the data collection to the data analysis and the writing of the thesis, I have realised that I faced several challenges related to my position as a researcher and some of my own experiences of human interactions. For example, during the data collection I have sometimes felt guilty for taking the participants' time and energy without any obvious material return for them. This feeling sometimes took the form of the 'imposter syndrome' in that I sometimes did not feel legitimate as a researcher and as an individual to enter the participants' personal lives. The whole process sometimes felt too utilitarian as I could not enter into the gift/counter-gift dynamic – although several participants said that the interview felt like a "good therapy session" (Sophia, main breadwinner). I also had mixed feelings when my findings ended up being quite different from the way many participants presented themselves and their situation during the interviews. For example, many participants thought of themselves as having reached equality concerning domestic labour in their households, and had a gender-blind rhetoric of being in an equal 'team' made up of two individuals. However, most of the data tended to show another story. Nuancing, and sometimes going against, the participants' ideas of

themselves and their willingness to adopt egalitarian ideologies and attitudes was maybe one of the biggest challenges I faced in framing the main arguments of this thesis.

Conclusion

In this chapter detailing my qualitative methodology, I first presented my methods of recruitment as well as the demographic and socio-economic variety of the participants before providing details of the data collection and data analysis I implemented. Alongside necessary descriptive considerations, I provided elements of my own reflexivity as a researcher and some of the issues I faced as an individual, such as initial difficulties in recruiting, and psychological challenges when collecting and analysing the data. I have highlighted the various methodological contributions and limits of this research, both with the intention of being as transparent as possible about my research process and from a willingness to acknowledge the limits of my methods, as well as they way they impact on the scope of the findings presented in the remainder of the thesis.

Chapter 4. Women's and men's contribution to domestic labour in female breadwinning households: the gap between the reproduction of traditional gender roles and perceptions of equality

From a micro-perspective focusing both on households as primary units ensuring the reproduction of the family and on the individual women and men involved in the daily processes of this reproductive labour, the division of domestic labour has been described as a process of 'muddling through' (Kirchler, 1993; Mannino & Deutsch, 2007). This process involves series of negotiations in which women and men have unequal power (Komter, 1989; Tichenor, 2005a, 2005b) in determining their own load of unpaid work and in reaching a balance that is best for both the wellbeing of the family and themselves. The division of domestic labour is the result of these negotiations, but it is also the basis from which negotiations take place. Indeed, once couples have settled and created routines of domestic labour, the existing division of domestic labour frames negotiations about the division itself or about new tasks related to new family needs (as I show in more detail in Chapter 6). It is therefore relevant to start this chapter with an assessment of women's and men's contribution to domestic labour within the female breadwinning households. I interviewed participants jointly as a couple and separately as individual women and men, in order to better understand the mechanisms and processes of negotiating domestic labour, the analysis of which forms the bulk of the remainder of this thesis. This assessment of women's and men's contribution is also the first step towards understanding the marital contract under which their situation functions.

Since the 1990s, research on the division of domestic labour has largely been dominated by the question: why do couples divide their domestic labour in a certain way? As I discussed in the literature review in Chapter 2, this line of investigation led to various important findings and to the emergence of two main theoretical explanations that Sayer (2010) calls

the “economic perspective” and the “gender perspective” (Sayer, 2010, p. 21) . This chapter contributes to this debate by using a qualitative approach to explore how some resources such as time availability and relative income provide a frame within which female breadwinners and their partners negotiated their division of domestic labour. This approach echoes previous qualitative research on the division of domestic labour inspired by both sociological and psychological frameworks, and exemplified by Hochschild’s and Deutsch’s publications on this matter (Deutsch, 1999; Hochschild & Machung, 2012) which tends to bridge the gap between the economic and the gender perspectives.

Far from being mutually exclusive in their influences, socio-economic and demographic characteristics all provide a frame within which the division of domestic labour is negotiated. Persisting inequalities, or the “anomaly of equality” (van Hooff, 2011, p. 26) in heterosexual households, are also related to how women and men perceive domestic labour, such as their own or their partner’s contribution to domestic labour, the fairness of their arrangements (L. Thompson, 1991), the social desirability of equality and inequality (Press & Townsley, 1998; Squires, 2007), and their aspirations to equality based on deeply entrenched gender ideologies and attitudes (I discuss this literature in Chapter 2). These subjective phenomena all influence how women and men negotiate, and the outcomes they ultimately reach (Deutsch, 1999). Perceptions of the contributions of oneself or one’s partner’s contribution are particularly important when it comes to negotiating change, as I discuss further in Chapter 7. Indeed, if women and men who aspire to be equal perceive their division of domestic labour as being equal when it is not, negotiations for change are less likely to occur than if at least one of them perceives inequalities.

This chapter identifies a specific type of discourse, the ‘team’ rhetoric used by a majority of participants, as a basis on which some attitudes and limited aspirations of domestic labour equality are built. Research points to the fact that women’s and men’s unpaid work

is not equally perceived; there is an overall tendency to over-estimate men's contribution to domestic labour, especially among men themselves (Y.-S. Lee & Waite, 2005; Press & Townsley, 1998). Some findings I present in this chapter add to the literature on the perceptions of individual contributions to domestic labour by highlighting how several women and men I interviewed aspire to equality while also understanding 'equal sharing' as compatible with some inequalities of contributions to housework and childcare.

This chapter addresses the following question: how do women and men in female breadwinning households divide and perceive domestic labour? Based on data from both joint and individual interviews, I find that the participants generally reproduced traditional gender roles in the home whereby women were the primary unpaid workers in the household (section I below), but also tended to perceive the way they shared domestic labour as equal (section II).

I. The reproduction of traditional gender roles in the home: female breadwinners as primary unpaid workers in the household

As Héri-tier (1996) argues, domestic labour is traditionally associated with 'women's work' in most known human societies where women are accorded the responsibility for domestic labour and take on the role of main unpaid worker in the household. As I show in this section, this almost universal distribution of gender roles between women and men in the household was also found in female breadwinning couples, despite the fact that these women were also the main paid workers of their household and were therefore responsible for bringing home the majority of the household income. A non-traditional economic setting in which women have more economic power is therefore apparently not a sufficient condition to avoid traditional gender roles in the home (Oakley, 1974). My analysis of the

quantitative division of domestic labour, i.e. the time women and men spent on domestic labour on a daily basis, shows that women's contribution to domestic labour was higher than their male partners' and that only a minority of couples with specific socio-economic circumstances reach quantitative equality or a balance where men do slightly more (sub-section A below). Whilst in their individual interviews participants emphasised the role of women's and men's time availability in structuring their division of domestic labour, their differentiated use of time was an important element of this reproduction of traditional gender roles (sub-section B). Finally, the core elements of traditional gender roles within female breadwinning households were identified in women's and men's differentiated domestic labour tasks, which follow the traditional pattern of 'feminine' and 'masculine' activities as their Household Portraits show (sub-section C).

A. The quantitative division of domestic labour: women's higher relative contribution to domestic labour

Female breadwinning couples I interviewed in general tended to reproduce traditional gender roles, in which women were the main unpaid workers of the household. Indeed, when looking at what I call the 'quantitative' division of domestic labour, I find that women's share of domestic labour was overall higher than their male partners. In order to have some quantification of men's and women's involvement in chores and activities within the home, participants were given a two-day time schedule (see Appendix 6) to complete after their interviews. 24 out of 26 couples and 6 out of 7 individual women returned their two-day time schedules. Couples' quantitative division of labour is based on men's and women's self-assessment of the time they individually spent doing 'general housework and administration' and 'childcare' on the same day. The six two-day time schedules from individual women are based on women's self-assessment of their time spent

on doing these tasks as well as their own assessment of their male partners' contribution on the same day. When comparing the number of minutes spent on all housework and childcare, the data shows that, overall, female participants on average self-reported contributing 60% of the total number of minutes spent by the couple on all housework and childcare, in comparison with 40% for men.

A more detailed analysis of individual self-assessed contributions of women and men shows three main patterns in the quantitative division of domestic labour between women and men. The first group – called Group A in the remainder of this thesis – consists of 10 couples and comprises the group in which men contributed at least as much as women. In a few cases, men did more than women, but women on average reported contributing at least 40% of the total labour, which is more than many men interviewed in this research report, including some unemployed men. Overall, couples in this group have reached quantitative equality, i.e. the time spent on all housework and childcare was almost the same between women and men. The second group – called Group B – consists of 11 couples and comprises the group in which women's contribution was higher than men's – between 56% and 65% overall. The third group – called Group C – consists of 9 couples and comprises the group in which a large majority (65%) of the time spent in housework and childcare came from women, and some men's involvement in the household in terms of domestic labour was minimal.

Overall, women contributed more towards domestic labour even when some tasks of domestic labour were outsourced, the main strategy being the hiring of a cleaner. 15 couples (six in group A, five in group B, and four in group C) interviewed were hiring a cleaner at the time of the interview (for 1.7 hour per week on average), and only six couples never hired a cleaner and did not intend to (I further analyse the processes and outcomes behind the hiring of a cleaner in Chapter 6).

The diversity of the participants' socio-economic characteristics within and between patterns of division of domestic labour contributes to the debates concerning the question of which factors determine the division of labour that heterosexual couples implement, and the link between individuals' economic power and gender roles within the home (I discuss these debates in Chapter 2). There is no clear-cut socio-economic or demographic characteristic that can be observed from the data as being a predicting factor explaining why couples in Group A were more egalitarian than couples in Groups B and C. However, given that this research focuses on the mechanisms and processes underlying the division of domestic labour, the following discussion is not centred around correlations between variables but on describing how – in the participants' own view - some of these socio-economic characteristics play a role in shaping the context in which the division of domestic labour was negotiated.

Even though women I interviewed overall rarely mentioned their higher relative income in their attempts to change the division of domestic labour towards more equality, a few of them reported using this as an argument in specific cases of decision-making. When discussing the reasons why she suspected her partner would prefer to earn as much money as her, Isobel (main breadwinner) acknowledged a link between her higher relative income and the “power” and “authority” it gave her: “Obviously it gives me spending power, and it gives me some decision-making authority in some ways which he [her partner] doesn't really like”. In rare occasions, women's higher relative income influenced the way some couples make decisions in cases of disagreements and arguments about the division of domestic labour. Buying domestic furniture is one of such area, as Laila (main breadwinner) explained:

When we have an argument about something I will quite often say, 'cause sometimes I ask him to do something, like when we need a new bed, I say how much it'll cost, say I'll save some money aside for it and ask him to source some

mattresses. And he didn't do it and I sometimes say: "look, if I'm paying for it, can't you look for it? Isn't that a fair split?" and he will feel defensive and say: "oh yes, I know you pay for everything!" and then he walks away.

In this case, Laila's higher relative income was presented as a means through which she can achieve "a fair split" by involving her partner in searching for a bed. Her partner, Graham, confirmed by saying that:

Sometimes I feel it always comes down to money and sometimes I don't have the choices I would have because I'm not paying for it, she pays for it and if we have an argument about anything, she's like "I pay for everything so what are you gonna do?"

The influence women's higher relative income had on the way couples divide domestic labour sometimes increased women's power in the negotiation, especially in the case of disagreements and arguments wherein women tried to increase their partners' involvement in a task. However, women I interviewed rarely mentioned explicitly using their higher relative income as an argument in the negotiation of domestic labour and decision-making.

This influence of relative income on its own did not seem to go beyond giving women I interviewed some power in some negotiations because women's higher relative income on its own did not directly map onto quantitative equality. A particularly large gap between women's and men's incomes was indeed more common in Group A, where women in dual-earner female breadwinning couples earned on average 75% of the total household income, and where six couples were sole female breadwinning couples. However, half of the sole female breadwinner couples I interviewed are found in Groups B and C, together with several main female breadwinning couples where women earned at least 75% of the total household income. It seems that other factors beyond relative income must have been present to make a difference in the negotiation. My analysis of the three groups of couples demonstrates that what I call women's relative socio-economic position – based on relative earnings, socio-economic category, and educational attainment, compared to their male partners – played an important role in the way women and men decided who would

specialise in the labour market or the household, partly confirming the rationality argument advanced by Becker (1981). Indeed, an analysis of the couples who were in Group A, shows that they tended to have the biggest differences – to the advantage of women – between women’s and men’s socio-economic category and educational attainment. Women’s absolute income was presented by several sole female breadwinner households as a crucial element that gave them the opportunity to enter or remain within this economic setting because women earned enough to compensate for the absence or reduction of the man’s income. Educational attainment and socio-economic category shaped women’s and men’s differentiated “earning potential” (Jim and George, both partners of sole breadwinners) which some couples perceived and discussed before choosing to give a priority to women’s career and that men would specialise in the household. Jim (partner of sole breadwinner) explains that “as my relationship with Mary evolved, it was obvious that Mary would have the blossoming career” leading him to consider the possibility of slowing down his own career, that he did not “enjoy” anyway.

Overall, participants tended to reproduce traditional gender roles in terms of time spent on domestic labour, with women’s relative contribution being higher in spite of their relatively greater economic power. Participants’ accounts of the influence of women’s higher relative income and socio-economic position however show that these characteristics influenced the negotiation over domestic labour and the roles women and men decided to adopt in a way that gave women more power.

B. Women’s and men’s time availability and differentiated use of time

On the topic of how they divide domestic labour, many participants spontaneously used arguments of time availability. In a similar fashion to the time availability approach

(Shelton, 1992), their arguments followed a gender-neutral analysis, as women's and men's use of time outside paid work was assumed to be the same and to follow the same logic. However, elements from the data challenge this idea and show that time availability did not mean the same for women and men and that there was indeed a gendered use of time outside paid work.

Time constrains the daily routines of domestic labour. Participants highlighted the way paid labour and time available at home influenced the division of domestic labour in their households. Olivia (sole female breadwinner) thought the way she shares domestic labour with her partner was not mainly based on an explicit discussion with her partner but instead followed the lines of "how it goes in terms of making it fit with our individual time, our time together, work etc". Her partner Geoffrey also reported that "it's pretty aligned with: "ok, what needs to be done?", and added the important element of physical presence at home: "and you know, if I'm there I can do it and if Olivia is there she can do it". Work schedules impacted this physical presence at home. The non-standard work schedules like nightshifts or evening jobs were chosen by men who wanted to get these schedules for childcare reasons. In return, they framed the division of domestic labour in their households, as John (partner of main breadwinner), who worked a nightshift, answer shows:

It's mostly fallen into a routine because that's what works. We haven't discussed it or anything like that, it's just that I work in the evenings and she works in the day so I take the kids to school and do whatever needs doing in the morning and she picks them up from school and puts them to bed because she's here and I'm at work.

Women's time in paid labour during the day means that women were relatively more absent from home, i.e. they were not physically there to do domestic labour, and therefore their partners had to take on responsibility for certain tasks. Roberto (partner of sole female breadwinner) explained: "there are some tasks which I do automatically because I know

that Emilia doesn't have time and is not there to do that so it's straightforward". When looking at women's and men's time in paid labour across the three patterns of domestic labour described in the previous sub-section, women's and men's absolute and relative time availability seemed to play an important but differentiated role in providing a context for quantitative equality. Overall, the more time women had outside paid work, the higher their relative contribution to domestic labour was compared to other women interviewed in this research. With respect to men, it seems that it was their relative time availability – compared to their female partners – that was more important in reaching quantitative equality. The difference between women's and men's paid working hours was much bigger in Group A than in Group C. Women's lower time availability outside work in Group A meant that some women did not return home before 8pm at least five days a week, and in addition they regularly worked from home. The greater time constraints observed for women in this group also raise the question of what quantitative equality in domestic labour means: is it fair to equally contribute to unpaid work in the household when the woman is much less available than her partner because of her higher involvement in paid work? Does equality mean that men should do more domestic labour than their female partner when the latter has more hours of paid work? These questions will not be answered in this thesis, but what my findings show is that the division of domestic labour I found is not a simple reversal of the traditional male breadwinner model.

If time can provide a frame in which men have no choice but to take on responsibility for certain tasks because women are more physically absent, this only happened to a limited degree. Women were overall much less present at home than their partners, but still tended to contribute more to domestic labour. Moreover, time outside paid work was used differently by women and men, as the following quote from Laila (main breadwinner) demonstrates:

And there are times like if I have some time off work, I will get necessary things out of the way and so if there are chores to be done, I will do them so I can be free after. But he's the other way, so we watch this film and before you know it time is gone and he's like "oh sorry I didn't get the time to do this, sorry" but if he did it the other way those things would be done. For him, if he has some time off, and I understand that, that should be your time off, he doesn't get a lot of time off from work or childcare so when he gets some he wants to watch a film. I understand. I want to do that too [laughs].

As Laila explained, her use of time outside paid work tended much more towards domestic labour than her partner, who often gave priority to leisure activities over domestic labour when he had time outside work. Her answer exemplifies well the difference between women and men that I find in their answers about their social life and activities during the individual interviews. While almost all women only did a few infrequent and time-limited social activities like meeting up with friends, many men reported frequent involvement in social activities such as attending community groups, sports, and social meetups. These findings echo wider quantitative research on differences in leisure time between women and men (Bittman & Wajcman, 2000; O. Sullivan, 1997; Vagni, 2019a).

Overall, female breadwinning couples I interviewed tended to reproduce traditional gender roles in the way they used their time outside paid work, with the responsibility for domestic labour falling on women's shoulders whenever they were at home.

C. The qualitative division of domestic labour: women's and men's tasks

When looking at what I call the 'qualitative' division of domestic labour, i.e. the type of tasks women and men do, my data from the Household Portraits show that women and men I interviewed tended to follow traditional gender patterns of 'feminine' and 'masculine' in the division of activities and tasks. I understand 'feminine' and "masculine' activities as tasks fitting the gender roles that are traditionally assigned to women and men respectively based on their sex.

In their individual interviews, most participants compared their current division of domestic labour with what they remembered of their parents' when they were children or teenagers. Several of them noted that there was a "clear split" (Peter, partner of sole breadwinner) in the tasks between what their mothers and fathers did, and this split was usually presented as aligning with traditional gender roles, as Daniel (partner of sole breadwinner) explained:

My dad would drive the car, take purchasing decisions, all of that sort of male-focused activities and my mum would raise the children, cook, clean and do the washing, these traditional female roles that were always done by women for that generation.

In contrast, several participants thought that the main difference between their parents' division of domestic labour and theirs was that they did not implement a clear split in the tasks they did. When analysing each Household Portrait, I find that this impression reflects the data to some extent. Indeed, when I check the columns chosen by participants for each task in their Household Portraits, I see that out of 80 tasks in total, only 13 were more often put in the 'only woman' column and five tasks in the 'only man' column. Compared to a clear delineation where women and men have full responsibility for their own gendered tasks, the participants' situation was indeed different. Men were involved in a higher diversity of tasks compared to the description of men in their families of origin made by many participants.

To get a clear view of the participants' qualitative division of domestic labour, I analysed each Household Portrait and created a tool, 'the Aggregated Household Portrait' (Table 4.1 below), to facilitate comparison between and analysis of the types of tasks women and men do. To create the Aggregated Household Portrait, I checked the columns where each task was placed in each Household Portrait I collected, and added them together. In the

Aggregated Household Portrait, I placed each task in the column that was chosen by the highest number of couples and individual women. For the Aggregated Household Portrait, I also decided to merge the columns ‘only woman’ and ‘mainly woman with man helping’ into a single column called ‘women’s side’, and the columns ‘only man’ and ‘mainly man with woman helping’ into a single column ‘men’s side’ to get a clear view of the division of domestic labour based on a binary between ‘feminine’ and ‘masculine’ tasks and activities. This methodological choice was inspired by Coltrane’s (1989) table of three columns – 1) Mother More, 2) Father & Mother Equally, 3) Father More – and is a heuristic simplification of Doucet’s own use of the Household Portrait based on five columns – 1) Woman 2) Woman (man helps) 3) Shared Equally 4) Man (woman helps) 5) Man. The first general analysis I draw from this Aggregated Household Portrait is that the tasks and activities of domestic labour in this research disproportionately fell on the women’s side of the Aggregated Household Portrait, indicating that, overall, the women and men I interviewed reproduced traditional gender roles in the way women and men were involved in the household.

Table 4.1: The Aggregated Household Portrait for 33 households

Women’s side	Shared equally	Men’s side
Mopping	Tidying living room	Cleaning the garage
Sweeping	Grocery shopping	Bins
Dusting	Putting food shopping away	Porch
Cleaning bathroom	Setting the table	Cooking dinner
Cleaning toilet	Preparing lunch	Ironing
Hoovering	Washing dishes	Decorating
Tidying bedroom	Putting dishes away	Painting
Planning meals	Preparing breakfast	Car
Grocery list	Hanging up clothes	Driving
Baking	Buying furniture and household items	DIY
Cleaning the kitchen	Deciding major purchases	Gardening and lawn maintenance
Laundry	Writing or phoning relatives/friends	Walking dog/changing litter tray

Hand laundry	Relationships with neighbours	Pet's health and vet
Sewing and repairing clothes	Driving lifestyle choices	
Buying clothes/shoes	School drop-offs and pick-ups	
Drying clothes	Disciplining children	
Contacting the landlord/dealing with the mortgage	Putting children to bed	
Household repair or calling a professional	Supervising children	
Paying bills and taxes	Bringing children to outdoor activities	
Paperwork and insurance	Playing with children	
Overall budget and financial management	Making decisions about children's behaviour	
Helping with financial problems	Dealing with children when upset	
Planning couple dates	Reading to children	
Organizing holidays	Deciding to get a pet	
Remembering birthdays and sending cards/gifts/phoning	Feeding the pet	
Organising social events with friends and family	Petting the pet	
Worry		
Comforting (partner, children, relatives)		
Helping with social/emotional problems		
Taking photos		
Supervising homework		
Organising children's birthday parties		
Making children's GP appointments		
Caring for sick children		
Morning routine with children		
Feeding children		
Long-term planning of children's activities		
Contacts with school/day care team		
Arranging babysitting		
Changing nappies		

Note: Tasks in green are related to food and meals; tasks in blue are related to cleaning and tidying; tasks in light blue are related to pet care; tasks in red are related to administration, paperwork, and finances; tasks in

orange are related to clothes; tasks in yellow are related to household maintenance; tasks in grey are related to childcare, tasks in purple are related to emotional and social activities.

Out of 80 tasks, 41 more frequently fell on the women's side, 26 in the shared equally column, and 13 on the men's side. This means that when a task was not more often mainly done by women, it was much more likely to be equally shared than done by men.

The qualitative division of domestic labour implemented by the participants also reproduced traditional gender roles in the type of tasks they specialised in. More precisely, a comparison of the tasks that more often fell either on women's or men's side shows that the tasks more often done by women tend to be traditionally considered 'feminine' while the tasks that were more often done by men tend to be traditionally considered 'masculine' activities. The tasks found on men's side are mostly related to household maintenance (43% of tasks found on men's side), stereotypically masculine activities of cleaning – such as taking out the bins – (23%), and pet care (15%) – with men being more likely to walk the dog than noticing the dog's health problems. The only stereotypically feminine activity that was more often done by men was cooking dinner, an activity which was usually seen as an enjoyment more than a burden by men who did it, as several of them reported in their individual interview and as shown in the literature (Szabo, 2013). Tasks that tended to be men's jobs are stereotypically masculine, occasional, and in a grey area between chores and leisure such as car maintenance and repair, gardening and lawn maintenance, driving, decorating, tidying and cleaning the garage, and doing DIY. Some men were open about their motivations behind doing this type of tasks, which reflected a mechanism of gender-deviance neutralisation (as I developed in Chapter 2), as Geoffrey's (partner of sole breadwinner) words show:

I also like doing things that aren't sort of typical househusband or housewife things like building sheds or fixing cars just to sort of compensate, to balance things out

you know [laughs]. I'm aware of that, and these are my hobbies and for ages I didn't have time to do them.

Geoffrey, who was a temporary stay-at-home father in Group A, acknowledged a conscious need to “compensate” his “househusband” status by frequently turning to his own ‘masculine’ hobbies.

A similar yet slightly more limited tendency towards gendered tasks can be observed for women. Tasks more often found on women's side tend to be stereotypically feminine, as they are mostly related to childcare (24% of tasks found on women's side), cleaning (19.5%), emotional labour (19.5%), clothes (12%), and cooking (10%). Contrary to men, women's spontaneous justifications for doing these ‘feminine’ tasks were less related to being a woman than to various other constraints, power mechanisms, and emotional reactions that I recount in the remainder of the thesis.

The qualitative and quantitative divisions of domestic labour were linked. Patterns of quantitative division of domestic labour presented in the first sub-section combine with patterns of the qualitative division of domestic labour. The more couples approached quantitative equality, the less stereotypical their qualitative division of domestic labour was. Couples in Group A had a uniquely high proportion of tasks that were more often at least mainly done by men (see Appendix 8): 40% compared with 14% in group C. Moreover, couples in Group A tended to place several stereotypically feminine activities of cleaning, cooking, and childcare on men's side, as well as several tasks that are tedious, repetitive, and prone to mental load and emotion work – such as remembering birthdays and comforting – in the ‘equally shared’ column. Most of these tasks remained on the women's side for the couples in groups B (Appendix 9) and C (Appendix 10). The main difference between these two patterns of the qualitative division of domestic labour is that women in Group B managed to equally share relatively more cleaning tasks and several

tasks related to cooking and childcare, compared with women in Group C who did almost all such tasks. In the latter case, the absence of a clear split was a problem for several women, who ended up doing everything, including some stereotypically masculine tasks, as Susan (main breadwinner) explained:

My parents had a more kind of traditional male/female split. So, my mum looked after the children, the home and the garden and my dad did the car, DIY, decorating, finances were probably split, holidays he probably did a bit more. So yeah, my perception was that she probably still did more but yeah, the split was better than ours I would say because I end up doing all the tasks my mother did and several tasks that my father did.

The presence of what seems to be women's and men's tasks in these female breadwinning households echoes the participants' own conceptualisation and awareness of traditional gender roles in domestic labour. Indeed, several participants across all groups spontaneously expressed comments on gender roles and on the 'feminine' or 'masculine' character of a task, both during the individual interviews but also during the joint interviews, while doing their Household Portraits. Some of these comments were only used to describe a type of task, as the following remark made by Rosie (main female breadwinner) about her and her partner's involvement in the household shows: "There's a lot of his jobs that would usually be seen as men's jobs, whereas mine... actually the budgeting and stuff like that are also seen as men's stuff". Furthermore, some of these comments also reveal the arbitrariness of the feminine/masculine binary around some activities of domestic labour, as Rosie remarked:

It's interesting isn't it, because I would never expect him to bake, I perceive that as an enjoyment thing. I do it because I like it, so I'm perceiving that as a feminine activity, but it doesn't need to be. It's just a preconception of my own.

More interestingly, comments showing the participants' awareness of traditional gender roles were often made in a context of explicit aspirations to equality, where participants invoke these traditional gender roles to say that they try to avoid them, as I show in the next section.

II. Women's and men's assessment of and satisfaction with their division of domestic labour: perceptions and attitudes towards equality

When describing the way they shared unpaid work in the household during the joint interviews, most participants' first reaction tended to express satisfaction with their sharing arrangement, their main justification being a perception of equality – equality that they profess they aspired to (sub-section A below). However, as several women and men later explain during their joint and individual interviews, this perception of equality allowed for some unequal elements, as the gap between their own understanding of 'equal sharing' and quantitative and qualitative equality illustrates (sub-section B). In fact, most participants' perception of equality despite a material context of quantitative and qualitative inequality was tied to their limited aspirations of quantitative and qualitative equality built on a 'team' rhetoric (sub-section C).

A. Perception of equality and satisfaction with the division of domestic labour as expressed in the joint interviews

Despite the reproduction of traditional gender roles and an overall quantitative inequality in the way women and men shared domestic labour, most couples in their joint interviews stated that they were satisfied with the way they share domestic labour (it is important to note that individual interviews brought some nuances to these perceptions as I show in the remainder of this thesis). Previous research has shown that an equal split is rarely the main criterion for women's or men's satisfaction in domestic labour (Baxter & Western, 1998; L. Thompson, 1991). Considerations of fairness and gratitude (L. Thompson, 1991), i.e. receiving emotional acknowledgment for one's contribution, tend to be more important determinants of an individual's satisfaction. In the case of the couples I interviewed, the main justification for satisfaction with the division of domestic labour was their perception

of equal sharing based on their own observation of the Household Portrait, whether this perception was fully supported by the data or not. In this sub-section, I focus on a perception of equal sharing as a criterion of satisfaction to illustrate the gap between the limited reality of equal sharing and participants' perceptions of equality.

The importance participants gave to equality as a primary criterion for satisfaction about their division of domestic labour was made visible when couples across the three aforementioned groups particularly focused on the 'shared equally' column of their Household Portrait to express their satisfaction. For example, Zarifah (main female breadwinner) and her partner Elliot, who are in Group B, felt satisfied with their Household Portrait because their perception was that they share a lot of tasks. This formed the main element that they focus on, as Zarifah's comment illustrates:

I think it is showing that we share a lot of stuff. I think a lot of couples wouldn't have as even a split of stuff. [...] So, I think well I'm quite lucky because I think it's quite fair the way we split things up. [...] I'm pretty happy with this [division of domestic labour].

In some cases, the focus on the tasks that were equally shared was so strong that it almost erased the overall unequal division of domestic labour shown in the Household Portrait. Indeed, several couples who were satisfied with their Household Portrait that was visibly skewed towards the woman's side considered this Household Portrait to show how equally they shared most tasks. The comments of Laila (main female breadwinner) and Graham (man) at the end of their joint interview illustrates the way their perception focused on equality:

Graham: "Yeah, I mean obviously there's more in 'mainly Laila' than in 'mainly Graham', but it's more even than I expected to be honest."

Laila: "There's more stuff that we share and it doesn't seem like that in your day-to-day because on any given days I'm doing these things and I guess I don't necessarily see what you're doing. I'm focused on what I'm doing."

When participants did not consider their division of domestic labour to be equal overall and did acknowledge women's higher contribution, their unequal sharing tended to be minimised by focusing on what they equally shared. Women were sometimes more prone than men to focus on equality in their assessment of their Household Portrait. The dialogue between Eva (main breadwinner) and her partner Owen illustrate one such example:

Owen: "No, I'm just glad that there are any on my side to be honest." [both laugh]

Eva: "I think I'm happy with how much there is in the shared equally column, I think that we do make a conscious effort to try and sort of do that."

While Owen's perception of their Household Portrait focused on his own contribution and the fact that it was more than he expected, Eva did not look at her own higher relative contribution but at the number of tasks they equally shared because of the "conscious effort" they generally make to reach an important level of equal sharing. As I show in Chapter 5, this "conscious effort" to share equally overwhelmingly relies on women's higher mental load and emotion work. Interestingly, women were more likely to focus on equal sharing while commenting on the Household Portrait during the joint interviews, but they were also more likely than men to bring nuances to this perception and to acknowledge inequality during their individual interviews. Such nuances expressed during the individual interviews echo previous gaps found in the literature using both joint and individual interviews (Doucet, 1996, 2015; Mansfield & Collard, 1982; Pahl, 1989).

Overall, a perception of equality shaped the participants' satisfaction with the division of domestic labour they implemented at home. This link between their perception of equality and satisfaction was also visible in the spontaneous comments most participants made while making their Household Portrait. Indeed, the data from the joint interviews show that participants reacted enthusiastically when they perceived equality – "what a nice, equal split" said Harry (partner of main female breadwinner) – and reacted with disappointment when they perceived inequality. For example, while doing the Household Portrait, Lewis

(partner of sole breadwinner) noticed that some of his contribution to domestic labour revolved around masculine tasks and says:

Lewis: “God, this is becoming depressingly stereotypical, isn’t it?”

Charlotte: [laughs]

Lewis: “Oh, I really thought we weren’t gonna be like that.”

Lewis’ first reaction was to be disappointed at the sight of what he understood as “depressingly stereotypical” because he and his partner were upholding traditional gender roles in their qualitative division of domestic labour. This reaction of disappointment stemmed from the gap between his aspirations to be an equal partner in domestic labour and the less egalitarian reality he saw in the Household Portrait.

Overall, couples tended to be satisfied with their distribution of domestic labour when they perceived equality, which both shows the importance they placed on equality and also leads to a puzzling gap between their perception of equality and the reproduction of traditional gender roles described in the previous section.

B. The gap between women’s and men’s understanding of ‘equal sharing’ and quantitative and qualitative equality

The contradiction between a reproduction of traditional gender roles and the importance participants place on equality in their satisfaction with their division of domestic labour is better understood when one looks at what participants saw as ‘equal sharing’. Indeed, women’s and men’s understanding of ‘equal sharing’ did not seem to be based on quantitative and qualitative equality as measured in the former section. When looking at the comments made by several participants across all patterns of division of domestic labour, participants tended to consider ‘equal sharing’ as being compatible with some unequal practices of housework (point 1. below) and childcare (point 2.)

1. The gap between women's and men's understanding of 'equal sharing' and inequality in practices of housework

Several couples jointly decided to put some tasks in the 'shared equally' column whilst acknowledging that such tasks were more often done by the woman. While giving her opinion on the way domestic labour was equally shared with her partner during the joint interview, Diane (main female breadwinner) described the 'shared equally' column and notes that she is generally "probably more cautious about doing these [shared equally tasks] than he is, he'll do them but I'm doing them 2 or 3 times a day as opposed to once every couple of days like he does for hoovering for example". Both Diane and her partner, Frank, considered several tasks as equally shared, although Diane reported spending more time doing them in some of her comments. In this case, the woman's contribution is underestimated, whilst the man's contribution is overestimated, echoing previous literature (Bonke, 2005; Kan, 2008b). This bias in estimation of women's and men's contribution was also visible in the way several couples tended to think of the columns 'mainly woman' and 'mainly man' as being closer to 'equal sharing' than showing inequalities in women's and men's contributions. "I would say that most of our tasks are in those three columns, so it shows that we share most of it" said Emilia (sole female breadwinner) while her partner stated how happy he was to see "how tasks are spread across all columns". 'Equal sharing' in this case was simply understood as the involvement of both women and men in the doing of a task, even if one person was 'mainly' in charge of the task and the other was 'helping'. Given that the column 'mainly woman with man helping' tended to contain many more tasks than the column 'mainly man with woman helping', the inclusion of these columns in considerations of 'equal sharing' underestimated the woman's contribution. In this mindset, it seems that only tasks that were not shared at all, found in the 'only woman' and 'only man' columns, were perceived as something other than what participants considered

‘equal sharing’ This supports Doucet’s (1996) findings on the diversity of meanings women and men give to the sharing of domestic labour and the difficulty in describing what ‘equal sharing’ really means.

Biases in the way participants estimated women’s and men’s contributions are also found in the way participants considered different ways of doing some tasks as being part of their ‘equal sharing’. In several cases, couples considered a task to be equally shared even when they were aware of the different standards both individuals have when doing this task. Usually, women were the ones with higher standards in their practices. Tasks of cleaning were usually good candidates to illustrate these standards; many couples reported a difference in standards, and this difference was usually slightly skewed towards women doing a more comprehensive job, such as the “deep cleaning”, and men focusing only on the main and visible areas. The following discussion between Amy (main female breadwinner) and her partner Logan during their joint interview provides one example:

Amy: “Hoovering, equally.”

Logan: “Yeah, but Amy finishes off the job.” [both laugh]

Sarah (researcher): “Oh, what do you mean?”

Amy: “Yeah what does that mean.” [laughs]

Logan: “I’ll do the hoovering, and then Amy will come home, and she’ll actually hoover where you’re supposed to. She gets the extension out and does every bits and corners.”

Amy: “Yeah, so for example Logan will clean the bathroom but that pretty much only involves the visible parts and throw some water in the sink and bleach down the toilet. He wouldn’t actually wash the floor and clean the window and when he hoovers, he hoovers the middle of the room.”

Logan: “The deep clean would come down to Amy”

2. The gap between women's and men's understanding of 'equal sharing' and inequality in practices of childcare

What participants considered as 'equal sharing' also included different standards of parenting. The cases of couples who aspired to be equal parents and who considered that they implemented 'equal parenting' show they did not always mean quantitative or qualitative equality as measured in the previous section, but rather focus on equality of contribution in decision-making about children and parenting styles. Indeed, 'equal parenting' in the couples I interviewed tended to reproduce traditional gender roles where women did the more tedious and repetitive parenting tasks such as the morning routine with children, caring for sick children, feeding children and changing nappies, whereas men were mainly involved in playing with children and in outdoor tasks such as bringing children to outdoor activities. Even when a parenting task was equally shared, participants' descriptions of the way they do some of these tasks showed different understandings and practices underlying the apparent 'equal sharing'. For example, women and men did not always understand and implement the item "disciplining children" in the same ways. In their individual interviews, several parents reported that fathers tend to be stricter than mothers. In practice, this usually meant that men were less involved in some aspects of parenting than women, as the case of Karen (sole female breadwinner) and her partner Daniel shows. During her individual interview, Karen explained that when it comes to disciplining children, she "would let minor things go but pick on the things that are important and then try and change those or help address those" while she thought that Daniel "sometimes picks on the unimportant or small things and everything becomes a battle". This difference in disciplining children resulted in a greater burden on Karen's shoulders, as she then explained:

So a very good example of this is I probably told him a million times that when the children are hungry and tired, there's no point having a battle with them because

you've got to feed them and wait until they're in the right mood, and then you've got to talk to them about it. I think P finds that difficult, so I think for me the most challenging thing is that sometimes I'm in the middle of that. With our daughter, shouting at her, 100% doesn't work, it is the most pointless thing because that is not the way to deal with her. But he won't remember that, and I might come back and she's up crying and he's down here, angry because he shouted at her about something. [...] That's why a lot of this emotional stuff is down with me because usually I get through to them.

The “emotional” aspect of disciplining children was taken on by Karen, resonating with findings about women's higher mental load and involvement in emotion work that I present in Chapter 5.

Overall, the understanding of ‘equal sharing’ demonstrated by many couples I interviewed tended to rely on both women's and men's overestimation of men's contribution and underestimation of women's contributions (I further discuss the asymmetrical value given to women's and men's contribution in Chapter 7). Some tasks participants considered to be equally shared sometimes coincided with inequality in practice due to different standards and practices that generally resulted in women's greater contribution to domestic labour.

C. Limited aspirations towards equality and justifications of inequality in the distribution of domestic labour: the ‘team’ rhetoric

The participants' broad understanding of ‘equal sharing’ that included inequality is underpinned by some of women's and men's attitudes and limited aspirations to quantitative and qualitative equality in domestic labour. These attitudes and aspirations are best understood in the light of the participants' ‘team’ rhetoric expressed in their individual interviews.

Despite the majority of participants agreeing with the statement “women and men should equally share housework and childcare if they are both spending the same amount of time in paid labour” (Jorat et al., 2016) , several participants' spontaneous comments show a

tendency towards rejection of what Chloe (main female breadwinner) called “a mathematical exercise”:

You see, I don't like the “should”. I think they should find a balance between themselves, so I would say I disagree with that, probably not for natural reasons... I feel I need to justify myself for disagreeing with that... I think every couple's dynamic is different and they should play to their strengths so I think broadly there needs to be an equal split, but I don't think it should be a mathematical exercise. I think it should be a balance exercise based on discussions between them or on how they naturally fall and making sure both people are happy with what they're doing.

There are several aspects of Chloe's answer that are particularly interesting which were also mentioned by several other participants. Firstly, she rejected what she saw as a normative dimension of the idea of equality by saying that she doesn't “like the should”, meaning that she had what could be called a liberal approach to how couples organise their household. This approach gives an importance to the autonomy of individuals and the refusal to judge or be judged by other people on this matter, especially as she considered that “every couple's dynamic is different”. This approach also underpinned Frank's (man in sole female breadwinning couple) preference for the answer “no opinion” because “it's whatever works for them, that's literally the point. It's not for me to start saying how people should set up their balance”. Secondly, her answer does show a certain attachment to an ‘equal split’, but brings nuances to this idea by focusing on the different “strengths” individual women and men may have. She instead prefers the idea of a “balance exercise” in which there are “discussions” based on how women and men “naturally” do different tasks. Her use of the term “naturally” here does not seem to refer to biological determinism in the way women and men contribute to domestic labour, given her previous clarification about why she disagrees with the question (“probably not for natural reasons”). “Naturally” here is likely best understood as ‘spontaneously’, referring to comparative differences in skills and efficiency between individuals in doing certain tasks over others, hence the idea of “playing to their strengths” (I discuss these differences further in Chapter 5). In Chloe's

case, the idea of complementarity is applied to the division of domestic labour within households and as an argument to tone down aspirations to quantitative equality. Chloe's rhetoric was consciously gender-neutral, and therefore did not explicitly reinforce traditional gender roles. But in practicality, gender-neutrality strengthens a status quo between women who tend to be socialised into doing domestic labour (and therefore to be relatively more skilled and efficient than their male partners, as I show in Chapter 5), and men who tend to be reluctant and passive in the process of learning domestic labour tasks (as I show in Chapters 5 and 6). On the same note, her gender-neutral defence of "discussions" to reach a more or less equal balance does not take into account unequal power dynamics between women and men, i.e. the fact that women and men are not on an equal footing when negotiating changes in their division of domestic labour, as I argue in Chapters 6 and 7. Gender-neutral attitudes and ideology in this case reflects an intention of not reproducing gender roles based on sex, but ultimately plays out as blindness towards gender as a wider hierarchical dynamic of inequality between women and men.

Chloe disagreed with the statement mentioned above, but many participants who "strongly agree" or "agree" with it also added nuance to their agreement with similar statements, like Eva (main female breadwinner):

I strongly agree but then I would kind of add that I sort of stand by the idea that people should play to their strengths and split tasks in terms of that, you know I don't think it's a case of drawing the line down the middle, I think you need a balance of people doing the stuff that suits them.

Chloe also gave a higher priority to satisfaction with the amount of tasks individuals decide to do than to strict equality in sharing tasks when she said that what matters is "making sure both people are happy with what they're doing". Given that women's satisfaction tended to be compatible with a higher burden of domestic labour, the focus on both women's and men's happiness leaves room for inequality and for preserving men's satisfaction with their

own relatively lower contribution. Chloe's justification echoes several participants' comments, such as John (partner of main female breadwinner), who had "no opinion" on this statement "because it just depends on what needs doing. I mean I don't see it as a trade-off where this has to be equal to that, as long as nobody feels they're being taken advantage of and everyone's getting on with their lives that's fine".

Justifications of inequality in the division of domestic labour through the ideas of complementary and gender-neutrality were themselves embedded in a wider rhetoric used by a majority of participants: the 'team' rhetoric. In their individual interviews, several women and men asserted themselves as a team of "complementary but equal" (Amy, main breadwinner) contributors to the household. Women and men tended to put a strong emphasis on defining their situation of female breadwinning as a mere descriptive fact – based on the criteria that the women earned a higher income than their partner – rather than a situation loaded with meaning and symbolism around women being the economic provider of the household. Most couples talked about how female breadwinning "happened" (Emilia, sole breadwinner) to them, instead of being a choice that was ideologically driven.

In their individual interviews, most women and men answered "yes" to the question "are you comfortable with this situation?" and were usually quick to point out that they are a "team so it's fine" (Mary, sole breadwinner). Several women and men saw their economic situation as that of a team based on a duo, with one woman and one man, specialising either in the labour market or in household labour, for the general good of the household unit. Some participants explained what they meant by 'team' by using some criteria such as the sharing of resources and the individuals' contributions to the household. The latter is illustrated by how Mary developed her idea of a "team":

I think it just comes to the team aspect. We're of equal importance and our contribution to our family is equal but it just so happens that I earn more, but Jim being at home or being more flexible than I am it contributes in a different way.

This mindset about the female breadwinning economic setting emphasises the equal importance attributed to women's and men's differentiated contributions as measured in the first section of this chapter (I discuss this further in Chapter 7). Overall, women's and men's aspirations to and understanding of equality did not seem to focus on quantitative or qualitative equality as measured in the previous section but rather on the idea of a 'team' of 'complementary but equal individuals'. This helps us understand why some couples' perception of 'equal sharing' included some inequalities. This specific understanding of equality seems to be the main element that bridges the observed gap between the reproduction of traditional gender roles and the participants' satisfaction based on perceptions of equality.

Conclusion

In female breadwinning couples I interviewed, there was a gap between the couples' division of domestic labour and their perception of equality. On the one hand, couples I interviewed tended to reproduce traditional gender roles in the way they divided their domestic labour. Their quantitative division of domestic labour shows that women's contribution to housework and childcare was on average higher than that of their male partners. Socio-economic characteristics such as women's higher relative earnings and overall relative socio-economic position provided a frame within which the negotiation between women and men took place to determine who would do what. Women's economic power based on their higher relative income was mediated by gender, and my findings echo wider literature showing that "marital power equation must take both money and gender

into account” (Tichenor, 2005b, p. 193). Women’s and men’s time availability were usually the main determinant structuring the division of domestic labour that participants reported, but their reproduction of traditional gender roles was also visible in women’s and men’s differentiated uses of time outside of paid work. While women tended to give priority to domestic labour tasks they were responsible for in their time outside paid work, men generally gave the priority to leisure activities before domestic duties. Furthermore, women and men exhibited differentiated contributions regarding the content of tasks of domestic labour that they did. Their qualitative division of domestic labour tended to follow gendered patterns of ‘feminine’ and ‘masculine’ tasks and activities. As my data shows, the marital contract in female breadwinning households can include inequality in the division of domestic labour, as well as uphold traditional gender roles.

The participants’ specific understanding of ‘equal sharing’, tied to limited attitudes and aspirations to quantitative and qualitative equality, influenced their perceptions and the focus they put on equality in their assessments of their own division of domestic labour. This gap between couples’ perception of equality and the traditional gender roles they tended to implement provides a frame through which to understand the context where further negotiation took place. This perception of equality concretely means that women’s unpaid work was underestimated, as previously found in several studies (Bonke, 2005; Kan, 2008b; Y.-S. Lee & Waite, 2005; Press & Townsley, 1998). Perceptions of equality were however found to be particularly strong in couples’ report during the joint interview. These involved biases when compared to comments and nuances emerging in participants’ individual interviews. Yet, it is important to consider how couples as a unit perceived their division of domestic labour at home, because their perceptions can be understood as a kind of ‘official narrative’ that shaped the negotiation between women and men. In this sense, the ‘team’ rhetoric used by women and men I interviewed seems to be an important element

of their marital contract: practical inequalities were tolerated and justified as long as they were not explicitly supported, and as long as women and men displayed theoretical agreement with ideas of 'gender equality'.

In Chapter 5, I highlight certain phenomena that further explain this gap between the perception of equality and the reproduction of traditional gender roles by focusing on the invisible and undervalued yet crucial aspects of domestic labour: mental load and emotion work. These two mental processes of domestic labour can also help in understanding why women I interviewed tended to do more of the physical tasks of housework and childcare.

Chapter 5. Micromanaging housework, care, and emotions: women's mental load and emotion work in female breadwinning households

In Chapter 4, I showed there is a gap between the reproduction of gender roles in the way female breadwinning couples I interviewed divided their domestic labour and their perception of equality in terms of their own and their partners' contributions to domestic labour. I argued that the couples' perception of equality was related to their own understanding of 'equal sharing' of the mainly physical tasks of housework and childcare, based on limited aspirations to quantitative and qualitative equality in domestic labour. However, domestic labour is more than the actual doing of physical tasks in the household. It also involves mental load and emotion work that tend to be invisible work.

The concepts of mental load and emotion work have recently reappeared in the public debate, both in the media and in women's grassroots activism. One of the most recent publications on this topic is written by journalist Gemma Hartley, and is entitled, *Fed Up, Women, Emotional Labor, and The Way Forward* (Hartley, 2018). The title itself directly points to the problematic dimension of this 'emotional labor' and the practical consequences on women's lives. In the book, 'emotional labor' is defined as "the unpaid, invisible work we do to keep everyone those around us comfortable and happy" (Hartley, 2018, p. 14). Hartley refers to the constant micromanagement of the housework that women in heterosexual couples report doing in addition to the actual physical tasks of domestic labour, leading them to being "fed up". In this chapter, I use the term 'micromanaging' to refer to the way the individual, who is in a position of managing the household pays attention to the details of the tasks of domestic labour and constantly organises, plans, and makes sure the work is done. In my data, the individuals who were in this position were women. In this sense, this chapter contributes to the literature on domestic labour by unveiling the crucial importance of micro-level, emotional, and cognitive (Damingier, 2019)

processes in the division of domestic labour and parental responsibilities (Doucet 2015). The micromanagement of the household appears when the overall management of the household involves, in practice, more than a simple division between one individual who is responsible for organising domestic labour and another who is responsible for executing or implementing tasks. Indeed, I argue that micromanaging housework, care, and emotions represent the efforts women as managers of the household have to make to ensure the delegated or shared work is actually completed. In the case of domestic labour, ‘micromanaging’ is the psychological process involving differences in mental load and emotion work between women and men. In the couples I interviewed, micromanaging, the mental load, and emotion work had several implications regarding the marital contract taking place between women and men.

In order to understand how the micromanagement of housework, care, and emotions participate in creating these differences between women and men, it is necessary to define the concepts of mental load and emotion work as well as looking at previous studies pointing at empirical evidence of these differences.

1. Conceptualisation of emotion work and mental load

The mental load and emotion work share the characteristics of being largely immaterial, invisible, continuous, mental processes concerned with running the household and satisfying the primary needs of its members, as well as the emotional connection between them so as to ensure family cohesion.

The concept of emotion work originated in sociological literature in the late 1970s with Hochschild’s (1983) study of the regulation of emotions in the workplace. In her book, she makes a distinction between “emotional labor”, which in a female-dominated professional

context she defines as “the management of feeling to create a publicly observable facial and bodily display; emotional labor is sold for a wage” (Hochschild, 1983, p. 29) , and “emotion work”, which refers to “these same acts done in a private context” (Hochschild, 1983, p. 29). Some uses of these concepts in the existing sociological literature are based on the study of service jobs and how these largely female-dominated jobs require women to regulate their emotions and the way they are presented as part of their interactions with customers and colleagues (Hochschild, 1983; Wharton, 2004). In the household, showing affection, apologising after an argument, raising problems that need to be addressed in a relationship and making sure the household runs smoothly are all concrete examples of daily emotion work. Hochschild (1979) points out that emotions are regulated by a whole range of social rules and that there are links between the “social structure, feeling rules, emotion management and emotive experience” (Hochschild, 1979, p. 551). She argues that “the individual often works on inducing or inhibiting feelings so as to make them “appropriate” to a situation” (Hochschild, 1979, p. 551) so as to conform to socially legitimate and expected feelings and the needs of others . In this chapter, I use the concept of emotion work to refer to the ways individuals more or less consciously provide emotional care for others, build intimacy, and adjust their own feelings and emotions to guarantee the stability of the emotional sphere in the household, i.e. the emotions of members of a household concerning themselves and other members. More precisely, this chapter highlights how most women I interviewed were the carers of their partners’ and children’s emotions. In this sense, emotion work contributes to the mental load as it involves mental efforts in terms of thinking about and remembering the emotional states of others in different situations of domestic labour, but these two concepts do not fully overlap.

Indeed, the concept of mental load covers a range of mental processes that do not only concern emotions, but also the overall organisation of the home, concrete planning, and

implementation of tasks. The application of the concept of mental load to unpaid domestic labour was developed by several sociologists in the 1980s and 1990s (Delphy, 1984; Haicault, 1984; Walzer, 1996). Haicault (1984) argues that the double shift of paid and unpaid labour brings an added and constant tension to make compatible different dynamics of space and time. She names this tension “mental load” and defines it as the “most adequate” (Haicault, 1984, p. 272) expression to understand the “superposition” (Haicault, 1984, p. 272) of the different times and spaces involved in paid and unpaid labour that women have to mentally manage. Women become the intermediary bodies between different practices, roles, and expectations at work and in the household and have to use time as a management tool between the different needs and expectations of those surrounding them. There are different temporalities that women manage: daily temporalities of the workplace and household, and the diverse and long-term temporalities of anticipating and planning paperwork, organising finances and paying loans. Mental load is primarily concerned with managing and catching up time, constantly calculating deadlines and resources to implement a task that needs doing. The specificity of mental load is not that it is a labour on top of other activities and services, it is the fact that this labour is simultaneous to these activities and services. For Haicault, mental load is the sign of a “double exploitation-domination” (Haicault, 1984, p. 275) of women whereby at any point in time they are likely to be physically and mentally juggling both paid work and unpaid domestic labour. In this chapter, I use the concept of the ‘mental load’ to refer to the mental juggling between domestic labour tasks and the constant thought processes underlying the implementation of such tasks, in the context of time constraints resulting from participation in paid and unpaid work.

2. Applications in the literature

The literature tends to argue that the mental load and emotion work is almost exclusively done by women (Erickson, 1994, 2005; Wharton & Erickson, 1995) and highlights the inequality of contributions underlying the equal division of purely physical tasks of domestic labour found in some heterosexual couples (Hochschild & Machung, 2012). The findings I present in this chapter support these arguments. The building of a father-child relationship in a context of involved fatherhood (Shows & Gerstel, 2009) is usually dependent on women's emotion work around organising it (Lengersdorf & Meuser, 2016; Seery & Crowley, 2000). All the while, this invisible and continuous mental process behind the smooth running of the household tends to have concrete effects on the individual responsible for this work. Strazdins and Broom (2004) argue that in their sample of couples with young children, the "gender imbalance" in emotion work "affected women's, but not men's, experience of love and conflict in their marriage" while posing a "health risk to women" (Strazdins & Broom, 2004, p. 356). The authors claim the effects of such imbalance partially explain "gender differences in psychological distress" (Strazdins & Broom, 2004, p. 356). Unequal mental and emotional involvement in the running of the household and maintaining family cohesion also have consequences on the quality of the relationship itself. For example, men's performance of emotion work is found to have the "strongest positive effects on wives' marital well-being" (Erickson, 1993). Neither of these studies have looked at how mental load and emotion work emerge in a context where women have higher relative economic power nor how they impact the negotiation between women and men over the division of domestic labour. The current chapter addresses this gap with the following question: how do differences in mental load and emotion work between women and men affect the negotiation of the division of domestic labour?

I argue that an element of why women tended to be the primary unpaid workers in their household is because they took on the roles of managers of the household and carers in the emotional sphere, involving largely invisible labour that is rarely perceived by participants (section I below). This invisible labour, composed of mental load and emotion work, emerged through gendered processes (section II) that influenced the scope of the negotiation over domestic labour in such a way that women and men did not start from an equal basis of power when negotiating. Indeed, women's attempts to reduce their mental load and emotion work through changes in the division of domestic labour tended to backfire in a way that increased their own mental load (section III).

I. Differentiated roles and invisible labour: women's mental load and emotion work

Women's higher contribution to physical and measurable tasks of domestic labour is inseparable from specific kinds of thinking processes – mental load and emotion work. These are necessary to, on the one hand, anticipate, plan, and organise the running of the household and, on the other, guarantee the emotional wellbeing of the household members. These elements comprise the invisible processes of domestic labour. I first discuss the challenges and solutions to measuring the mental load and emotion work in sociological research (sub-section A below), before showing that these aspects of domestic labour were associated with specific roles in the couples I interviewed. It was women who tended to take on the role of managers of the household, leading them also to undertake the mental load of organising housework and childcare (sub-section B), while their male partners generally adopted the role of helpers. Moreover, women tended also to take on the role of carers in the emotional sphere, involving emotion work that men generally did not perform (sub-section C).

A. Measuring the emotion work and mental load: making visible the invisible labour in the household

The attempt to frame domestic labour as a sociological object of analysis from the 1970s faced several challenges, since domestic labour covers activities and roles that have historically been conceptualised as natural behaviours and personality traits, as opposed to work. As Daniels (1987) and Wadel (1979) show regarding emotion work, there is real work involved in caring for others. But behaviours involved in this work are often not defined as work because it is taking place in the private sphere of the family and is unpaid, therefore not measurable with conventional standards. Moreover, women have a set of internalised “expectations” (Daniels, 1987, p. 405) involving caring for others, making them feel as though these activities are or at least should be a spontaneous “expression of love” (Daniels, 1987, p. 407) towards members of their family. The entanglement between duties, feeling, expectations, love, and intimacy makes the processes behind the concepts of the mental load and emotion work particularly challenging to measure in sociology. Mental load and emotion work tend to be “unacknowledged, or devalued” (Strazdins & Broom, 2004, p. 357), including by the both the individuals who perform the work and those who benefit from it as I show in my findings. Several sociological studies in the 1990s and early 2000s included these concepts in their research and methods. As the Table 5.1 listing items measuring the concept of emotion work in two academic articles shows below, there is a variety of items that can provide data on the emotional dynamics within couples.

Table 5.1: How emotion work can be measured – two examples from the literature

<i>Reference</i>	<i>Items included in their questionnaires to measure emotion work</i>
(Strazdins & Broom, 2004, p. 364)	<p>“Items measuring relative involvement in family emotional work such as caring for and understanding their partner’s or children’s emotional needs, helping with problems, giving emotional support to partner and children, doing things to improve or maintain the relationship, and setting and enforcing standards for children’s behaviour”</p>
(Minnotte et al., 2007, p. 753)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Emotion work for spouse: <p>“Respondents were asked: “In general, how often do you engage in the following behaviors? (a) Confide my innermost thoughts and feelings; (b) Praise my partner; (c) Suggest good solutions to my partner’s problems; (d) Take the lead in talking things over; and (e) Sense that my partner is disturbed about something.” The response categories were: 1 = never, 2= seldom, 3= sometimes, 4= often, 5 = frequently, and 6 = always”</p> • Emotion work for children: <p>“Respondents were asked to indicate who in their relationship does each of the following: (a) Soothes our child(ren) when they experience disappointments (e.g. rejected by other children); (b) Praises our child(ren) for school performance; (c) Praises our child(ren) for doing household chores; and (d) Compliments our child(ren) for achievements (e.g. sports, music, scouting). The response categories included 1 = “partner much more,” 3 = “we do this equally,” and 5 = “I much more.””</p>

In my research, I assessed mental load and emotion work with multiple methodological tools. The two-day time schedule provided at the end of the interview intended to provide detailed data on the daily division of mental load and emotion work, but results were

excluded from the final data set because only a few couples filled in the line referring to these activities. I argue that the high non-response rate reflects the difficulties for women and men to place in a schedule activities that are continuous, immaterial, invisible, and devalued. This lack of evidence from the two-day time schedule is compensated by the data provided by the joint and individual interviews. The joint interview, mainly focused on constructing a Household Portrait was in the end the best way to arrive at some understanding of the division of mental load and emotion work between the women and men I interviewed.

Based on the literature and data from my participants' joint and individual interviews, the items in the Household Portrait list of tasks that are the most strongly associated with high levels of mental load and emotion work are listed in the following table:

Table 5.2: The Aggregated Household Portrait for 33 households – mental load and emotion work only

Women's side	Shared equally	Men's side
Planning meals	Deciding major purchases	
Writing the grocery shopping list	Writing or phoning relatives/friends	
Helping with financial problems	Relationship with neighbours	
Planning couple dates	Driving lifestyle choices	
Organising holidays	Disciplining children	
Remembering birthdays and sending cards	Making decisions about children's behaviour	
Organising social events with friends and family	Dealing with children when upset	
Worry		
Comforting (partner, children, relatives)		
Helping with social/emotional problems		
Taking photos		
Organising children's birthday parties		
Making children's GP appointments		
Supervising homework		
Caring for sick children		
Long-term planning of children's activities		

Contacts with school/day care team		
Arranging babysitting		
Household repair or calling a professional		
Contacting the landlord/dealing with the mortgage		
Overall budget and financial management		

These tasks involved varying degrees of mental load and emotion work, usually both at the same time. Even when a task was about the partner's or children's emotions, such as remembering birthdays, this usually involved some planning and anticipation. Writing the grocery shopping list may appear at first as a task that is pure mental load and planning, but as DeVault (1991) shows, there is a whole range of meanings and symbolism underlying food in households, and the individuals in charge of that (mostly women) put a lot of emotion work into planning, preparing, and serving food to their family. The few tasks that mostly involved mental load with lower emotion work in my participants' accounts were household repairs or calling a professional/tradesperson, overall budget and financial management, deciding major purchases, and contacting the landlord/dealing with the mortgage.

The data on the distribution of mental load and emotion work drawn from the Household Portraits is completed by data from the individual interviews. Mental load and emotion work are recurrent themes, both because of several interview questions on this topic and because participants, especially women, spontaneously talked about these phenomena. The data provided by the Household Portraits and participants' comments during the joint interview show that mental load and emotion work were overwhelmingly women's responsibilities in the female breadwinner couples I interviewed. Women were generally the managers of the household and the carers of the emotional sphere. I argue that this

mental load and emotion work is associated with specific roles women took on in the household.

B. Women as managers of the household and men as helpers: micromanaging housework and childcare under time constraints

Female breadwinners I interviewed tended to function as managers of the household whilst their male partners tended to adopt the position of helpers. In her study comparing couples with equal and unequal divisions of labour, Deutsch (1999) finds a similar division of roles in “alternating-shift couples” (Deutsch, 1999, p. 170) between men who help at home while their partner is at work and women who remain in charge of domestic labour when they return from work. In their qualitative study of stay-at-home fathers’ time-use in female breadwinner families in the United States, Latshaw and Hale (2015) call this phenomenon “the domestic handoff”. Deutsch (1999) notes that among couples implementing this division of roles and responsibility, “although gender ideas [...] have changed enough to allow men to take over domestic duties when their wives are at work without any loss of manhood, often these ideas have not changed enough to really shift the responsibility” (Deutsch, 1999, p.183). In the same way, the tendency I find among the participants is for women to take on the role of managers of the household not because of an explicit traditional agreement with their partners, but because the sense of responsibility for domestic labour remained differentiated between women and men – women felt more responsible for running the household than men. This differentiated sense of responsibility for domestic labour is supported by my analysis of the item ‘worry’. While the Household Portraits show that women did most of the worrying, several couples also pointed to differences in contentment between women and men. These differences exposed women’s higher relative sense of responsibility for domestic labour, even in the case of some couples

in Group A, as the following discussion between Prisha (sole breadwinner) and her partner

Peter shows:

Prisha: “I worry about work and my son and they are my two main worries. [...] Work in the context of stuff to do but also in the context how are things at home because I don’t see much of home and I’m at work so there’s that worry. And then I worry about [our son], like you know, ‘are we being good parents? Does he turn out ok? Are we bringing him up as well as we could?’ ”

Sarah (researcher): “And what do you worry about, Peter?”

Peter: “Uh, I don’t worry about these things at all. I think I usually worry about probably financial things more than anything else, making sure we’re doing things right financially.”

The role of manager of the household also involves degrees of planning that generally remained invisible to the men in my research. My analysis of the participants’ Household Portraits shows that most tasks of planning were more often done by women than by their male partners. Tasks which contribute to the mental load which tended to be more often equally shared than gendered are either childcare-related or irregular tasks related to equal involvement in the decision-making of the household (deciding major purchases, lifestyle choices, deciding to get a pet) or to individuals’ social networks (writing/phoning relatives and friends, maintaining relationships with neighbours). The equally shared childcare-related tasks are also specific: they tended to be divided between tasks of equal involvement in the decision-making in the upbringing of the children (disciplining children, making decisions about children’s behaviours) and tasks attached to involved fatherhood (playing with children, dealing with children when upset). By contrast, the childcare-related items of mental load found on women’s side tend to be the most tedious tasks of planning because they involve a regular involvement and less enjoyment or intimacy (supervising homework, caring for sick children, making children’s GP appointments, long-term planning of children’s activities, contacts with school/day care team, arranging babysitting).

Most women used strategies of delegating tasks to their partners as a way to “make everything fit” (Jackie, sole breadwinner) within their own double timetables and

responsibilities between paid and unpaid work. In this act of delegation, the managers of the household were still responsible for planning most tasks. The mental load therefore tended to emerge as a result of a separation between planning and doing a task in a context of women's limited time availability for unpaid domestic labour. The separation between planning and doing a task was a common theme in women's analyses and experiences of domestic labour. In their individual interviews, several women spontaneously used concepts such as "mental load" to describe the mental work involved in a task. Rosie (main breadwinner), whose contribution in domestic labour was one of the highest of all participants, explained:

I think the main thing [about her experience of domestic labour] is the mental load. As everybody knows, the preparation and the thinking time and the sort of emotional investment and working it all out is a big percentage of the execution of the task.

A task of domestic labour such as taking the bins out or putting the dishes away involves at least a few steps, however discrete and menial it appears to be: noticing the task has to be done, thinking about when and how to do it, doing it, and deciding or making sure it has been fully done. There is always some degree of planning, even if the task is simple and done by one individual for her/himself. Applied to the unit of a household, domestic labour can be understood as a continuous process, as it is a series of interconnected, small mental and physical steps and tasks with different temporalities and multiple recipients (the individual, the partner, and in some cases the children, dependent relatives, and pets).

In this case, both individuals can be involved at different steps of the same task. This separation between planning and doing tends to favour men, whose contribution to most tasks of housework and childcare generally focused solely on the doing, rather than the planning as well. As managers of the household, women must micromanage the housework

and childcare they delegated to their partner by checking whether the tasks were properly done or not. To the question asked during the individual interviews, “do you ever have to remind him/her to do housework and childcare?”, most women replied “yes”, and most men replied “no”. Several women talked about having to “prompt” their male partners quite often and in various tasks of cleaning, childcare, paperwork and finances, and food. As Laila (main breadwinner) explained, when her husband Graham contributes to grocery shopping, it is when he is on his way from somewhere else, doing another activity than domestic labour. When he contributes, it is usually in the context of a convenient access to the shop and a detailed reminder from her because, according to Graham himself: “I am quite forgetful, it is really helpful that she reminds me and sometimes it’s utterly necessary that she reminds me”. However, sometimes the reminder is not enough for Graham and other men, and their female partners end up doing their partner’s task, as Laila later reported:

I don’t know why... this is a weird one, but I’ll remind him “oh isn’t it your dad’s birthday next week? Don’t you need to go and get a card and what present to do you wanna get?” and so on, that kind of thing because he just doesn’t remember those things and generally I remind him about that and he says “oh yeah yeah” and sometimes I get the things for him.

As noted in the previous chapter, the three patterns of vertical distribution of domestic labour found during the fieldwork did not involve the same degree of inequality in mental load. The comparison of the general Household Portraits between Group C (Appendix 10) and Group A (Appendix 8) shows that an unequal division of physical tasks of housework and childcare went hand in hand with unequal degrees of mental load. In couples where the sharing of domestic labour was close to 50/50 or where the man did more, several items involving the mental load such as planning meals are found on the men’s side of the Household Portrait, or in the shared equally column. In these cases, men tended to be

responsible for the whole task and a lesser degree of separation between the planning and the doing was involved – for example, items related to cooking food are also found on men's side.

In the context of female breadwinning and women's lesser time availability for unpaid domestic labour, this continuous process of micromanaging housework and childcare is constrained by limited resources in terms of women's time and energy. Mental load is involved in the multitasking women must balance to organise both paid and unpaid labour they perform at home and in the workplace. Women who spent a lot of time in their workplace and were therefore physically absent from the house tended to see their mental load or emotion work shift to their workplace, as Gemma (main breadwinner) said: "I think that puts more pressure on you and if you're not here, more than the other person is, and you are stuck at work, that puts another layer of pressure". She reported thinking about her children or the house at work because "it's easier to do it from there, like contacting the school, making arrangements". These findings echo wider research on multitasking (Sayer, 2007; O. Sullivan & Gershuny, 2013).

C. Women as carers in the emotional sphere

Women's role as managers of the household was paired with another role they take on as carers in the emotional sphere. This role of carer of the emotional wellbeing of male partners and children involved high levels of emotion work. The great majority of items related to building intimacy in the family (organising holidays, planning couple dates, comforting, helping with social/emotional problems, remembering birthdays, worry, organising social events with friends and/or family) were more often done by women. Even in the case of couples in Group A, the notable exception to this equality is the set of items

related to building intimacy, which were still more frequently found on the women's side of the Aggregated Household Portrait – emotion work and mental load (Table 5.2 above). In women's individual interviews, I find evidence of the connection between mental load and emotion work. Sophie (main breadwinner) reported that she has to remind her male partner often to do housework tasks, and expressed that it's the "biggest frustration" she has:

[...] because in my mind I shouldn't have to ask all the time, or more of the time than not. That's a learning process, it's about sensing and predicting. That's the caring part of a relationship for me. It's taking time to think about what the other person wants.

Her words touch the core aspect underlying mental load and emotion work when she said: "that's the caring part of a relationship for me". The more meaning, symbolism, and care is required or put behind a task of domestic labour, the more the mental load and emotion work. Most tasks of domestic labour involved at least some consideration of care for others, as Grace (main breadwinner) remarked: "getting people dressed and undressed and wiping their bottoms and cleaning their teeth is not the most fun thing in the world [laughs], but it's also they need to know that we're here for them".

Because childcare-related tasks and activities involve the highest levels of care (Doucet, 2015; O. Sullivan, 2013), most them are laden with mental load and emotion work. For a lot of women, parenting and motherhood meant managing different and contradicting expectations from different sources. Describing her own experience as a mother, Gemma (main breadwinner) explained that parenting means:

[...] being pulled out in so many different directions at the same time and having so many expectations on you. There is an added pressure of being a professional and doing your job well and spending a lot of time doing your job well and then doing everything else that you're expected to do as far as your family is concerned. And I don't necessarily just mean all the domestic chores, the domestic chores are just that, it's you know, have you spent time with your children? Have you done this with them or that with them? Because at the end of the day the amount of time you get to spend with the kids, as quality time and stuff we do together, is very limited.

There is an asymmetry between women and men when it comes to emotion work. Women tended to be at the receiving end of men's negative emotions, as Elliot (partner of main breadwinner) himself acknowledged:

I just vent in the car to Zarifah on the way home [laughs], and then by the time I get home I feel fine, and Zarifah is feeling down because it was just me shouting in the car [laughs]. But that's how I deal with it.

Women's position of carers in the emotional sphere meant that they tended to prioritise the emotional wellbeing of their partners and children over their own. In practice, the priority women gave to the emotions of other members of the household over their own led them to a process of adjusting their emotions to other people's needs. When negotiating the division of domestic labour, women's emotion work largely lied on the fact that they tended to adapt to their partners' emotions and minimise their own emotional reactions to a variety of daily situations and challenges. Women's emotion work was therefore relational in a way that it compensated for their partners' lack of work on their own emotions. When faced with a situation of asymmetry in which their partners expect emotional support for their own emotional challenges, women adapted their own emotions without getting the same level of support in return. While talking about how his partner reassured him whenever he feels insecure over his work achievements, Patrick (partner of main breadwinner) admitted his own limitations regarding the emotional wellbeing of his partner: "whenever she comes back very stressed from work, I don't know how to handle it, she's sort of stuck with it".

Women's roles as managers of the household and carers of the emotional sphere were connected by the emotion work women had taken on to ensure the wellbeing of their partners and children. As I showed earlier in this sub-section, there was a fundamental asymmetry between women and men as regards to providing and receiving emotional

support, and women's emotion work for their partners was not generally reciprocated to the same extent.

II. The gendered mechanisms underlying the emergence of mental load and emotion work

The reproduction of traditional gender roles in domestic labour was rooted in the roles of managers of the household and carers of the emotional sphere, both of which women tended to adopt. These differentiated roles were grounded in an asymmetry between women's and men's sense of responsibility for domestic labour and emotion work. This section further investigates the roots of this asymmetry and differentiated roles through analysing the gendered mechanisms underpinning why and how women took on these roles and, as a result, most of the mental effort involved in domestic labour. I argue that women's higher relative mental load and emotion work were linked to gendered standards, generally understood by the participants as being a consequence of essentially different personalities that they saw as 'natural' and 'innate' (sub-section A below) despite the influence of the gender socialisation they received, which can explain some of these gendered standards (sub-section B).

A. Gendered standards and personalities

The emergence of mental load and emotion work in the different steps between planning and executing a task was intertwined with specific social and individual standards and expectations of care and domestic labour that some participants tended to naturalise by justifying differences of practices of domestic labour with reference to inherent individual personality traits.

During their individual interviews, about half of the women and men – with slightly more women than men in the cases of couples in which individuals disagree – reported different quality standards of cleaning, tidying, childcare and paperwork than their partners in terms of what women and men expected the house to look like and their approach to childcare and intimacy. Most of these differences of standards resulted from women’s higher relative standards, with the exception of a few men who had higher relative standards. These different standards involved mental load and emotion work to bridge the gap between different expectations, as Sophie’s (main breadwinner) answer to the question “Would you say that you have similar standards in terms of cleaning, tidying, childcare, paperwork?” shows:

Sophie: “Cleaning, no, marginal differences. Tidying, yes.”

Sarah [researcher]: “To what extent?”

Sophie: “Like... if you come in at the end of the day and there’s a shoe rack, put your shoes in the rack. If there’s a place to put your coat away, put your coat away. V. isn’t always like that, especially if he goes grocery shopping, he leaves everything by the door open because he knows he’s going to come back. [...] I think with that has to do that if I’m the one who does the cleaning I want to know where everything is, so there’s a bit of unbalance here.”

Her partner, Alexander, considered that they have similar standards and that he “might compromise here and there just for the sake of being done quicker, but it is very rare”. This difference could at least be partly explained by men’s vision of domestic labour and what it takes to achieve the standards they have in mind. Claims from women I interviewed, such as “he just doesn’t notice” (Charlotte, sole breadwinner) and “he has no idea what’s in the fridge” (Nathalie, main breadwinner), illustrate how women tended to notice both the domestic labour that needs doing and that their male partners do not themselves notice. The tendency for men to be “oblivious [...] to what needs doing” (Emma, sole breadwinner) was acknowledged by some of them, as this dialogue between Charlotte (sole breadwinner) and her partner Lewis shows while completing their Household Portrait:

Lewis: “Vacuuming. It’s you

Charlotte: “Yeah, but that’s because we only have the stairs, and I’m the only one who notices that.”

Lewis: Yes, there’s a lot I don’t notice.”

Even in the cases of couples with similar quality standards, women tended to have higher levels of standards in terms of frequency and temporality of when the task should be done within a certain period of time, as Catherine (main female breadwinner) expressed:

I don’t know if it’s different standards, we both like living in a clean and tidy house so that’s kind of a shared expectation of our living space and we both take responsibility for that. I think I’m more likely to kind of think the bathroom needs cleaning probably weekly.

Recent research (Thébaud et al., 2019) helps in understanding the gap between similar quality standards and differentiated implementation of these standards, showing that women are held to higher standards of cleanliness by “moral judgements” to higher standards of cleanliness and are generally “deemed more responsible for housework than their male counterparts” (Thébaud et al., 2019, p. 1186)

Women and men tended to naturalise their differences of standards by pointing at individuals’ different but usually complementary personality traits. For Sophie (main breadwinner), doing domestic labour comes “much more intuitively”, but for her partner “that’s an effort. He has to positively think about doing that and I don’t, that comes quite naturally for me”. Understandings this through a lens of personality differences also had consequences in terms of mental load and emotion work, as Grace (main breadwinner) explained about the difference of standards and approaches to parenting in her household:

I also think that even if we’re both around, I get more sensitive. For example if Michael is under pressure to get to work on Monday morning, he’ll get cross with [the children] and that upsets me, I don’t like that so I’d much rather step in, make sure they’re ready than worry about it being even because I think it makes the house work better as a whole.

Several women were quick to describe themselves as ‘control freaks’ when talking about their higher relative standards, and a few women referred to their willingness to ‘keep control’. Laila (main breadwinner) considered she is in the position of being the planner and organiser of domestic labour in her household because she “is better at that but equally there must be an element of control in it that I know if I’m responsible for these things then I can control when they happen and they happen when I want and to the standard that I want and that sort of thing.”

A few women and men justified some differences of standards with arguments revolving around ‘innate’ sex-based differences as justifications for differentiated domestic labour roles. Daniel (partner of sole female breadwinner) argued that he doesn’t “even see dust” contrarily to his partner, because “I guess there’s definitely a fundamental male/female divide”. A few women associated their caring approach to motherhood and sometimes with ‘innate tendencies’, while others acknowledged the influence of gender roles on their own socialisation, like Catherine (main breadwinner) who explained her higher relative standards and contribution to cleaning and tidying partly by the fact that she has ‘been taught to do that and I think we learned different things along the way’.

The accounts of several women and men suggest some continuity in women’s behaviours and mindsets between home and at work. According to Graham (partner of main breadwinner), Laila generally organises most of the household because “that’s very much her domain... that’s how she lives her life, she has to live her life in a very structured and organised way. This is how she succeeds at work and she keeps this structure at home”.

A lot of women and men who explained their different standards and personalities directly pointed out that these differences were complementary within their household unit and family balance. Several participants argued that “it’s all about understanding [...] where

our relative strengths and weaknesses” (Prisha, sole breadwinner) in a partnership or ‘team’. The lack of men’s proactivity and initiative in the household was understood by both women and men as signs of ‘being more relaxed’ while several women linked the fact that they ‘are on top of it’ in the household to broader personality traits such as ‘being driven’, ‘determined’, ‘organised’.

Overall, the differentiated mental load and emotion work between women and men were influenced by gendered standards of domestic labour that tended to be understood by the participants as differences of personalities between individuals who are part of a ‘team’ (as described by the ‘team’ rhetoric presented in Chapter 4).

B. Socialisation and knowledge behind gendered standards

Differences of standards and personalities do not exist in a vacuum. While Thébaud et al. (2019) highlight the importance of “gendered judgements and expectations” from other people in understanding how “housework is assigned and interpreted” (Thébaud et al., 2019, p. 1207), effects of traditional gender roles in early socialisation seems to be particularly important in shaping women’s and men’s knowledge of domestic labour. Indeed, the greater involvement of women in domestic labour during their childhood means that they had more personal experiences in the household which provided them knowledge about domestic labour. These differences in knowledge can explain differences in standards between women and men.

Participants’ answers to the question “did you contribute to housework when you were at child/teenager?” during their individual interviews show that, overall, both women and men had some experiences in domestic labour during their primary socialisation but that women’s contribution as children and teenagers tended to be more frequent than their male

partners. While men who had contributed to housework in their childhood reported doing ‘what they were told to do’, a significant number of the female participants reported both doing what they were told to and learning to proactively contribute in order to help their mothers. Moreover, women had generally been socialised into doing a greater share of domestic labour as children when compared to the experiences of their male partners, echoing findings from the literature (Cogle & Tasker, 1982; Mullan, 2019; Wikle, 2014). As they grew older, women had therefore accumulated more knowledge about domestic labour tasks than their partners.

This early gendered socialisation around domestic labour may persist in adulthood. Concerning younger participants, some men had been living in their parents’ household prior to moving in with their female partner, often benefitting from their mother’s domestic labour and thereby more comfort in their lifestyle than if they had been living alone, which would require learning domestic labour tasks by themselves – as some male participants with this experience reported during their individual interviews. As Catherine (main breadwinner) explained, her experience of living alone for a few years greatly impacted the way she thinks of domestic labour, her partner’s limited autonomous experience in this type of labour creating a gap in knowledge between them:

Naturally I think I’m more organised so stuff like sorting out a folder for us to put all our stuff in, I was the one that sorted that out and I think I set the spreadsheet. Yeah I think that’s also related to the fact that I haven’t lived at home since I was 18, so for 8 years, whereas Leo went to university then went travelling for a bit but lived at home sometimes then and when he came back, so I guess my experience of paying bills and sharing a household with other people was more recent than Leo’s because he’d been living at his mum’s.

On the other hand, men who had been living on their own for a while presented as more aware of the work that needs to be done in the house, as Diane (main breadwinner) explained:

He's pretty good actually to be fair at taking the initiative. Like he's been off today so there'll be things that I've not said to do that he's done. He's lived on his own a long time before me so I think he's used it himself. I think it would have been different if we had started the relationship straightaway after living with his family but yeah he's always been self-sufficient.

Gendered socialisation around domestic labour also provided a basis for the different preferences for the tasks of domestic labour between women and men. Most participants referred to their enjoyment of a task as a justification for the way they 'share things', as Lewis (partner of sole female breadwinner) said: "I think it is actually helpful sometimes to have things which someone does. And there are also things that people just enjoy doing, and therefore great you know, let them, so much the better".

The difference of preferences and priorities led to a difference in standards as Arthur (partner of sole female breadwinner) described:

There are certain things either I don't necessarily like doing or I prioritise others so I mean that's why stuff on the kitchen side, I don't mind leaving it until it piles up, until it's worthwhile doing, whereas Amber, if there's two dishes on there, she can't stand it therefore she'll wash them up anyway, but that's just a difference in how we are.

These differences in preferences and standards also resulted in differences of skills, as Elaine (main breadwinner) explained:

We're both responsible so we both try and do our bit but obviously John has skills that I don't have and vice versa. Like baking, he never baked a cake in his life, he doesn't wish to learn and I quite enjoy doing it so I do it. So that's the nature of our interests more than anything and if he doesn't want to then I don't want him to either and I do it.

These differences in preferences, standards, knowledge, and skills that both predated the relationship and were reinforced during the relationship, influenced the negotiation over the division of domestic labour. Female participants generally tended to have more tasks which they reported enjoying and, reported being less reluctant to do tasks they dislike when compared with their partners. These tendencies, coupled with higher overall

standards, knowledge, and skills in domestic labour relative to their partners, resulted in a bias towards women being more involved in domestic labour than their partners.

The differentiated knowledge between women and men often disadvantaged women in negotiation over the division of domestic labour, especially concerning the tasks of domestic labour that are not “the big, clear, discrete tasks, which are quite easily defined, the named tasks” (Charlotte, sole breadwinner). The continuous yet unnamed tasks with no name usually “just fall into place” (Charlotte), most commonly falling within women’s responsibility. Practical knowledge of such tasks could sometimes be difficult for the men to acquire. Owen (partner of main breadwinner) described one such task:

The concept of packing and preparing for things is something that is learnt by experience and I think the simple fact of the matter is that I’ve had less time having to prepare those things, do things like packing and preparing for things. Eva just knows exactly what needs to be done, exactly sort of what we need, things like that.

The transmission of this knowledge between partners is made all the more difficult because when women were, through experience, more efficient at doing a given task than their male partner, and thus did not always feel that they could teach their partner how to do it since they would then have to manage his emotions and reactions to failure. Eva (main breadwinner) explained that when she “gets involved” in what her partner does when the outcome is subpar (beneath both what could be considered basic standards and her own standards), and when she says “oh so you know, you need to do it this way”, she feels she is “being over-meddling [...] and that probably is sometimes very annoying [for him]”.

Another barrier to the transmission of knowledge was the reluctance and inertia of male participants in actively learning how to do a task, and thinking of tasks of domestic labour as shown in Susan’s (main breadwinner) response:

Well last time was the “I don’t know how to use the washing machine” about doing the laundry. And you know, he said it with a slightly postmodern smirk, so he knew he was being rubbish and was being slightly ironic about it and we both kind of

laughed and it's not worth an argument. But you know, he knows it's unfair and he probably knows I will come back to it.

In this case, the male partner's apparent lack of knowledge of the way the washing machine works both stemmed from and reinforced the trajectory in which Susan found herself: his lack of initial knowledge was entrenched over time because of a certain inertia and reluctance to consider domestic labour as something he is also responsible for.

In the face of men's inertia, women's knowledge was a factor in their greater long-term contribution to domestic labour, while men's lack of this knowledge enabled them to consciously or unconsciously avoid some tasks permanently.

III. When women's attempts to share domestic labour: adapting to men's emotions

The details of the mechanisms underlying the emergence of mental load and emotion work in a given household shows that these processes were intricately entwined with gendered standards. I showed in section II above how participants proposed personality traits as an explanation different approaches of domestic labour among women and men. However, I argue that the individual focus on personality to explain the gendered division of domestic labour needs to be understood in the context of early socialisation in gender roles. This contributes to differentiated knowledge, preferences and skills, as well as the difficulties women faced when trying to share domestic labour with their male partners. Indeed, women's attempts to delegate a task or involve their partner in the household usually led to an increase of mental load and emotion work (sub-section A below), and involved some adaptation to men's emotions (sub-section B).

A. Men's inertia and women's attempts to change

Women who reported a certain willingness to 'control' what is going on in the house also discussed their experiences of trying to share some tasks of domestic labour with their partners. While one directly referenced her "own silly standards" (Amber, sole breadwinner), others like Laila (main breadwinner) acknowledged a certain difficulty in fully trusting their partner in the execution of a task.

Sarah [researcher]: "And is it [the "sense of control" she wants to keep] related to previous experiences when you let him be in charge?"

Laila: "It's probably a mixture of my personality and the fact that he's not great at remembering things so there have been times in the past where I've left something to him to do and it hasn't happened and I've been unhappy about that outcome so I've said to myself "ok next time I'm doing it then I'll know I'll be happy with it."

Her statement echoes her partner's own acknowledgment of his "memory problems": "But yeah, if it wasn't for her reminding me, I don't know if I'd get better at remembering or if nothing would get done" (Graham). Efforts to tackle an imbalance meant taking the risk that the task will not get done – and therefore ultimately having to do the task oneself, and to face potential consequences of the delay.

Women's mental load and emotion work may also be intensified when there was a shift in terms of gender roles at home. On occasions where men withdrew from the labour market, female and male participants alike reported experiencing at least a temporary phase where women did even more domestic labour because, in addition to the mental process and communication efforts with their partner to share more tasks, they also ended up having to do the task themselves when men failed to do a task, or failed to meet the standard their partner considered appropriate.

Karen (sole breadwinner), who swapped paid and unpaid labour roles with her now stay-at-home partner a few years ago, described the extra work she had to do for "several

months” when she returned to the labour market whilst her partner became the primary carer at home:

I think it took a few months to get it sorted out and working out what our roles were [...] and it took him a while to sort of understand and he did the basics [...] but he wouldn't be thinking “I need to sort the window cleaner out, I need to get this done, I need to book the birthday party venue in three month time because it's gonna get all booked up” that sort of thing, he couldn't really think around it so there was a lot of prompting at the beginning. So, it wouldn't be unusual for me to text him saying “don't forget to pick the children up” or set an alarm.

Owen (partner of main breadwinner), who at the time of the interview recently began involved parenting at home, acknowledged that “there will have to be a learning process” and “a backward step when it comes to needing to be reminded about things”, but that he and his female partner were enthusiastic about it being a temporary phase. While Karen (sole breadwinner) pointed out that her male partner did improve his contribution to domestic labour over time, she also explained that the main solution to this “temporary” gap and increase of mental load and emotion work was to herself organise the hiring of a cleaner— a solution all but few couples resorted as a way to handle tension and conflict around domestic labour, as I discuss in Chapter 6.

A strong majority of couples and individual women (20 out of 33 households) reported using technology to organise their housework and childcare. In every case, the idea came from women, who also ultimately became the ones organising and updating the family timetable.

Table 5.3: Examples of technology used to reduce the mental load, sorted by types

<i>Type of technology</i>	<i>Description provided by the participant</i>
Shared ‘Google calendar’	“We have a shared Google calendar so I’ll sort of put things in there and sort of keep track of whether they’re happening or not” (Eva, main breadwinner)

<p>'PickNick' (mobile phone application)</p>	<p>"it's an app on our phones and we have it and my mum has it and Jack's mum has it as well. And so you can do lists on there and tasks and we use it as a calendar and you can tag people in. So if I need him to pick the girls up, it pops up as a reminder." (Sophia, main breadwinner)</p>
<p>Paper timetable on the fridge</p>	<p>"I think when I was doing sort of full-time parenting, I had one up there, not as detailed as this. So, Daniel does this one and it often takes a little while into the term for all the information to come in. [...] And when he doesn't do it then I sort of do it" (Karen, sole breadwinner)</p>
<p>Chalk board on the fridge</p>	<p>"We got a chalk board for these things but I would say that I know what's on it so I know what I need to get whereas he doesn't know that." (Laila, main breadwinner)</p>

Resorting to technologies however was often not fully satisfactory for the women. As Sophia (main breadwinner) explained, the application she had her partner download after he forgot to pick up their daughters from school was only adding another step to the mental burden in planning and executing a task:

If I need him to pick the girls up, it pops up as a reminder. He needs reminding to put stuff in. He's awful at letting me know that he's got a parents' evening or something like that. So I will add something on 'PickNick' and he'll see it on his phone and he'll say "oh but I've got parents' evening that night" and it's not on his phone.

Overall, the mental load easily becomes a burden that women rarely managed to share with their partners. When they did find strategies to reduce this invisible process, usually the mental load shifted only from 'planning a task' to "planning the planning of a task" (Gemma, main breadwinner), instead of solving men's inertia concerning proactivity about domestic labour.

B. Women adapting to men's emotions about domestic labour

While several men acknowledged their "lack of memory" (Daniel, partner of sole breadwinner) and difficulties in anticipating family needs and the planning they require, only a few of them explicitly said during their individual interview that it was something they would like to change. Harry (partner of main breadwinner) wishes he was "in the position where we could put more of think-y things on my side, [...] it's just I'm not very good at it". On the other hand, several men seemed to become quite defensive when their female partner ask them to do a task, as Daniel (partner of sole female breadwinner) acknowledges: "I have become quite defensive over this topic [domestic labour] in the past".

Men's defensiveness sometimes explained why some women developed a fear of "being a nag", as Amber (sole breadwinner) said: "I think housework reminders just annoy him, so that's why we have Margarita [the cleaner]. So yeah sometimes I'll ask him to do stuff but I don't nag him too much. I think he doesn't like it."

Some of women's efforts to consider their partner's feelings about domestic labour can be found in the way some couples were interacting while making their Household Portraits during the joint interview. A few men expressed anxiety or disappointment at the sight of their columns. In such cases, female partners usually tried to find ways to reassure them, as this dialogue shows:

Alexander: "I haven't got anything in my column yet." [sighs]

Sophie: "You'll come to that don't worry, I know you do stuff."

When trying to get their partners do more domestic labour, in their individual interview several women described how they opt for a reassuring and non-confrontational communication style. It appeared to be important that this style was centred around soothing their partners' negative emotional reactions such as defensiveness, by going to great lengths to make their partner understand they are not personally attacking them, but simply trying to help or communicate that a task needs to get done. Kirsty (sole breadwinner) explained that she does not remind her partner to do some domestic labour tasks because:

We don't really work like that. I don't really like to communicate in that way, because I think it comes across as a naggy thing and it makes it sound like a chore and then that person is less likely to do what you want them to do, when you go at it from that angle.

She thought "there's a bit less trust from his side" because her partner Alan had "ongoing issue of feeling used in some way, historical stuff of feeling like taken advantage of, so I'm quite sensitive [...] and sometimes I think I'm doing too much when I'm not".

In some situations, women ultimately did the task themselves and stopped expecting their partner to contribute. For Laila (main breadwinner), it is easier to "get necessary things out of the way" than communicating with her partner to make him do some tasks because "I sometimes feel I'm always moaning because I have to remind him all these things and none of them are really exciting". In situations where women persisted in trying to get their

partners to do the tasks they are responsible for, there were some elements of care for men's feelings and efforts to take their emotional reactions into account. Kirsty (sole breadwinner) said that she doesn't remind her partner and instead is:

[...] more inclined to kind of say like with the cleaning for example, "right so on Sunday you're still ok to do a cleaning with me" kind of like that, where it's about both of us doing it, and then if he says he can't, I'm usually a bit of a martyr, I'll carry on, do it. So there's no kind of "have you washed the dishes?", not from me.

She dealt with her partner's defensiveness and fear of being used by making the task a shared one. Gemma's (main breadwinner) way to deal with her partner's emotions and reactions is to consider the best moment to bring up the topic, as she explained: "I think we would talk about anything, you just need to choose your time you know. There are some times when it's obviously mad to talk about certain things, when one person is particularly stressed about something you know". Women who made these accommodations often ended up finding themselves responsible for constantly adapting to their male partner's emotions.

Conclusion

Mental load and emotion work are emotional and cognitive processes embedded in the domestic roles participants took on: women as managers and carers of the emotional sphere, and men as helpers. Because they exist largely independently from an explicit agreement between women and men, these roles can be analysed as tacit parts of the female breadwinning marital contract found between women and men in these households. The mechanisms underlying the emergence of the mental load and emotion work were rooted in gendered standards, personalities, and men's resulting inertia towards domestic labour. While of the mental load and emotion work were rarely expressed as labour but instead as expressions of personality traits, women's attempts to involve their male partners in

domestic labour and to reduce their own mental load and emotion work were often faced with resistance and inertia. Some women ended up having to constantly micromanage emotions in the household, and more acutely, their own reactions to men's emotions. Findings presented in this chapter deepen current sociological understanding of the mental load and emotion work by showing that they are relational, i.e. women's mental load and emotion work emerge in relation to their partners' lack of involvement in managing the household and care in the emotional sphere, and negatively impact women's power in negotiating the division of domestic labour in a way that would bring change and reduce their burden of unpaid work. Within such a dynamic, mental load and emotion work are also processes that prevent change in the asymmetry of roles found in the marital contract of couples I interviewed. In the next chapter, I further explore in the next chapter the ways in which women and men I interviewed negotiated change (and lack of thereof), and how the asymmetrical roles of women and men shaped their power in negotiating the division of domestic labour.

Chapter 6. The influence of marital conversations and conflicts on change: women's and men's power in negotiating domestic labour in a diversity of female breadwinning situations.

After showing a fixed cross-sectional picture of the participants' current division of domestic labour (Chapter 4) and introducing elements of time and change in the emergence of women's emotion work and mental load (Chapter 5), in this chapter I delve further into the theme of change to analyse how the division of domestic labour evolved over time among my participants, based on their individual interviews. To shed light on this process, the current chapter has four aims: examining the conditions of change (1), investigating the scope and negotiability of such change (2), and detailing conditions of its failure (3), and finally, assessing how some processes underlying change varied between diverse situations of female breadwinning (4). This chapter contributes to the literature on change and domestic labour by providing detailed qualitative empirical findings and theoretical insights on how change takes place.

The question of change in the division of domestic labour was deeply intertwined with the state of women's and men's power when negotiating the household roles, tasks, and the responsibilities each partner took on, which all deeply influenced the type of marital contract I observe between the women and men I interviewed. Discussions, tensions, conflicts, and the strategies to solve them are all processes that spotlight the power imbalances between women and men at home. Drawing from Komter's (1989) understanding of power in the household (explained in Chapter 1), I look into women's and men's differentiated and multi-layered power dynamics concerning changing the division of domestic labour. The issue of power when negotiating change can be understood in the following manner: the power to name and define desirable change for oneself, the power to voice desire for change, the power to trigger and implement change, the power to avoid

change, and the power to symbolically and/or materially benefit from either change or status quo. I understand change from an endogenous perspective, i.e. how it is negotiated between women and men in the household. Such an understanding therefore excludes a reduction of an individual's load of domestic labour when it is enabled by external resources such as a cleaner or childcare services. In the data I collected, the reduction of an individual's load of domestic labour through the hiring of such services was reported in many households, but as section II below details, such outsourcing is a consequence of an impasse concerning change between women and men.

The present chapter addresses the following question: how do women and men negotiate change in their division of domestic labour? I first examine the conditions of successful change by investigating the role of new circumstances affecting the management of time and different needs within the household as well as the role of marital conversations and conflicts (section I below). I then focus on how the failure to negotiate change was dealt with through external and internal processes (section II). Finally, I argue that change is a process that was negotiated and negotiable within some boundaries that limited its scope and that sometimes became a barrier to the processes of naming, demanding, and implementing real change towards more equality within the household (section III).

I. Marital conversations, conflicts, and change in the division of domestic labour: examining the evolution towards more equality and its conditions

In this section, I demonstrate that an important condition for successful change towards greater equality was the emergence of new circumstances which have consequences for the household and that were made explicit through marital conversations (as introduced in Chapter 1). I first provide further details on how couples navigated two main new circumstances: women's increasing relative time constraints due to paid work, and the

arrival of children (sub-section A below), before developing the role and content of open marital conversations in enabling successful change (sub-section B). I also detail the processes and outcomes of conflicts on change (sub-section C).

A. New circumstances bringing successful change: women's increasing time constraints and the arrival of children

In this sub-section, I argue that an important condition for successful change in my participants' division of domestic labour was the emergence of new circumstances that change the household's time constraints and needs, such as women's increasing time constraints due to paid work and the arrival of children.

Women's increasing time constraints due to paid work directly influenced their time availability for domestic labour. Although most women I interviewed had always been the main breadwinners of their current relationship, several of them have increased their involvement in paid work through promotions, new projects, or new jobs that had led to lengthening their paid working hours inside and outside the office. As a result, adjustments regarding their involvement in domestic labour at home had to be made. Explaining the evolution of the division of domestic labour in her household from lesser to greater equality, Zarifah (main breadwinner) stated:

In the first years of our relationship, when we lived together, I used to do more cooking and I used to do more tidying up. But as I got more responsibility at work I had to work until 9 or 10 at night and occasionally at the weekend. So then he started picking up more of the cooking and the tidying up

In this context daily and repetitive household tasks were usually transferred from women to men, such as those described by Gemma (main breadwinner), who had began to be outside the house from 7 a.m. to 7 p.m. to manage her business several years ago. She

reported that her partner took on washing clothes and hoovering as a result of her new work schedule.

The arrival of children also greatly changed the household's needs and created new tasks and responsibilities. Although these new circumstances tended to involve an increase of inequality between women and men in the general population (Bianchi et al., 2000; Gershuny & Sullivan, 2003), and in several couples I interviewed, several couples used this opportunity to adjust their division of domestic labour. These new circumstances often gave women power in the division of domestic labour, since they triggered thoughts and desire for change for themselves. The arrival of a baby in the household involved several steps that were directly linked with domestic labour tasks and responsibilities. In the first instance, pregnancy – and especially the later stages – often resulted in reduced energy for domestic tasks. For some women like Isobel (main breadwinner), this highlighted how much she had been doing in the home: “when I was pregnant [...] it actually started to become really obvious how much I did because I stopped doing some tasks”. As a result, some tasks, such as cleaning the balcony, were transferred to her partner immediately following childbirth.

This continued for the following months as Isobel, like many women, focused on the new baby: “when I was on maternity leave, I actually did less cooking dinner because my priority was doing more with the boys, obviously when they're little and they're breastfeeding you're just so tired all the time”. Some men took paternity leave, which redistributed some of the household tasks and responsibilities, as Charlotte (sole breadwinner) described: “the childcare aspect has gone from one parent to the other. So that is his job and with it goes some other things that have to do with the house”. Her partner Lewis, discussed how the greatest change in the division of labour in the household was directly linked with the arrival of their baby, which brought “a whole set of extra tasks and

other more demanding tasks like tidying because she created mess, and there's also a lot more washing going on".

Change after the arrival of children was sometimes a manifestation of an explicit commitment to equal parenting, but also tended to be a necessity in a context where pregnancy, childbirth, and its aftermath puts pressure on women who simply could not maintain the same quantity of domestic labour as before, at least temporarily. In a few cases, childbirth affected women's health to such a degree that, as Jackie (main breadwinner) who experienced post-natal depression explained, her partner James had to become a stay-at-home father because "the lifestyle changed for myself when we had our first child, the impact of it was just huge".

New circumstances changed the couples' existing division of domestic labour by redistributing some tasks from women to men. Such change may take place organically and spontaneously, either because the woman simply stopped doing some tasks and/or because the man simply took on new tasks without much discussion involved. However, as I show in sub-section B, I find that the most successful and durable change in the division of domestic labour took place with open marital conversations.

B. The role of open marital conversations in bringing about successful change

In this sub-section, I examine the form and content of open marital conversations (as mentioned in Chapter 1), demonstrating their crucial role in bringing about successful change towards a more equal division of domestic labour. I understand open marital conversations as expressions of women's power to voice and implement change (Benjamin & Sullivan, 1996). I also analyse women's and men's differentiated positions in these conversations and argue that their efficiency largely depended on women taking on the role

of carers of the emotional sphere (as described in Chapter 5). In this sense, women's power to voice and implement change remained limited and conditioned to specific approaches and behaviours.

In the case of the new circumstances described above, marital conversations played a crucial role in establishing successful change in the division of domestic labour. Jane (main breadwinner), who went on maternity leave after the birth of her two children, recognised that the way her partner and her divided domestic labour at the time of the interview was partly influenced by explicit discussions:

Both times I went back to work we talked about the allocation of responsibilities and how we should split to make it work and so I would say Harry picks up more household stuff since. It was a 'this is how we're gonna make our life work' kind of discussion.

Her partner, Harry also took paternity leave after their second child and described how a "structured discussion" was necessary in adapting to new circumstances and domestic roles:

When Jane was off work for 6 months for the children and she went back to work, I was 6 months off with the children after that and so you kind of flip role so you need to have those discussions about what needs to be done and stuff. And then, when I went back to work, we kind of became conscious about 'ok we need to think about', when I was off with the children it was easy to go to the shop and buy food for a couple of days at a time but when we're both working we need to have a plan of how we're doing our shopping so we had a structured discussion about 'ok when are we going to do our online shopping order, who's gonna take responsibility for them?'

Independently from the emergence of new circumstances, women (and a few men) initiated open marital conversations to express their willingness to change some of the division of domestic labour. The type of change that was discussed depended on the quantity of domestic labour performed by each partner and their standards. Catherine (main breadwinner) talked about how she had several discussions with her partner about cleaning the bathroom at least once a week:

I think we have always been very honest about talking about stuff so I think it just took me to say “this is my reflection of us living together and what I think I’m doing and what you’re perhaps not seeing”, because obviously he’s not in my head so I don’t know, then it was immediately “yeah ok I’ll do that”

One discussion was however not always enough, even when both women and men agreed to implement change. In this case, open marital conversations had to be followed up by reminders, usually contributing to the women’s mental load (as described in Chapter 5).

Communication in open marital conversations tended to uphold women’s role as carers of the emotional sphere. In the previous quote, Catherine carefully chose her words to avoid an accusatory tone towards her partner. She used a benevolent and understanding approach to her partner’s lack of involvement by saying that he “perhaps” does not “see” what she does in the household. Such approaches in the way women navigated open marital conversations regularly came up in my interviews. Benevolence – based on empathetic thinking and positive assumptions about their partners’ actions – was part of a non-confrontational type of communication and it emerged out of women’s own understanding of the reason why their partner did relatively less domestic labour. Sophie (main breadwinner) described how early on in the relationship her partner Alexander was hardly involved in domestic labour, meaning that she had to:

[...] get him to understand that my working day was as exhausting and as demanding as his working day, and that at the end of my working day, I came home to a different job but for him there wasn’t a different job.

In order to navigate this situation, she developed an explanation of his lack of involvement based on “his upbringing” and early cultural environment that she considered different to her, since he grew up in a communist Eastern European country where he:

[...] could not develop an interest in home maintenance because he didn’t have the tools for that because you couldn’t go to a home supermarket and buy the tools you needed, and learn the skills you needed and I had to recognise that this was a completely new world for him.

For marital conversations and change to emerge, she thought that she “had to move much closer to understanding that if you don’t know that, you can’t acknowledge it”. Her partner Alexander, like several other men I interviewed, did not realise or acknowledge the efforts she spent both in reaching such an understanding, and into marital conversations to find the “right balance” (Sophie) at home, because for him, the daily division of domestic labour “just happens and you get along with it”.

In some cases, women’s and men’s positions in marital conversations were equal. Mary (sole breadwinner) thought that she has a “grown-up relationship” with her partner and described it with the following words:

I think grown-up is a good way to describe it [...] We’re just grown-up enough to understand each of our triggers and we very rarely argue. [...] We know when we’ve crossed a boundary and we’ll pull back on that and so we’ll apologise. And it’s much more of a productive relationship. We’re not in competition, we’ve said it before, we’re a team.

Mutual understanding, collective thinking, readiness to challenge oneself and to apologise, and respect for personal boundaries were very important elements of the marital conversations that involved equal efforts from both women and men. However, even in these cases, women had to make explicit efforts to have their boundaries respected. Mary acknowledged that the “grown-up relationship” she was describing was initially quite different: “I’m his second wife and when we first got together, there were a couple of behaviours where he’d be quite bossy and angry, like we would have arguments quite often. So yeah, it’s not always been like that”.

Open marital conversations played a crucial role in bringing successful change in the household, but they tended to reinforce women’s role as carers of the emotional sphere. This type of approach and behaviour therefore both conditioned and limited the scope of women’s power in open marital conversations. Moreover, this approach did not guarantee

an absence of conflict. Far from being exempt from conflict, the lines between open marital conversations and situations of conflict were often blurred, as I demonstrate in the subsection C.

C. When conflict works and doesn't: conflict processes and outcomes

Most couples I interviewed had experienced conflicts at some point. These conflicts were either based on disagreements about inequality in the division of domestic labour or, as I mention in the next chapter, on finances, lifestyle, and career trajectories. In this subsection, I focus on conflict processes and outcomes by detailing how conflicts arose, as well as how women and men handled disputes over the division of domestic labour and change.

Conflicts over the division of domestic labour typically arose either when women felt a need for a more equal division or when men wanted to reduce their involvement in domestic labour. However, the majority of conflicts reported by participants were borne of the former situation. The way in which the individual who wanted a change demanded it, and the way the partner reacted both played a role in the emergence of conflicts. Failure to engage in fully open marital conversations acted as a catalyst in these conflicts. I argue that in these circumstances, conflicts can be understood as emerging from a power struggle between women who have the power to name and define desirable change for themselves and men who have the power to symbolically and materially benefit from the status quo.

Conflicts easily emerged when open marital conversations about change in the division of domestic labour were not possible or made possible. In this case, several women I interviewed had named and defined desirable change for themselves but did not have the power – or do not feel they have the power – to efficiently voice and implement change. In this case, most conflicts remained latent, i.e. they were mostly implicit, but they were

visible in the way women and men communicated with each other and in the way they subjectively experienced what they saw as a problem. Morgan (main breadwinner), would like her husband to do a larger share of domestic tasks and gets “frustrated” that her partner does not “see what needs to be done in the house”. She described how her partner often plays with the children while she does all the “chores”, admitting that she had not and would not discuss it with him because “it’s really difficult” since he previously told her that he “feels as though he does a lot” compared to other fathers. Some conflicts that took place from a lack of open marital conversations oscillated between being overt and latent. Philip (partner of sole breadwinner), who acknowledged that he sometimes has arguments with his partner over his involvement in housework, described how he is “very sensitive” to her “criticisms”. When asked about how these arguments are solved, he replied:

We don’t talk things through because there’s nothing to talk through. It’s not like we have a major relationship disaster and we need counselling. It’s almost like “well you put the dishes in the dishwasher the wrong way around”, it’s that petty, that for some reason get blown out of proportion.

In Philip’s case, the rationale for eschewing an open marital conversation in this situation is that “it’s that petty” because it only concerns housework, which for him is not a sign that he and his partner have a “major relationship disaster”. For his partner, Anne (sole breadwinner), the rationale behind instigating an open marital conversation is that she noticed that he started to become “much more sensitive about that kind of thing” since he was made redundant the previous year. She therefore empathised with his situation and tried to avoid bringing up this topic too explicitly, which made her stick to simple “remarks”. This tendency of women I interviewed to avoid open conversation due to the sensitivity of their unemployed male partners around criticism also emerged in a few other cases of sole female breadwinning couples, in which the man was made redundant and was involuntarily unemployed. In these cases, the unplanned and involuntary aspect of the female breadwinning situation played a role in the emergence of conflicts. But this aspect

was not a sufficient condition, as I have also found such patterns of conflict in some dual-earner female breadwinning couples.

A failure to engage in open marital conversations was not the only catalyst of conflict. Indeed, I find that in many cases, the boundary between open marital conversations and conflicts was unclear. During an open marital conversation, some ideas and thoughts can get lost in translation and mutual understanding is not always easy to reach. As Lewis (partner of sole breadwinner) pointed out: “there’s an ongoing thing about the forms of communication and the ways in which we say things and how that gets understood; I would say one thing and she would interpret it in a different way, or vice versa”

Conflicts could also arise from the beginning of an attempt to engage in an open marital conversation. In most cases, women’s attempts to start a discussion were met with defensiveness from their partner because they were often perceived as criticism from men, leading to conflict, as Karen (main breadwinner) case shows: “For me, if there’s a problem you gotta talk it through and sort it out, but Daniel gets quite cross about discussing it, I think because he thought it was a criticism of him”. Men sometimes considered such attempts as too blunt, which triggered defensiveness and conflict. Susan (main breadwinner) had made a list similar to the Household Portrait in the past, in order to open up a conversation on housework and childcare with her partner and make him realise what they were both doing around the flat. She reported that her partner, who did not take part in the study, “said it was really blunt and demotivating and asked what I expected him to do with it”. Her attempts to explain resulted in an argument in which “he will bring something up, like he’ll say I did this wrong so I’m worse than him...etcetera”. In these cases, women had the power to voice change, but men’s power to protect the status quo prevented change from taking place.

Successful open marital conversations were not the only catalyst for change towards a more equal division of domestic labour. In a few cases, conflicts themselves had a positive outcome (Kluwer et al., 1997), i.e. change ended up taking place. Positive outcomes were usually accompanied by communication aimed at solving the conflict; in other words, an open marital conversation. Explaining how conflicts over miscommunication get solved, Lewis (partner of sole breadwinner) said:

We talk, and occasionally we shout... But often we get the escalation up and the de-escalation down. And we do that relatively quickly, so very often it will be, you know, trying to explain the different ways, what we think and what we feel, and we have non-violent conflict resolution techniques that is a lot of “well this is how I understand what you say and this is what I want to happen”.

In addition to “non-violent conflict resolution techniques” and communication about each other’s feelings, conflicts with positive outcome also depended on an equal involvement in and commitment to finding a solution from both partners, even though women tended to be more proactive in getting their partner to realise that a solution has to be found. As Lewis describes: “Charlotte is the one who will raise it and who will push it, but we will be equally involved in trying to solve the problem because you don’t really solve until everyone feels that they’ve been listened to”.

However, most situations of conflicts had a negative outcome (Kluwer et al., 1997), i.e. change did not take place. This was because conflicts were primarily a manifestation of the failure of change due to men’s resistance to increasing their share of domestic labour. In the next section, I discuss how women deal with negative conflict outcomes.

II. The failure to negotiate change: women dealing with negative conflict outcomes

In this second section, I examine how women I interviewed dealt with the impossibility of change when there are conflicts and tensions over the division of domestic labour. I argue

that when the power dynamics between women and their male partners in this situation were such that the women could voice desirable change for themselves but could not effectively implement it, women typically had two options that were often complementary: externalising the conflicts by hiring a cleaner (sub-section A below) or internalising the conflicts within themselves as a solitary method of dealing with them (sub-section B).

A. Externalising conflicts: hiring a cleaner

Latent and open conflicts over the division of domestic labour remained a permanent source of tension between women and men when they failed to find a solution, and were often externalised on the labour market through the hiring of a cleaner, usually a woman from a lower socio-economic (and often migrant) background (Demetriou, 2015; Lutz, 2016). At the time of the interviews, 15 couples were hiring a cleaner, 11 couples either had hired a cleaner in the past and/or were seriously considering hiring a cleaner in the future, and only 6 couples had never hired a cleaner and did not intend to. In this sub-section, I analyse this strategy of outsourcing as being primarily a result of women's willingness to ease the simultaneous pressures of paid work and domestic labour, as well as solving conflicts with their partners where endogenous change was either not possible, or not possible without conflict due to the power dynamics within the couple. In these dynamics, women did not have the power to implement change, but their higher relative income gave them some power to limit the inequality in the status quo of their relationship.

Failure to negotiate change in the division of domestic labour ultimately boiled down to the failure to increase men's contribution to domestic labour in order to alleviate women's contribution. For most couples I interviewed, hiring a cleaner then came as a way to stop or to avoid conflict. This strategy alleviated the women's load while entrenching a failure to increase men's load as Isobel's (main breadwinner) description of the process that led her to hire a cleaner illustrates:

I was hoping that he would do more housework than he does [...] So I just decided that I wasn't gonna fight with him, cause I used to come back from work and say "I can't believe you've done nothing, you've just been in the gym all day it's ridiculous" and I was like he's not gonna change so I can get really cross or just put 20 quid to have someone come and do it.

Sometimes, hiring a cleaner prevented the relationship from ending, as in Nathalie's (main breadwinner) case when she and her partner had many arguments about domestic labour at the beginning of their cohabitation more than ten years ago:

So, at that point we decided that it was either break up, because we were having so many rows about it, or resolve it and get a cleaner. And it did resolve a lot of our issues, the cleaner would come in on a Thursday and so it'd be cleaner and tidier for him to come home on Friday, and it was nice for both of us to have a nice and clean house in the weekend

Couples regularly outsourced similar tasks: general cleaning of the house (cleaning the bathroom and toilets, cleaning the kitchen, mopping, hoovering, dusting) and in some cases, taking out the bins, ironing, changing beds and cleaning clothes. These tasks were more often done by women, but a few of them were also done by men or shared equally. The frequency of the cleaner varied from less than five hours a year in the case of a couple without children who hire a cleaner only when they return from holidays, to four hours a week in the case of a couple with one child who are both working full-time. In most households, the cleaner came one to two hours a week. In every case of couples hiring a cleaner, women brought the discussion to their partners. In the vast majority of households (24/26), women were also the ones organising and paying the cleaner.

Most men enthusiastically agreed to hire a cleaner and the decision tended to be joint, but some were initially reluctant while others disagreed, meaning that no cleaner was hired. In these cases, I argue that there were elements of men's gatekeeping at play. Men who were initially reluctant but ultimately agreed to hire a cleaner underestimated their partner's "need for help" in domestic labour, as Amber (sole breadwinner) explained: "when I told him about getting a cleaner, Arthur kind of thought 'oh it's ok, we, *we* [she stresses the

word] can cope' but it's me doing most of the cleaning. And I just said 'no, I'm organising it', so I organised it'. These initially reluctant men ended up agreeing with their partners when they realised that the only alternate solution to the conflict was for them to become more involved. This can be seen in Isobel's description of her partner's reaction to the idea of hiring a cleaner:

He was a bit funny about it and he's basically said something along the lines of "if you want to" and he's refused to engage with it as being a mutual decision, I think so he can hold the power to tell me if he thinks it's not working. [...] But you know, I've talked about it a few times and said it's fine if he's not happy with it, but that he'll need to do a bit more around the house cause that's why I'm doing this. He said he wasn't really happy having to step up, and he quite likes coming home to a clean house.

Men's gatekeeping was particularly evident when they refused to hire a cleaner because they felt that being at home full-time or being relatively more available than their partners meant that they should be able to meet the family's needs without outside help as Daniel (partner of sole breadwinner) explained:

I'm quite dutiful I think in that I feel that there are responsibilities and roles and because I'm not working full-time, I just feel it's my responsibility to do stuff. So that's why I get a bit touchy when Karen come back and decides to dust or says, "have you dusted?" or "I'll do that ironing" or when she first started to talk about getting a cleaner.

In other cases, men refused to pay someone "to do something we can do ourselves" (John, partner of main breadwinner), in order to save money. These men tended to be in NS-SEC 2 and 3, and they all came from working-class families and backgrounds. This was also the justification given by a few women in NS-SEC 2 and 3 who never considered hiring a cleaner because "it comes under a budget" (Jackie, sole breadwiner). Externalising the tensions and conflicts through hiring a cleaner was therefore an option for female breadwinners, especially those coming from middle-class background and/or holding middle-class socio-economic positions in the labour market, because they could afford it and were comfortable with the idea of paying someone to save the little time outside paid

work they have. This can be understood as a strategy of ‘lesser evil’, which minimised the problem without making it disappear, that some female breadwinners could afford when they realised that their partners’ contribution will not increase.

B. Internalising the conflict within and against oneself: female breadwinners’ disempowerment in the household and its emotional costs

When conflicts could not be resolved, women also tended to internalise the conflict, bringing about additional negative outcomes. I discuss in this sub-section different types of internalising strategies women I interviewed implemented in this context.

First, some women minimised the tensions initially felt by creating a narrative the situation was not as bad as they initially thought to downplay some of their feelings, as Sophia’s (main breadwinner) reaction to a scene making more explicit the imbalance between her and her partner Jack shows:

I think it irritates me that sometimes he will sit down after putting girls to bed or like last night while I was putting the girls to bed he was just sat down in the bedroom and I think “couldn’t you be doing something?” cause I don’t like sitting down until it’s kind of tidy. But it’s rare that I think, actually no, it’s quite common but you know it’s not a massive, it’s just a frustration rather than we need to sit down and talk about this and overall it kind of evens out.

Sophia’s word on her own feelings of irritation oscillates between acknowledging these feelings and hesitating about their frequency – between “rare” and “quite common”. After this temporary hesitation, she decided to downplay her feelings and focuses on how housework “overall [...] evens out”. In fact, Sophia’s and Jack’s unequal contributions to domestic labour placed their household in Group B.

Resignation is another strategy of internalisation that women commonly used with respect to their partner’s inertia. In this context, after trying to voice and implement change in the household, women passively accepted that the status quo would remain, and as a result,

continued to do the tasks they initially wanted to delegate. Because the status quo remained despite voicing their need for change, they did not voice it again. This outcome was the most blatant manifestation of women's disempowerment. Karen (sole breadwinner) tried to communicate with her partner to share the laundry, washing up, and dusting but her partner Daniel did not ultimately implement any change. Explaining how she dealt with this status quo, she said that she "sometimes" can get "annoyed":

If there's a massive pile when I come back from work I just think "uh I shouldn't have to do this because I've been working all week and he's not working", but then I think "if it's not done, somebody has to do it and I don't mind doing it", and sometimes I think it's just easier to do it than to make it into an issue, so yeah I just do it.

Some internalising strategies seemed less disempowering for women than others. A few women, like Gemma (main breadwinner), reported handling these conflicts by lowering their standards, and therefore their time spent on some tasks, and had since felt relieved:

When I was on maternity leave and the kids were little, this house was basically spotless because I just cleaned it from top to bottom every weekend. And I look back now and I think "oh goodness what amount of time I've wasted cleaning a house that nobody appreciated". The children were tiny so they didn't care or didn't even notice, and it was all about me having a clean and tidy house but looking back I think I should have done some stuff that we enjoyed doing – go swimming or go cycling. I just spent hours and hours and yeah, my standards have changed, I care less about it.[...] I think there's more to life than cleaning the house, it took me a while to realise it that's all.

Gemma also said during the interview that since she had her own bathroom and refused to clean her partner's and sons' bathroom, theirs never gets cleaned. Both she and her partner "recognise that it [the partner's and the son's bathroom] is filthy", "and when you look at it you go like "this is like a house hazard", but he's not that bothered about it" and he "just doesn't clean it". Reducing the woman's standards of cleaning could therefore be a solution to some conflicts, but this also came with challenges around the definition of 'good standards' of domestic labour (Thébaud et al. 2019).

Refusing to do certain tasks was a strategy that a few women resorted to when they felt they had no other choice but to preserve their energy whilst also making the problem more visible to their partner. Susan (main breadwinner) explained that, following “tense conversations” around domestic labour with her partner, she decided to “refuse to cook for him [...] at the end of [her] maternity leave” after a conflict:

One day he had bought something as part of a meal I didn't want to eat, so I said I didn't want to eat that because I didn't like it and he was really unhappy that I wouldn't eat what he had planned for dinner in full. [...] He's not happy with that because he takes it personally. Then I realised that I'm the one who cooks almost all the time and whenever I cook for both of us, I'm eating things I don't want to eat because he eats a more limited range of food than I do. So I felt like “why should I carry on? But to this day he still asks me every day “are you cooking for me now?” you know...

Given the emotional costs women bore when using these strategies, I argue that these were ways of internalising the conflict within, and sometimes against, oneself. Latent conflicts involved a particularly high level of mental load and emotion work for women in their dynamic with their partners. These conflicts shaped a whole emotional dynamic in which women tended to internalise feelings of guilt and focus on their responsibility in their dissatisfaction: “I'm asking too much” (Anne, sole breadwinner), “I'm a control freak” (Amber, sole breadwinner), “my standards and expectations are the problem” (Fernanda, main breadwinner). This emotional burden for women emerged from a relational dynamic with their partners who often reacted in a way that increased the guilt and anxiety among women. Susan's decision to stop cooking for her partner has resulted in her partner asking her daily if she is going to cook for him. In circumstances of pressure from her partner, her decision was made more difficult to maintain over time, and therefore required further energy and emotional strength to sustain. Her partner's behaviour can also be understood as a way to maintain power for himself and over his partner's contribution of domestic labour. In this case, Susan's relative empowerment through her active refusal to do some

tasks was met with elements in her partner's reaction that directly threaten to disempower her in her attempt to change the status quo.

Negotiating change and dealing with the impossibility of change therefore appeared to result from complex dynamics of power between individual women and men.

III. The boundaries of the negotiability of change

The likelihood of change within the division of domestic labour depended on many elements within the couples themselves, but it also varied according to the type of change that was proposed. In this third section, I argue that not all change was negotiable because change took place within specific boundaries that prevented radical change from happening, but did allow incremental change (sub-section A below). Some of these boundaries, such as men's limited receptivity to their partner's demands for change (sub-section B) and women's limited sense of entitlement to a fairer division of domestic labour (sub-section C), acted as barriers because they prevented change from even being conceived at the individual level.

A. What scope of change is and is not negotiable?

Change (or lack of thereof) in the division of domestic labour must be understood within the context of the entrenched, pre-existing division of domestic labour. In their article on the different types of marital conversations and change, Sullivan and Benjamin, analyse what they call the "negotiability" (Benjamin & Sullivan, 1996, p. 239) of housework and relationship issues among heterosexual couples and draw broad categories of what is negotiable in the couples I interviewed. I apply this idea of negotiability of housework issues to my research, and more specifically to change, in order to understand the context

in which it takes place and the conditions that make it possible. I therefore use the idea of “the negotiability of change” to refer to the scope of change that can be negotiated by women and men within the broader context of a pre-existing division of domestic labour. This idea allows me to identify some boundaries that framed change and the agency of participants. I understand these boundaries as factors that limited or block the possibility to negotiate change, either because these factors made change difficult to imagine and identify or because they made change difficult to demand and implement. In this sub-section, I examine three main boundaries of change negotiability: the existing division of domestic labour itself, unavoidable tasks and responsibilities, and the unconscious processes and habits underlying the division of domestic labour. These boundaries made radical change (change of the trajectory of the division of domestic labour) impossible, but left space for incremental change within the trajectory of the existing division of domestic labour. They therefore tended to disempower women by limiting their agency to think of, voice, and implement radical change.

The existing division of domestic labour itself framed the extent to which change is negotiable and possible. Overall, my data suggests that the first months of cohabitation with a partner tended to increase the load of domestic labour of female breadwinners. Also, when couples started their life together with unequal domestic labour contributions, only a few tasks and responsibilities were transferred from women to men over time. Moreover, when I compare the occurrence of open marital conversations leading to actual change and the couples’ three categories of a ‘fixed’ division of domestic labour (as introduced in Chapter 4), I observe that open marital conversations leading to actual change were more likely to take place in Group A, i.e. among couples who were either equal or men were doing more than women, than in Groups B and C, i.e. couples who were unequal. The entrenched trajectory of the division of domestic labour that couples settled into also influenced the

domestic balance after the arrival of children. In my data, couples with children who managed to equally share childcare were already equal – especially in terms of housework tasks – before becoming parents. James (partner of sole breadwinner) thought the equality in domestic labour taking place with his partner was “an extension of” the fact that “before we had the children we used to do things together anyway”. On the other hand, in my data, within couples with children who were unequal before becoming parents the gap between women’s and men’s contributions tended to widen after the arrival of their first child.

A second boundary of change negotiability I observe stems from the fact that some tasks and responsibilities of domestic labour were unavoidable. In other words, it was (nearly) impossible to avoid or refuse doing such tasks because they pertain to basic human needs and/or childcare. The scope of negotiable change could be limited by the fact that if men did not actually implement change, it was difficult for women to simply stop doing some tasks. Some standards – such as cleaning the bathroom twice a week – may be lowered, but tasks around food preparation and basic household hygiene are primary needs. The option to simply stop doing certain tasks is also out of the question when the needs and survival of dependent members of the household such as children or pets are involved. Some women who talked about trying to achieve more equality in childcare referred to the difficulty of lowering their contribution in the face of their partners’ inertia. As Nathalie (main breadwinner) expressed: “you know sometimes when I get back home and see the house in a state I just want to go out for a walk, but then the children are not going to get fed”.

The third boundary of change negotiability that limited the scope of possible change was the fact that the division of domestic labour largely rested upon underlying mental processes and habits that tended to go unnoticed by both women and men. Such processes framed the long-term division of domestic labour. When asked the question “would you say that the way you share things is the result of an explicit reflection or just how it goes?”,

most women and men emphasised the role of “routine” in their daily division of domestic labour. These unconscious processes also explained why the division of domestic labour within couples persists over time, sometimes despite changes in paid labour and increasing family needs. When asked the question “has the way you share housework and childcare evolved over the years?”, most participants recognised both aspects that had varied and aspects that had never changed. The household of Jim (partner of sole breadwinner) went through many changes such as moving house, a change in employment, and the arrival of children. Jim said : “There’s some changes when Mary works but it’s mostly pretty similar. Some things changed within the life cycle of our relationship but yeah, not that much”.

The three aforementioned boundaries of the negotiability of change combined with other types of boundaries that acted as barriers in the sense that they actively prevented change from taking place. The main mechanisms I identify from the data pertain to how individual women and men thought of possible change and how they reacted to demands for change from their partner. These aspects were different for women and men, as I show in the next sub-sections.

B. Men reacting to demands for change: a case of limited receptivity

In this sub-section, I identify men’s inertia (described in Chapter 5) and defensiveness as two types of reactions that expressed a wider mechanism blocking change: men’s limited receptivity to demands for change from their partners. I also analyse other phenomena related to this limited receptivity. Firstly, the way some men framed change as unnecessary and sometimes illegitimate and secondly, the various strategies men consciously or unconsciously put in place to avoid or minimise change.

Men’s degree of receptivity to their partners’ demands for change varied in my sample and I find limited receptivity and defensiveness in 15 cases (about half of my sample). I argue

that at the root of their limited receptivity was the fact that many men in my sample saw change as unnecessary and sometimes illegitimate. Evidence that they saw change as unnecessary lies in how they thought about necessary change in domestic labour. While only a couple of men in Group A posited that they would like to change some of their behaviour in this area, especially around the work of organising and planning, most men I interviewed reported that there was nothing they would like to change. When they did say that they would like some things to change, they did not point at their own behaviour but at their wish to delegate more tasks to someone external to the household, as Graham's (partner of main breadwinner) reply shows:

Ideally [...] you pay someone to do all the household, you pay an accountant and they do all that crap. [...] A daily cleaner who would do the cleaning and the ironing.[...] And then someone would do the hard work of thinking about which food is healthy and tasty

Some men also considered their partners' demands for change as illegitimate since in their view, they were already doing enough. Discussing the tensions and conflicts around domestic labour with his partner Emma, Cooper reported feeling that she does not acknowledge what he does around the household. Cooper – who was one of the less involved men of my sample – said: “it seems there's a lot of times where I had done things and she'll only remember certain stuff.” His thinking of change as illegitimate was intertwined with some blaming of his partner:

A lot of the times I just tell her that what she says is not what's exactly happened but this is going nowhere and I get pissed so no point trying to state my point because all what she does is talk, talk, talk, and make me feel like a piece of shit.[...] She keeps on criticising me for this or that, she doesn't move on, she always rewards herself and never looks at what I do

His partner, Emma, on the other hand, said that she always tries to be in the mindset of “ok let's find a solution to this” but her attempts are generally met with resistance:

He gets very angry and aggressive, and often just storms off. [...] I do tell him that I'm tired and exhausted from all my responsibilities, and his response is always

“you’re doing too much outside the house” rather than thinking about what goes on in our relationship. [...] Whenever I try and say “you need to do more”, he always gets defensive and goes “but I took out the trash this morning” or “but I cooked you dinner last night”.

Men’s limited receptivity became visible when they pointed out their own contributions in responses to being asked to understand the woman’s situation and her need for change. The result of this was an atmosphere of competition in which they posit that their level of involvement is equal to their partners’. This reaction was one of several “strategies men use to resist”, as Deutsch (1999, p. 73-74) argues. While in the past men could feel entitled to their wives’ unpaid domestic labour on the basis of their sex, Deutsch (1999) argues that contemporary men have developed different strategies justifying their lack of involvement in the household: passive resistance, when men ignore their partner’s demands for change; incompetence, where they demonstrate an underlying lack of motivation for household chores; praise, when they focus on their partners’ skills as a justification for withdrawing from a task; different standards, that are often much lower than their partners’; and denial, through which they either over-estimate their own contribution or overstate the role of their partner’s preferences and personality. All of these strategies appear in my data. In the case of men thinking of change as unnecessary or illegitimate, I argue that it was a defensive mechanism focused on denial and directed at maintaining a status quo that was beneficial for them. These strategies were particularly visible in unequal couples but also in some equal couples, as in the case of George, a stay-at-home father, and Carole (sole breadwinner), who often worked abroad during the week. George considered that Carole does some tasks such as cleaning and ironing when she comes back home on the weekend because “it might be part of that feeling grounded, because if you’re away from home a lot, it’s very easy to start being detached and certainly when she gets back there are certain routines and certain things that help her reconnect”. Talking about her routine when she gets back home, Carole however had a different version to offer:

You know, if I'm doing a long week or if I've got a busy weekend, finding the energy to do the cleaning and ironing is hard but you know, we haven't actually done anything about it. So yeah, I think sometimes one gets that thing, you know it's just fatigue, but you wish the other person was taking more.

I find the strongest defensive reactions in men who were involuntarily unemployed, but I also find such elements in men from a variety of situations – from men who are currently working to men who are voluntarily in a position of stay-at-home fathers – echoing previous research on the negotiation of the division of domestic labour which showed defensiveness in men from all types of economic situations (Deutsch, 1999). Such findings therefore provide nuance to the literature hypothesising gender-deviance neutralisation as an explanation for men in female breadwinning households doing relatively less domestic labour (Bittman et al., 2003). It seems that there was indeed an element of gender-deviance neutralisation in the way involuntarily unemployed men over-react to demands for change towards more equality – as some of the previous literature shows (Jahoda et al., 1933; Legerski & Cornwall, 2010; Morris, 1985; Sherman, 2009; Sullivan, 2011). However, it is difficult to claim that the limited receptivity of men in a situation of female breadwinning households was primarily a way to neutralise gender deviance in the labour market rather than a common way for men as individuals and as a group to maintain their position as direct beneficiaries from women's unpaid work and the unequal status quo in the household (Deutsch, 1999). These reactions and behaviours made radical change impossible to achieve, while making even incremental change sometimes difficult and laborious for women, as I show in the next sub-section.

C. When negotiable change becomes the only desirable change: women's limited sense of entitlement to equality

In this sub-section, I argue that women's limited sense of entitlement to equality acted as a second barrier to change. Indeed, power dynamics between women and men when negotiating change tended to lead to a situation in which the (limited) change that was actually negotiable ended up being the only change women could envision, and therefore, desire.

Thompson (1991) identifies women's sense of entitlement, i.e. the degree to which women feel they can legitimately expect their partner to do their equal share of domestic labour, as an important basis of women's sense of fairness regarding the division of domestic labour. Pyke and Coltrane (1996) include this element of entitlement in a larger "economy of gratitude" (Hochschild & Machung, 2012), along with feelings of obligation and gratitude. Looking at the division of domestic labour in different types of couples, they conclude that "marital economies of gratitude tend to affect task allocation in a way that favour men's interests and reaffirm their privileged position in marriage and in society" (Pyke & Coltrane, 1996, p. 79) because they find that "men's feelings of entitlement are more likely to be honoured in the allocation of labour than women's" (Pyke & Coltrane, 1996, p. 79). I also found such asymmetry in my data, especially when looking at the few occasions on which women reacted to men's demands for change. Contrary to men's limited receptivity and inertia, women whose partners had asked for some changes had directly shown understanding and a willingness to implement change. I argue that this asymmetry was one element that shows both an imbalance of power at the expense of women their relatively limited sense of entitlement to change which would be beneficial for them.

Women's limited sense of entitlement to equality can also be observed in the way they talked about their 'ideal' scenario of the division of domestic labour. Almost all women,

including those who were in the most unequal couples, tended to only focus on a few tasks or responsibilities that they would like to be more balanced with their partners, as Susan's (main breadwinner) answer shows:

What would be more realistic is if we could define who does what a bit more, so let's say he could take over the car and some more stuff (laughs). And we would have some more regular discussions about who's doing what and when, you know kind of sit down and write a list and agree [...]. That's probably more realistic but he would probably need some persuading

It is not that Susan and the other female participants did not think about a broader idea of equality. Susan also said that "ideally, clearly there would be more balance and more equity you know, but we're very far away from that right now". However, women's answers show that the change they actually considered tended to be only changes that they thought could be "realistically" negotiated with their partners. This shows how women's sense of entitlement to equality also relationally emerged from their dynamics with men. This deflation of women's ideal scenario to what would be 'realistic' could be accompanied by resignation in women. Amber (sole breadwinner) is such a woman:

I don't mind, whatever, I do sometimes get angry and think "why am I doing this?" but he's also doing other stuff for the family. The only thing I'd really like him to do is cooking for me occasionally. So I know he likes certain food so I'll cook that for him, but he's never done that, it's just not his thing. [...] I think there's a lot of effort that goes into that, a thought process, you learn new skills and that's quite hard. But you know, he's busy so it's not gonna happen.

Amber did relatively more domestic labour and was overburdened with work as the sole breadwinner of a household with two children and a newly purchased house, but her partner's limited receptivity to her past demands for change had resulted in her feeling of entitlement to equality and care to wane.

Women's limited sense of entitlement to equality could also be identified in some equal couples. Talking about her partner's involvement in the household, Prisha (sole

breadwinner) clearly expressed her willingness to reduce his contribution by hiring a cleaner:

[...] because I don't want my husband to do all of this [...] boring work and people make a profession out of it [...], why not taking the benefit of it? Cause I think he could do something more fun with his time, more productive with his time, you know, it's not like he likes doing it.

Prisha's partner, Peter, resigned from his former job because he was "fed up", taking this opportunity to be the primary carer of their son and stay at home temporarily. Because Peter took on a lot of tasks, especially housework tasks, Prisha sometimes felt "uncomfortable and guilty" at the idea that her partner was doing work she considered "boring" and that she knows Peter did not like. In this case, her willingness to hire a cleaner in the near future, came from an anticipation of his needs and preferences as well as discussions in which her partner explained that he was getting bored and depressed at home. Despite differences in their female breadwinning situations and their division of domestic labour, Susan, Amber, and Prisha all had their power to name and define desirable change for themselves limited by their relatively reduced sense of entitlement for change and equality.

Women's sense of entitlement to change could however be favourably influenced by their specific positions as female breadwinners; women who had always been the main breadwinner in the relationship tended to have a slightly greater sense of entitlement to an equal division of domestic labour than women who became main breadwinners a while into relationship and cohabitation started. Prisha (woman) had only been sole breadwinner for a year at the time of the interview. By contrast, Chloe (main breadwinner), who had always been the main breadwinner of her relationship, said that one of her criteria for a male partner was a willingness to "balance it out" at home because she knew she was going to need her household to be "cooperative" and "truly joint in efforts" given the career path she was

already on. Her sense of entitlement to equality and balance had therefore to some extent framed her criteria for a partner from the beginning, making her sense of entitlement easier to maintain and express during the subsequent relationship.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I first examined the evolution towards a more equal division of domestic labour and its conditions. I showed that women in this situation acquired more power to induce change when new circumstances emerged, such as increased working hours or the arrival of children, especially when these circumstances were accompanied by open marital conversations. The latter manifested women's power to name and define desirable change for themselves, to voice it, and to implement it. However, this empowerment only crystallised under the condition that women took a specific reassuring approach with their partners by which women soothed their partners' emotional reactions about their share of domestic labour. As a result, this ultimately tended to reinforce their roles as carers of the emotional sphere. I also showed that conflicts emerged when there was a tension between women's power to name and define desirable change for themselves and men's power to continue to benefit from an unequal status quo. In this sense, the marital contract in female breadwinning couples I interviewed allowed some flexibility and individual agency in the negotiation of the division of domestic labour but only within certain boundaries that reproduced gender roles.

Secondly, I examined women's reactions to the impossibility of change when there were conflicts and tension about the division of domestic labour. I showed that women's position as female breadwinners tended to give them power to limit their own contribution by externalising the conflicts through the hiring of a cleaner. However, a persistently unequal

status quo also disempowered women who were faced with the impossibility of implementing change because their partner refused to increase their contribution. Such situations came with emotional costs for women, who internalised the conflicts within and against themselves. A unique feature of the marital contract in female breadwinning households was therefore to give some women the possibility to maintain peace both within the home and internally by ‘balancing’ tasks requirements between their partners and some external person. Equal division of domestic labour relied heavily on this outsourcing. Finally, I argued that it is necessary to think of change as a process that is negotiable only within specific boundaries. The presence of such boundaries limited the scope of possible change to incremental change in the division of domestic labour, while some barriers such as men’s limited receptivity and women’s limited sense of entitlement prevented change from taking place by limiting women’s power to name and define desirable change for themselves. These boundaries tacitly framed female breadwinning households’ marital contract, and introduced asymmetries between the positions of women and men when negotiating the division of domestic labour. This topic will be further explored in the following chapter.

Chapter 7. Women's and men's positions and power in the negotiation of the division of domestic labour: analysing the asymmetries framing the female breadwinning marital contract

So far, I have illustrated that the marital contract negotiated between the women and men I interviewed was based on some traditional gender roles of domestic labour (Chapter 4) taking place in a context of tacit roles concerning mental load and emotion work (Chapter 5) and of specific boundaries within which some change was negotiable under specific circumstances (Chapter 6). The difficulty of achieving change towards more equality is itself related to the overarching issue of women's and men's unequal positions and power in the negotiation of the marital contract. In this chapter, I take the idea of negotiation further and analyse the specific asymmetries of positions women and men found themselves in when negotiating the structural division of domestic labour they ended up implementing, independently from any attempt of change. To shed light on these positions, I have three aims: to examine women's and men's subjectivities about their female breadwinning situations and how these subjectivities impacted on women's and men's power and positions when negotiating the overall division of domestic labour (1), to highlight some of the underlying characteristics of a female breadwinning marital contract based on an analysis of the interplay between gender as a structure of wider inequalities and individual subjectivities (2), and to analyse women's options to exit the relationship in case of dissatisfaction over domestic labour (3).

Negotiations do not take place in a vacuum. Both parties in a given contract come with specific social backgrounds, life experiences, emotions, and psychological states of mind. The abstract equality between parties implied by the institution of the contract is not always mirrored by equality in practice, as individuals do not always possess the same amount of power in the negotiation, and are therefore not in an equal position to negotiate (Pateman,

1988). It is because of asymmetries of power and resulting positions that the division of domestic labour – as an outcome based on the reproduction of some traditional gender roles – couples I interviewed negotiated cannot be analysed as free from the influence of structural inequalities. I find Pateman's (1988) analysis of the marriage contract between women and men (presented in Chapters 1 and 2) particularly useful in understanding how domestic labour was divided and how the content of the contract was negotiated and implemented in the couples I interviewed. Indeed, her conceptualisation of the marriage contract – which I call the 'marital contract' in this thesis – as a domestic labour contract in which male breadwinning is founded on asymmetrical power between women and men, as well as the exploitation of women's unpaid labour in return for economic safety brings a puzzling question to the study of female breadwinning couples: what shape does the marital contract take when economic roles are reversed between women and men? The tendency towards inequality in the contributions to domestic labour at the expense of women presented in previous chapters shows that the marital contract in these female breadwinning situations was not a mere reversal of the male breadwinning marital contract. Pinpointing the content of this marital contract requires understanding women's and men's actual positions and power in the negotiation. This chapter therefore contributes to the literature on domestic labour by applying the theoretical tool of the marital contract to data from individual interviews in order to better understand how macro- and micro-level mechanisms of interplay interact. I also explore the interplay between social structures and individual agency and subjectivity. Lastly, the chapter highlights some emotional and symbolic mechanisms of the economic devaluation of women's labour.

This chapter addresses the following question: what positions and power do women and men hold in the negotiation of the division of domestic labour?

Firstly, I demonstrate the existing subjective asymmetry between the positions of women and men in the negotiation of the division of domestic labour (section I below). Then, I show that this subjective asymmetry contributes to a hidden asymmetry in the value given to the contribution of women and men to the household (section II). Ultimately, I argue that women's positions in negotiation is negatively impacted by their limited options to exit the relationship, despite their relative financial security (section III).

I. Women's and men's differentiated subjectivities underlying their positions and power in the negotiation of the division of domestic labour

In this first section, emerging from my data based on individual interviews, I argue that when negotiating their marital contract and division of domestic labour, the power and positions of women and men in negotiation were asymmetric due to two important mechanisms linking individual subjectivities with gender as a wider structure of inequality. Firstly, women's power and position in these negotiations were negatively affected by comparisons with others. This was a subjective mechanism that lowered their expectations of their partner's and their own situation (sub-section A below). Secondly, asymmetry in the emotional dynamic between women and men prevented both parties from being aware of certain inequalities (sub-section B).

A. Comparisons with others: lowering women's expectations of their male partners and their own situation

In this sub-section, I argue that comparisons with others played an important role in lowering women's expectations and sense of unfairness, which ultimately affected their position and power when negotiating the household contract and division of domestic labour with their male partners. This exemplified another implicit mechanism which

contributes to the gap between the overall unequal division of domestic labour and the rhetoric of equality presented in Chapter 4.

Examining women's sense of fairness and its determinants, Thompson (1991) argues that comparison referents (Major, 1987), i.e. "the standards people use to judge existing outcomes" (L. Thompson, 1991, p.182), play a crucial role in framing the content and credibility of "justifications" for the differentiated contribution to domestic labour between women and men. Women rarely compare themselves to their male partners or to other men in their lives as a base for their sense of fairness and consequent level of satisfaction. Generally this comparison is limited to other women (Major, 1987). This literature on women's sense of fairness and comparisons is useful to understand the dynamic between women and men I interviewed, as the participants' spontaneous analysis of their situation was very often illustrated with comparisons. The most common type of comparisons were sex-based comparisons, but there was also some class- and ethnicity-based comparisons.

I also observe in my data that comparisons seemed to have two main tacit functions in the way women and men thought of the way they shared labour and their level of satisfaction with it: lowering women's expectations of their male partners, and devaluing or minimising women's issues and their underlying dissatisfaction in some aspects of the division of domestic labour. I observed this in couples of all patterns of division of domestic labour identified in Chapter 4, but especially those in groups B and C. These comparisons therefore framed and restricted the scope of the negotiation, to the detriment of women.

If female breadwinning situations were a mirror of male breadwinning situations, female breadwinners would compare their partner's contribution to female partner's of male breadwinners. However, in my data, women's standards of their partners seemed to be lowered as a result of comparisons with other men – either imagined or directly known.

When women compared their partner with other men, it was sometimes based on knowledge they acquired from discussions with their female friends: “I mean, I would really struggle if he wasn’t around or if he didn’t do as much as he does, ‘cause in comparison to my friends’ husbands he does loads [laughs]. I have to not tell them [laughs] because he does do so much” said Elaine (main breadwinner). Sometimes the comparison did not directly originate from the individual women themselves but from other women who praised what they saw as an exceptional involvement from the male partner. Commenting on the Household Portrait she had just completed, Morgan (main breadwinner) said:

I know it does fall down to a reasonably stereotypical lines in terms of the car and the finances [...]. Compared to a lot of families, I would say my husband does a lot more than my friends’ husbands [...]. So I had a friend coming over for the weekend and my husband had just been to Tesco for the weekly shop and he came home and put the food away and he made us all lunch so the children could play and I didn’t have to leave them. My friend was like she wanted to marry him and it was like he was the world’s best dad and husband, but to me I just think that that’s sharing the burden. Whereas outsiders thinks that my husband is like a saint, and my mother-in-law thinks he probably does too much.

In several cases, the comparison referent was other men in female breadwinning settings that were seen as being less involved. Fernanda (main breadwinner), who is in Group C, used such comparison to talk about her partner Patrick:

I think he’s worked really hard since the redundancy to build up his business and I probably don’t say enough that I think he’s done very well with that. I have a couple of friends whose husbands found themselves in this situation and they ended up watching TV pretty much and really not doing anything [...]

Fernanda’s insight shows that the existence of men who are worse than her male partner directly affected the level of inequality she could tolerate. In this sense, comparisons used by the participants were a way to rationalise inequality (van Hooff, 2011) by minimising women’s standards in the negotiation. This echoes the explanation of Eva (main breadwinner), who is in Group B, for why she was satisfied with her partner’s contribution

in the home despite her acknowledgement that the mental load falls almost exclusively on her shoulders:

[...] if he was sitting watching the football and drinking beer, then you know probably I would be more annoyed but [...] he's doing what he's aware of needs to be done and always sort of thinking about it so then in terms of who's actually doing more or less it's sort of not so much an issue.

Another way of invoking the existence of men that are worse than the male partner was the use of ethnicity-based comparisons. I found that women from ethnic minority groups who were living with a white man tended to compare their white male partner with other men of their own ethnic group. Prisha (sole breadwinner), who is in group A, is Indian and came to the UK in her 20s, and considered herself very lucky to have found her current white British partner, Peter:

[...] my perception is that the general Indian man feels very entitled and I think this chart would be very very different if I was married to an Indian man [...] living in India. [...] This concept of shared partnership, I think an Indian man sees is very very different. [...] Many would take their wife even wanting to work as an insult. And I think they would genuinely feel threatened by a situation where financially it was the woman bringing in more money.

Similarly to their female partners, men also compared themselves with men who do less domestic labour in order to present themselves as relatively equal and modern, as Arthur's (partner of sole breadwinner) class-based comparison shows:

We are from a middle-class sort of demographic, been to university, have sort of middle management jobs. I have no way of quantifying this but I suspect that a working-class family may be more old-fashioned, [...] more "man works, woman makes home". The only reason why I say that is because when I think of the soldiers I used to be in charge of, that's how they ran their families. Soldier, you're the breadwinner, wife, you're in the home and you're making babies, that sort of thing.

Arthur, who is in group B and did less than 40% of the domestic labour, reported this at the end of the individual interview as he was expressing satisfaction in the way his relationship works and its division of labour. This comparison enabled him to present himself as a fairer partner than other men by virtue of the simple fact that he is not of the mindset "man works, woman makes home".

Some stay-at-home fathers compared themselves to other men in this situation as a counterexample for the behaviour they wanted to emulate in their home, as James (partner of sole breadwinner), who is in group A, explained: “I don’t want to be one of those partners sitting at home and saying, ‘where’s tea?’ whenever she gets back. That’s not me”.

These comparisons tended to lead to an over-appreciation of men’s contributions, thereby removing women’s power to voice dissatisfaction and conceive of a different division of domestic labour involving higher standards of equality. Ultimately, these comparisons show that for both women and men, it is not absolute equality that was important to them but relative equality: the idea that this individual man was relatively fairer than at least some other men, and that therefore his female partner was in a better position compared to other female breadwinners.

The other function that comparisons played in the couples interviewed in this research was the devaluation and minimisation of women’s issues, and the underlying dissatisfaction with the way domestic labour was shared with their male partners. The women who explicitly expressed some dissatisfaction tended to compare their situations with those of other women’s which they saw as being less desirable than theirs. This comparison led them to conclude that their issues with their own situation were not legitimate enough to voice their dissatisfaction and demand change in the dynamic with their male partner. Talking about her dissatisfaction with some of her partner’s standards of cleanliness, Amber’s (sole breadwinner, who is in group B) answer illustrates this mechanism: “I really hate it when it’s not neat and tidy...but yeah, it really sounds like a first world problem. There are worse things happening in other parts of the world”. The geographical distance implied by the vague comparison to regions outside “first world” enables a psychological detachment from the situation, without requiring a precise idea of what the problems outside the “first world” are, and why it should matter so much that they should influence

her perception of her own situation and expectations. Grace (main breadwinner in Group B) used the same type of ethnic- or cultural-based comparison based on the way she perceived the experience of a “Muslim friend”:

I have a Muslim friend who's lovely and who's very independent and she was talking about her husband agreeing to get a dishwasher and I was thinking that Michael and I decide together but I wouldn't say it in that way. It would be “oh Michael and I agreed to get a dishwasher”, not “he's agreed I can have one”.

In this case, the comparison with a female friend that she saw as being in a less equal situation in terms of power of decision in the relationship seemed to function as a way to feel better about her own issues with her partner.

Women's comparisons with other women in worse situations could also sometimes function as proof that it was practically possible to shoulder a higher burden of domestic labour, given that some women do it. For example, Isobel (main breadwinner who is in Group C) compared herself to “single mums” when she explained future challenges coming with the arrival of her second child:

He [her partner] doesn't get home til 9:30 so how am I gonna manage getting them both to bed [laughs], I don't know [laughs], I'm gonna have to think of something... [...] I mean single mums do it all the time so we'll find a way. But it'd be easier if he wasn't doing those long day shifts.

Her answer hints at the problem of her partner's absence but focuses more on the idea she should be able to handle future issues herself, given that single mothers do all the domestic labour on their own.

Comparisons were a mechanism of reproduction of traditional gender roles through the interplay between individual subjectivities and gender as a wider structure of inequality. Individual and subjective comparisons tended to rationalise (van Hooff, 2011) the reproduction of traditional gender roles in the household in a situation of non-traditional gender roles in the labour market, which ultimately reduced women's sense of fairness and

entitlement to an equal division of domestic labour. This mechanism of comparisons often prevented the participants from seeing inequalities as they were.

B. The asymmetrical emotional dynamic in the negotiation of a non-traditional marital contract: women's guilt and men's need for reassurance

In this sub-section, I explain an emotional dynamic I find in several female breadwinning couples which tended to hinder renegotiation of the division of domestic labour by further preventing the participants from seeing inequalities as they were. Such a dynamic is based on two types of emotions that were sometimes related: women's guilt and men's need for reassurance. This emotional dynamic is also an important part of the female breadwinning marital contract. It is also a mechanism through which traditional gender roles was reproduced, through the interplay between individual subjectivities and gender as a wider structure of inequality.

Chapters 5 and 6 previously highlighted the presence of a feeling of guilt from some women in female breadwinning couples in the context of attempt (or failure) to change the division of domestic labour. Women's guilt was an important part of the emotion work they do (Chapter 5), and could result from the way women internalised failure to change the division of domestic labour due to men's inertia and limited receptivity (Chapters 5 and 6). As Baumeister et al.(1994) argue, "guilt should be understood as an essentially social phenomenon that happens between people as much as it happens inside them" and "appears to arise from interpersonal transactions", especially in "communal relationships which are characterized by expectations of mutual concern" (Baumeister et al., 1994, p. 243). In this sub-section, I build on this relational and contextual understanding of guilt by focusing on the ways women's and men's emotions and actions influenced each other, and how guilt

was sometimes a sign of self-blame that prevented some women from seeing inequalities or feeling at peace with doing less than their partner.

I argue that some women's guilt was a result of the tension between their non-traditional position in the labour market as female breadwinners and a more traditional sense of family and household responsibility, resonating with some arguments in the qualitative literature about women's gender-deviance neutralisation (Warren, 2007). The most significant guilt-inducing aspect was motherhood, and the difficult balance between the way mothers wanted to evolve professionally and the expectations they had for themselves as providers of childcare. Olivia (sole breadwinner), whose partner Geoffrey is a stay-at-home father, considered that she both would like to be and should be more involved in childcare for their son:

I think it's simply 'cause I'm not here so I sometimes feel guilty about not doing more you know. [...] I don't feel terrible but I do have a sense of guilt, that I don't have the close relationship that Geoffrey has with the child.

Olivia's guilt took place in a context where her presence at home was heavily constrained by her involvement in the labour market, which was something that all mothers I interviewed face. Amber's reaction to a question about the challenges she faces as a breadwinner mother illustrates this:

Sarah (researcher): "What are the biggest challenges of being a mother in your situation?"

Amber: "I think guilt is definitely the biggest challenge."

Sarah: "And when do you feel guilty?"

Amber: "All the time... [she starts crying] [...], that's just the hardest thing."

Mothers' guilt was usually at its peak when it came to leaving children to go to work. Prisha (sole breadwinner) explained that sometimes her son is "so sad" and says "I don't want you to go", which makes her "feel even worse".

Standards of childcare could also trigger guilt. For example, Chloe explained that she feels responsible for her child's literacy level and future in education:

There is that frustration that my mum stayed home with me and I could read before I went to school and it's that sort of guilt that he's a bit slower and he's gonna go to state school because we can't really afford to send both of them to a private school in London.

Several women who were not mothers also expressed a sense of guilt related to their partner's lifestyle and mindset. For example, Emilia (sole breadwinner) feels guilty for "being so tired after work that she cannot Hoover or always be there emotionally" for her partner who is "depressed" (Roberto), while Mary (sole breadwinner) feels "a little bit guilty" because she has "a better social life than he [her partner] does".

Because guilt tended to act as self-blame for these women. Generally, they were more focused on how they are failing to uphold traditional gendered expectations than on their partner's actual involvement in the household. This process was reinforced by the other element making up the dynamic of emotions in female breadwinning couples: men's need for reassurance from their partners. This emotion tended to come from the insecurity some men felt in their position within the family, and the tension between their non-traditional position in the labour market and their own sense of manhood. This also resonates with some arguments in the qualitative literature about men's gender-deviance neutralisation shows (Jahoda et al., 1933; Legerski & Cornwall, 2010; Morris, 1985; Sherman, 2009; Sullivan, 2011). Several men directly referred to these tensions during their individual interview, but women's individual interviews generally provided insight overall. Household finances were an important area in which men's need for reassurance became explicit. For example, Eva (main breadwinner) explained that because her and her partner Owen opted for a joint financial arrangement where "both of our incomes are going in there and we take out sort of equal amounts of money", and felt that:

He needs reassuring that I'm ok with it, like I think that he worries that I'm going to mind that he's not bringing in as much as I am but I genuinely don't mind and I'm happy that he's been able to find work that is much more suited to him.

Talking about her partner's need for reassurance, Grace (main breadwinner) explained that her relationship with Michael went through a "particularly difficult phase" when the house renovation that Michael was overseeing of "went wrong" and "the budget increased so much" that Michael was, in his own words, "angry and stressed out about it" and added:

Michael's family history is much more up and down financially so he's had more exposure to that than I have. But I think he felt reassured we could cope with a difficult period if we needed to, it relaxed him, because I think he was quite anxious about that beforehand. He doesn't want to be like his parents. So that was good showing him that we could deal with it, we could manage.

In practice, "dealing with it" meant that Grace, took on the task of reassuring Michael that their household finances will be secure as "one of the things about me is I adapt and therefore I'm quick on cutting costs, not buying any new clothes for a couple of years".

The main source of the need for reassurance in the men I interviewed was their insecurity over their position and role in the family as Daniel (partner of sole breadwinner) acknowledged:

I sometimes feel less secure in my importance in the household because Karen is the breadwinner and I'm not. The kids don't require the steering and the guidance as much as when they were younger so they don't rely on me so much, and Karen doesn't rely on me to bring to money in, so almost your position in the family has slipped somewhere underneath the dog [laughs], you do actually think "what do I contribute?"

Daniel's insecurity over his contribution to the family was triggered by the underlying emphasis put on the importance of contributing through paid work rather than through domestic labour. An important element to note is that Daniel, who did a lower share of domestic labour than his partner although he is a stay-at-home father, did not think of his insecurity as a result of a lack of involvement in domestic labour. He instead pointed at the fact that "Karen is more assertive, I'm less assertive, in terms of our interactions with each other". One might understand his framing by thinking of his feeling of insecurity as a result

of, in his point of view, an unsatisfying level of power for himself in the home stemming from what he saw as a lack of assertiveness compared to his partner.

Men's need for reassurance was sometimes an artifact of the guilt they felt over not being in a position whereby they earn enough to allow their partner the possibility to paid work. Patrick (partner of main breadwinner) explained that when he was made redundant from his job several years ago, he didn't like that it meant his partner had to work more to maintain family's financial stability. In his individual interview, he reported feeling "a bit guilty about that" as a result. His partner Fernanda (main breadwinner) explained that after his redundancy:

If I was stressed about work he would feel a kind of responsibility because he wasn't doing the job he was doing before and [...] it made him kind of feel guilty [...]. I've tried to say to him "look, it doesn't actually help me if you're stressed about me being stressed, it's like going around in a circle.

Fernanda's answer also shows that men's need for reassurance tends to have an emotional impact on their partner, whereas women's guilt that I described earlier in this sub-section was hardly mentioned by their partners during the interviews. Prisha (sole breadwinner) explained how she "started to feel more and more guilty" since she realised that her partner was getting "bored and depressed" while being a stay-at-home father. The emotional dynamic therefore seems asymmetrical; on one side women handled some of their negative emotions on their own, and on the other men's negative emotions became a household matter in which women contributed to finding a solution. Women's guilt was triggered by dilemmas surrounding their career and their family – dilemmas which were often made more difficult by lower involvement in domestic labour from their male partners – and sometimes by men's insecurity over their position in society and in the family. Guilt was a way of taking personal responsibility for what was seen as a failure. This guilt framed domestic labour inequality as the woman's problem, and therefore reduced their sense of

entitlement to a fairer split. Such emotional dynamic therefore negatively affected women's position in the negotiation over the division of domestic labour. In this sense, the study of emotions and their asymmetrical gendered dynamic can bring important insights to the idea of gender-deviance neutralisation behaviours as being the source of domestic labour inequality in non-traditional economic settings in which men need to compensate at home for their lack of relative power in the labour market. On the one hand, emotions seem to be a missing piece explaining how compensatory behaviours emerge for the individual: female breadwinners' guilt pushed them towards doing relatively more domestic labour, while men's need for reassurance provided a justification for them to do relatively less. On the other hand, I argue that such findings unveil the powerful impact of the unconscious and uncontrollable mental processes within individuals, thereby calling for a nuanced understanding of how compensatory behaviours emerge: less as a conscious willingness to 'perform gender' in order to conform to sex-based wider societal expectations, and more as another manifestation of how gender as a hierarchy is reproduced at the micro-level.

The subjective asymmetries I presented in this section themselves contributed to a larger hidden asymmetry of value between to women's and men's contributions to the household that underpinned the female breadwinning marital contract in the couples I interviewed.

II. The hidden asymmetry of value of contributions to the household underlying the female breadwinning marital contract

In the context of a household, the value given to labour of individuals is of utmost importance when considering their position and power in negotiating the division of domestic labour. The higher the labour – paid or unpaid – done by an individual is valued, the more it is possible for this individual to expect recognition of their efforts from the other

partner, and to feel legitimately dissatisfied with an imbalance of tasks and responsibilities. As I argued in Chapters 1 and 5, the literature on women's labour shows that it tends to be chronically and structurally devalued, even ignored, both by their partner, women themselves, and wider society. In this section, I emphasise some underpinning of the marital contract in female breadwinning couples I interviewed by shedding light on the hidden asymmetry of value given to women's and men's contributions to the household, both on the symbolic level (sub-section A below) and on the financial level (sub-section B). I argue that this hidden asymmetry was a direct micro-level reflection of the way gender as a wider structure of inequality devalues women's labour.

A. Inequalities in the ways men's and women's contributions are valued: the implications of equality of importance for different contributions to the family

I find that to understand the specific way in which women's labour was devalued in these female breadwinning situations, it is necessary to return to the 'team' rhetoric presented in Chapter 4, and what such rhetoric implied in practice in households where women's combined paid and unpaid contributions were greater than their partners. In this sub-section, I argue that the general implication of the 'team' rhetoric is that men's overall contribution to the household was over-valued relative to women's contribution due to some emotional mechanisms on the symbolic level. More specifically, men's contribution to domestic labour tended to be made visible and elicited gratitude from women, whereas women's contributions tended to be more invisible and taken for granted in the way couples speak about the complementarity of their roles. This tendency was visible in participants' spontaneous comments and responses showcasing the "economy of gratitude" (Hochschild & Machung, 2012) in the relationship. This was particularly visible in answers to questions such as "do you feel grateful for your partner's contribution to the family?" and "what

contribution are you thinking about?”. Most participants reported that they felt grateful for their partner’s contribution to the family and had explicit and implicit ways of expressing this to their partner. However, women tended to feel grateful for their partner’s contribution towards domestic labour, whilst men’s gratitude was generally towards their partner’s financial contributions in the form of paid labour. Arthur (partner of sole breadwinner) considered that his partner Amber “is keeping the family afloat in terms of bringing in the money and enabling us to create this home for the future”. Talking about his sole breadwinner partner, Geoffrey expressed that he “definitely” thankful for his partner’s contribution especially as “she’s taking a lot of pressure at work at the moment, and I appreciate what it’s like to be in this position because I’ve seen that side of the role”. Olivia, his partner also “definitely” felt grateful for his contribution, saying:

I do say to people “oh god he’s done such a fantastic job with our son”, he’s showed him how to walk in the streets and stop at the road and how to behave, and it’s largely S. because I’ve been at work.

The fatherhood aspect of men’s contribution to domestic labour was particularly highly valued by their partners and people in their social networks. The fathers in the study often reported that their friends and colleagues – especially in the case of female-dominated jobs – as well as their own parents and other mothers at school generally give more positive than negative comments about the men’s position in the family. Logan (partner of main breadwinner) stated that: “actually people [mostly women as he later precised] love me because they think ‘oh he’s such a nice guy because he’s put his career on hold to look after the kids’”. Similar reactions were also received by Owen (partner of main breadwinner), who reported: “I’ve had nothing but positive comments and essentially kind of admiration for my way, for the decisions that me and Eva are making”.

While some men report a reaction of bafflement, and sometimes jokes from some male peers over their position in the family, several men also reported positive comments from men around them who would like to be in the same position, as Daniel (partner of sole breadwinner) put it: “many guys want to be stay-at-home fathers and can sometimes get jealous of my position”. Men’s contribution to housework, however limited it was compared to their partner’s, also received focus and appreciation both by their female partner and their social peers, echoing previous literature (Deutsch, 1999).

Women’s contribution to domestic labour told another story. They played a much smaller role in participants’ feelings of gratitude. Female breadwinning couples I interviewed tended to value women’s contribution to the household through their involvement in their career and in the labour market. This value given to women’s paid labour was visible in the priority most couples give to the woman’s career, on the condition that their career remained compatible with some of their domestic labour responsibilities as I explain later. This higher priority relative to their partner’s career was especially pronounced in case of couples where men did not work in the labour market.

This difference in value and priority between women’s and men’s careers in the labour market tended to stem from their different approaches to career and employment. Women’s primary role as the member of the family who invests more in the labour market was rooted in the different ways women and men I interviewed tended to conceptualise the idea of having a career. Men who were in paid work in my sample were much less likely than women to consider their career as very important or important, and tended to adopt an attitude of detachment and distance towards the idea of having a career. Most participants said that the woman is the more “career-orientated” member of the couple. For several men in lower socio-economic positions, working was a matter of “economic necessity” (Logan, partner of main breadwinner), and they did not think they have a career, nor did they think

it is important to have one. As John (partner of main breadwinner), a bartender said, “I’ve never been that sort of ambitious and driven to have a career”. Men’s detachment from the idea of having a career which would be based on money, status, and prestige tended to pre-date meeting their female partner and by extension the female breadwinning situation, but their partner’s higher earning potential also fuelled the way men consider their career.

Women I interviewed considered their career to be important or even very important, but what they conceptualised as ‘career’ varied, and the justifications for being career-orientated covered specific themes. Firstly, women resorted to economic justifications that were both individual- and family-focused. Several women explicitly mentioned considering their career to be very important for their own “financial independence” and to be “making their own money” (Emma, sole breadwinner). Sometimes, the focus was placed heavily on financial independence as a reaction to witnessing the lives of other women who are financially dependent on men, and who therefore have less autonomy. When women resorted to family-focused justifications for being career-orientated, they used two types of arguments. One was based on ideas around consumption, with a desire to achieve a “comfortable” lifestyle, with “some holidays, a nice house, and stuff like that” (Diane, main breadwinner). Sometimes the emphasis placed on lifestyle and consumption could become a trap of sorts, where women eventually did not have an option to focus less on their career. As Karen (main breadwinner), a solicitor, explained, her high wage has allowed her family to become accustomed to high lifestyle standards, and she felt that she had no other choice but to keep her job to maintain such standards. An alternate type of family-focused economic justification I observed was the argument highlighting the importance of providing for the children and their partner. Women who mentioned the idea of “providing” in a positive light focus on “bring[ing] security” (Mary, sole breadwinner) for their children. But for some women, the position of being the main breadwinner was experienced

as a burden, especially in the case of sole breadwinners. They therefore emphasised it is exactly because their male partners cannot provide for the household that they felt that they must adopt or maintain the breadwinner role to provide for their household. Anne (sole breadwinner) explained that she is deeply unhappy with her job but has to retain it because her male partner was unemployed and taking his time to find a job he would enjoy. When some women explicitly identified with the provider role, it tended to be orientated towards the needs of others, but not as a confirmation of their identity the way some male breadwinners sometimes understand their position as a crucial part of their manhood (Gonalons-Pons & Gangl, 2021).

The value given to women's careers was however often constrained by their responsibility for domestic labour. Grace (main breadwinner) explained that one of the reasons why she decided to go part-time four days a week was because she is "away one night four times a year for work". She added:

If I was working full-time and doing that, Michael would feel like he picked up a lot more of the things that we now share. So I think that it would make life more tricky at home so it's really good just having that little bit of room for manoeuvre.

She also talked about how she ultimately refused a job due to her partner's conflicted feelings:

He's a bit torn sometimes. He likes me because I'm successful and career-orientated, that's part of what he likes and at the same time he likes me being at home, so there's always this conflict in him, in supporting me but not wanting too much of it to take me away. And we have quite a lot of debates, particularly around overseas trips. I nearly got a job that meant I had to spend quite a lot of time in Africa and he was very unhappy and in the end I had to pull out. And I really liked the idea of the job, I was quite excited about it, but when it comes down to it, he does know it would have a big impact on him and the children, especially at this young age, and he's quite good at thinking that through

While her partner, Michael, did acknowledge some of Grace's constraints, he presented it as a "personal choice of hers" contrarily to Elliot (partner of main breadwinner), who was open about his responsibility in his partner's career constraints and thought that "it's a bit

annoying that we're both so bothered about our career, it'd be much easier if one of us was 'ok you do that and I'll stay at home' ". Talking about the challenges he and his partner Zarifah faced in their relationship the past, he described how his partner "sacrificed wanting to live in Vancouver – her favourite place in the world and work in a great office, so I could do my career thing". The initial plan was for Elliot to join his partner in Vancouver but in the meantime he found a job in the United Kingdom and decided to stay. This decision led his partner to quit her job to return to the United Kingdom and preserve the relationship.

The value given to female breadwinners' contributions to paid labour was itself mediated by specific emotions and feelings towards their male partners. Women felt particularly grateful towards their partners for the priority given to their career. Several of them were quick to emphasise that they "couldn't do it [having a career] without" (Elaine, main breadwinner) their male partner. Mary (sole breadwinner) described how she considers her male partner to be very supportive because his role as a stay-at-home father "allow[s] [her] to not worry when [she] travel[s] away from home for work" and added: "I've always felt he has to compromise for my career, and he's been very supportive".

Women's and men's contributions to the household were not observed or measured in the same way between women and men in my data, thereby revealing a hidden asymmetry framing both the negotiation over the division of domestic labour and the overall female breadwinning marital contract.

B. Financial equality: the disconnection between men's labour and their access to women's money

The hidden asymmetry in the value of women's and men's labour in the couples I interviewed is also found in the way these couples organised their finances and thought of their money. I find a disconnection between men's contributions to the household's wellbeing and their access to the earnings of their female partners. If one takes the functionalist approach of the "exchange theory" (K. Davis, 1941; Merton, 1941; Rosenfeld, 2005) by considering that male breadwinners financially reward their wives for running the household, then another asymmetry arises in the case of female breadwinning couples I interviewed: men were financially rewarded in these households despite the fact that these men were contributed to domestic labour less than their female breadwinning partners. Although money in the household revolves around issues of power (Pahl, 2007; Vogler, 1998; Vogler et al., 2008), the team rhetoric underlying the female breadwinning marital contract between women and men I interviewed assigned high priority to financial equality, and can be analysed as a manifestation of the hidden asymmetry of value between women's and men's differentiated overall contributions to the household. In this way, participants expended a lot of effort into reaching financial arrangements that ultimately tended to guarantee men's equal access to women's incomes. Both during the interviews and when starting the female breadwinning relationship, most women went through a process of clarifying that their money, or at least a part of it, was not just theirs, but belonged to the family or the couple. This process is materialised in the way couples organised their finances and spending. A detailed and comparative analysis of my individual interviews on this topic shows that all couples reported wanting to ensure financial equality between women and men within the relationship, but the concrete arrangements implementing this equality varied along two main axes. Given that the vast majority of couples had both joint

and individual bank accounts, it is more relevant to look at how the money was thought of by the couple and who has access to it. Half of the couples thought of the money earned as going into a “big pot” (Karen, sole breadwinner) that both women and men could access, while the other half settled on alternative financial arrangements in which some of the money earned by their members was accessible by both women and men and the rest was individualised, i.e. only the individual who earned it could access it. The ‘big pot’ approach stemmed from a more holistic vision of the household, in which individuals contribute to a unit that is larger than themselves, while alternative arrangements were usually presented as the best way to guarantee financial equality in the form of equity between women and men and individual autonomy (Pahl, 2008)

Several participants who adopted the ‘big pot’ approach made spontaneous comparisons between their shared arrangements and other couples who do not share their money at all. The comparisons often began to explain why they think pooling their money is important to them and, in their opinion, a better arrangement than completely separate finances. Charlotte (sole breadwinner) said that “wages should go into a pot on the table, that’s how family should work really”, while Arthur (partner of sole breadwinner) rejected the idea of any other arrangement than complete money-pooling, citing the example of his friends:

[...] he’s a doctor and she’s a teacher, and she almost has some kind of allowance in terms of they have a joint account but they have their own separate accounts and they run the household bills with the joint account but everything else is separate. For me it’s a staggering way to run a family to be honest, I’m not sure I could do that”

On the other hand, couples who opted for alternative types of arrangements did not make any explicit comment on full money-pooling.

The ‘big pot’ approach was motivated by the idea that it guarantees financial equality. This arrangement was thought to acknowledge both women and men’s contributions to the household, even in the cases of female sole breadwinning couples where the man’s

contribution was assessed not by the labour market but by was contribution to domestic labour. Mary (sole breadwinner) explained:

Jim doesn't have a job but we're equal in terms of how we contribute to the family so we share all of our finances so I don't have more money than him and he doesn't have more money than me.

This approach to household finances was compatible with different arrangements of bank accounts, such as a combination of joint and individual accounts where individual accounts had only "little traffic" (Harry, partner of main breadwinner) to separate accounts that both members could access, and sometimes indirectly through transfers from the woman's account to the man's account.

The alternatives to the 'big pot' arrangement all combined equal access to some of the money and individual autonomy for the rest of the money. These arrangements broadly followed two patterns: one where women's and men's money was separated, and contributing to 50% of the family spending, and one where some of the woman's money was somehow redistributed to the man in an aim towards financial equity. The latter case is best exemplified by the case of Catherine (main breadwinner) and her partner Leo. This young couple who opted for both joint and individual accounts recently had discussions, started by Catherine, to find what she saw as the fairest approach to finances in her relationship. She wanted to move away from a symmetrical approach to finances where both equally share the spending by splitting it 50/50, because her partner earns a very low wage and because "at the end of the day we both live together". Instead, she convinced him to "put proportionately in our joint account", meaning that she ended up putting a higher amount of money than her partner in this account instead of an equal amount. She initiated this redistribution between her wage and her partner's wage because she "didn't feel comfortable at the idea of having more disposable income than him". Even though "it took a lot of time" to get to this arrangement because "conversation about money are

uncomfortable”. Leo was, in his own words, initially in the mindset of “splitting 50/50 no matter what”, but he explained that the couple agreed since he was ultimately convinced that “in the end it does make sense that the person who brings in more money should maybe pay a bit more especially if we don’t have much money in general and I have a low wage”.

The common point of the ‘big pot’ and the alternative approaches is that discussions on how to organise and share money was usually initiated by women. These discussions were often a way to prevent conflicts, dissatisfaction, or what they see as financial unfairness. I argue these discussions were a mechanism minimising the tension between female breadwinning and financial equality with men who earn less, although conflict still appeared in several cases. In the case of money-pooling, conflicts and tensions over money tended to revolve around women’s spending, usually thought of as unreasonable or unnecessary by some men, such as Logan (partner of main breadwinner), who said:

I think Amy spends too much money on clothes for children. So sometimes we have packages of clothes arriving at the door and we fight a lot about that because I don’t necessarily see the need for them to have as much as they do clothes-wise.

On the other hand, conflict and tensions in the case of alternative financial arrangements tended to be about men’s access to women’s money, thought of as too restricted by some men, like Graham (partner of sole breadwinner) described:

I think she earns 4 or 5 times what I earn and sometimes I have to ask for some pocket money and that’s demoralising, as a man and you know, growing up my dad earned the money and my mum earned pennies. We were poor, definitely lower working-class but we did as best as we could as a family. But now I’m not supplying the money, I’m asking her for money.

In several cases of conflicts and tensions taking place within couples who had alternative financial arrangements, the issue of men’s access to women’s money tended to be combined with issues of gendered subjectivity, as exemplified by Graham’s concerns with his manhood when asking his partner for what he called “pocket money”. His dissatisfaction with this situation can be analysed as an emotional reaction that is consistent with the

framework of gender-deviance neutralisation given the way he compares himself to his father who was the male breadwinner of the family to contrast his situation as a male partner of a female breadwinner.

Female breadwinning couples I interviewed had a strong attachment to financial equality, but there was a diversity of ways to implement it. Often, the issue of ‘whose money is it?’ when it came to women’s money was not fully resolved. Such strong attachment to financial equality and conceptualisations of women’s money as the family’s money implied that it could be more difficult for women to systematically use their relatively higher economic power to negotiate a better balance for themselves in the division of domestic labour. Apart from a few women, women I interviewed did not report using their higher relative economic power as an argument during conflicts and tensions about the division of domestic labour.

Moreover, the high priority given to financial equality can be analysed as a manifestation of the hidden asymmetry of value given to women’s and men’s differentiated overall contributions to the household.

The combination of asymmetries between women’s and men’s differentiated subjectivities about their female breadwinning situation and the hidden asymmetry of value attributed to women’s and men’s labour negatively affected the position and power of women when negotiating and structurally framed the female breadwinning marital contract. A fundamental aspect of this contract was the devaluation of women’s labour.

III. How the asymmetrical female breadwinning marital contract persists: women's limited option to exit and its impact on the negotiation

From a purely economic approach to equality in the household, one might wonder why the female breadwinners I interviewed stayed in unequal partnerships – or at least partnerships that reproduce some traditional gender roles as it is the case even in equal couples. How does the household and the relationship persist despite such asymmetries and some conscious dissatisfaction I previously described in this chapter? This puzzle is all the more pertinent in the case of female breadwinners, since the financial barriers to exiting a relationship for female breadwinners are lower than the financial barriers faced by women who have little or no economic independence – and this was especially true in the cases of female breadwinners in NS-SEC 1 and, to some extent, NS-SEC 2. Women's economic empowerment has long been defended by feminists as being one of the most important conditions for equality in the household, because such empowerment is assumed to be a potential card heterosexual women can play to negotiate a better balance at home since it provides a safety net in case she would want to leave the relationship. As I demonstrated in the previous section, female breadwinners' higher financial independence relative to their partner and women in other economic settings did not in fact seem to be the ultimate trump card in the negotiation because the money they earn tended not to be regarded as their own, but as the couple's. In this section, I argue that despite their relatively higher financial independence, female breadwinners' option to exit the relationship remained limited by some mechanisms which negatively impacted their position and power in the marital contract, and when negotiating the division of domestic labour. I first show that love – and the priority given to love – was the main emotional mechanism which limited these women's option in considering to leave their partner (sub-section A below). I also spotlight

some material barriers that limited these women's option to exit, when such option was considered (sub-section B).

A. Love: the main emotional mechanism limiting women's option to think of exiting

In this sub-section, I argue that the main emotional mechanism that enabled a household to persist despite dissatisfaction over some asymmetries and women's relatively higher financial independence was love – more precisely the priority some women in these households gave to love.

The idea of love seems to have become the highest priority for a 'good' relationship in the wider culture. Giddens (1993) understands this phenomenon as a sign of a transformation of intimacy that has taken place in Western countries since the 1980s. Whereas the relationships of the 19th and early 20th centuries tended to (at least in theory) be based on mutually practical arrangements, the commencement and continuation of a relationship would now be based on new intimate criteria such as love, happiness, and sexual attraction. But feminist scholars have long pointed out that love, or at least heterosexual 'romantic love' (Jackson, 1999), sometimes functions as a way to justify relationships in which there are inequalities at the expense of women. In my fieldwork, several women mentioned loving their partner right after talking about the issues, tensions, and dissatisfaction they experience in some aspects of their relationship. In these cases, love was given a higher priority than equality and fairness. Rosie (main breadwinner) described her relationship in the following words:

Whilst there are frustrations around how we share the burden, I love him very much ultimately so I'm willing to make sacrifices around these things without even complaining about it. And I kind of see that as one of the things you do when you're a wife or partner, making those sacrifices. It's not perfect by any means, we have some difficulties and some severe up and downs, I think it's probably in the life of

any marriage. We did have marriage counselling last year because we had a really rough period, this year is better, touch wood.

Rosie's description of her relationship exemplifies several important points in explaining how love holds together a relationship that is otherwise characterised by the woman's dissatisfaction with her partner's contribution to domestic labour. Firstly, love is explicitly given the ultimate priority over equality and fairness in domestic labour and trumps her "frustrations" in the division of domestic labour. Love itself does not even have to be without challenges to be accorded this priority, as her and her partner's participation in "marriage counselling" shows. Secondly, her definition of love includes "sacrifices without even complaining about it", suggesting she subscribes to a version of love that is compatible with unequal power where the individual at least partially suppresses their interests and desires in favour of the partner. It can be argued that Rosie's exemplifies a case of "love power" in which love reproduces structural male power in the relationship (Jónasdóttir, 1994).

Such priority given to love as a criterion for maintaining the relationship generally was seen as incompatible with contemplations of ending a relationship. Whilst discussing her dissatisfaction with the division of domestic labour, recurrent arguments, and anger bursts from her partner, Emma (sole breadwinner) acknowledged that she had "recently thought" about breaking up with him, before adding: "it did come to my mind for a second... but you know, I love him so that's not a thought that I have seriously considered". From the point of view of the balance of power in the negotiation, love could therefore become a factor that disempowered women. Indeed, in a situation where one of the parties negotiating an arrangement has already ruled out the option to actually exit – or at least to voice to oneself and the other the existence of this option if some of their standards are not met and/or if a compromise cannot be reached – the balance of power between the parties is

already skewed. Negotiation in such a context can lead to outcomes in which standards and needs of one party are at least partially ignored to the benefit of the other.

This asymmetry of position and power between women and men is amplified by the scarcity of potential male partners felt by several female breadwinners in this research. Firstly, several of them reported that their status as female breadwinner was a significant source of tension in previous relationships. Secondly, several women also experienced a time where it was difficult for them to find a man to date or start a relationship with, because of their own status in the labour market, as Grace (main breadwinner) explained:

I have a friend who's unmarried and who I worked with and we used to have conversations about the challenges of meeting somebody that could deal with the fact that you are intelligent and successful you know. Because a lot of men seem to find that quite tricky. It upsets their sense of manhood.

For women who had experienced such difficulties, there was an acute sense of gratitude towards finding a man who (at least) doesn't mind earning relatively less. From this angle, exiting a relationship with a man in this mindset – however small his contribution is to domestic labour – holds for women, especially those in higher-paying jobs, the risk of either ending up with a man who is bothered by earning less, or simply not entering a new relationship in the near future or, indeed, ever. This potential outcome can emotionally too costly for some women, especially in a society in which heterosexual coupledness based on cohabitation is the statistical and cultural norm at the expense of alternative romantic and/or sexual arrangements, and in which long-term singledom for women is often culturally regarded as a failure and a source of “cultural anxiety” (Jeffreys, 1997; A. Taylor, 2012). Such cultural factors made the option to exit a relationship more difficult for women in general, including the female breadwinners I interviewed.

In the next sub-section, I demonstrate that these cultural factors sometimes combine with material barriers to limit the possibility for women to exit their relationships.

B. The material barriers limiting women's option to implement exit

Love was not always a necessary condition for the relationship to continue despite asymmetries and dissatisfaction. In this sub-section, I argue that even when feelings of love had subsided and women seriously considered the option to exit, there were significant material barriers that prevented them from actually leaving the relationship, despite their relatively higher financial independence.

Explaining that there was no longer any love between her partner and her, Amy (main breadwinner) reported:

Logan and I have always, always, and I know he'll tell you the same thing, we've always talked about how our relationship has hung together because other things kept it together. So that old quote about "of course we both wanted to divorce we just didn't want to divorce at the same time", that's not quite to that extent but there's always been something keeping us together, whether that be because we've got the house, we're financially tied together, we've got the kids and the dogs. [...] And for me the kind of romantic notion is just not there. [...] It's not the thought of the happier times that kept us together during the harder times, it's more that we couldn't be arsed or found it too tricky to sort out the logistics of not staying together.

Amy's testimony points to different material barriers keeping her in this relationship: economic constraints such as shared finances and property ownership, care and legal constraints related to the guardianship of children and pets, and all the "logistics of not staying together" related to the paperwork and administration involved in divorce. While these material barriers are known to prevent women in different economic settings from leaving because they carry costs in terms of money and energy, they can also apply to female breadwinners.

In some cases, such barriers led women to settle for a relationship based on a friendly and mutual understanding. In Amy's case, such mutual understanding is all the more valued because she is satisfied with the way her and her partner are bringing up their children. However, economic and administrative barriers to separating could also lead women to

settle for a relationship based on fear when there is another material barrier: potential psychological and physical violence from the male partner.

Explaining that she thought of “splitting up” because of the inequality in contributions to domestic labour, Susan (main breadwinner) added : “Sometimes I think about it every day [laughs], for weeks on end. And then I forget about it for a while, and then I think about it again. It kind of depends on what is going on”. In this process, the costs of exiting the relationship are carefully evaluated and weighed against the advantages of this option. “So in my mind there’s that balance between ‘can I live with this? Should I live with this? Would that be worse?’ ”, wondered Susan before arguing that her son was the “main reason” why she hasn’t broken up with her partner yet:

[...] because it would have a massive impact on him [...]. At the moment I think we’d have to split the time, all of the stuff that comes with splitting up, everything. But then I would still be organising and doing a lot of this stuff, he would want 50/50 split custody which would not be acceptable to me.

Her anticipation of how her partner might behave during separation weighed heavily against exiting the relationship, especially as:

He was married before and I think it’s fair to say that he gave his ex-wife a pretty hard time when they split up, that was very difficult for various reasons. So, I think he would make my life hell... [laughs] and I’m not sure I’d be safe.

Some women’s fear of potential male psychological and/or physical violence (Johnson, 1995, 2005) when voicing their decision to break up and in the aftermath of it was an important factor in maintaining unhappy and unequal relationships. This was spontaneously reported by three women I interviewed while talking about their relationships with their partners, in a context where I explicitly told them that I was listening to them but was not expecting them to disclose this type of information.

Overall, the presence of some material barriers to exiting a relationship ultimately constrained some female breadwinners’ agency and ability to negotiate a better balance of

domestic labour for themselves as they were not in the position to seriously consider breaking the marital contract by ending the relationship.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I showed that there were fundamental asymmetries of positions and power between women and men in negotiating the division of domestic labour. Firstly, there was a subjective asymmetry in which women and men used comparisons with others that lowered women's expectations of their male partners and of their own situations by rationalising and minimising inequality. Secondly, there was an asymmetry in the emotional dynamic, where women's guilt and men's need for reassurance prevented them from seeing inequalities as they were, which negatively impacted women's positions and power in the negotiation. These asymmetries in women's and men's subjectivities were two mechanisms of the reproduction of traditional gender roles through the interplay between individual subjectivities and gender as a wider structure of inequality. These asymmetries also contributed to a hidden asymmetry underpinning the marital contract in couples I interviewed: the unequal symbolic and financial value given to women's and men's contributions to the household, which I understand as a direct micro-level reflection of the way gender as a wider structure of inequality devalues women's labour. I therefore argue that a fundamental aspect of these households' female breadwinning heterosexual marital contract was the devaluation of women's labour, resulting from the interplay between macro-level structures and micro-level individual agency and subjectivities. Despite the relatively higher financial independence of female breadwinners (compared to their partner and women in other economic settings), and some dissatisfaction they felt, this asymmetrical marital contract persisted because women's option to exit – or to consider

exiting – was limited both by love as an emotional mechanisms love and by material barriers.

Chapter 8. Conclusion

This thesis began by looking at a puzzle, one particularly relevant in contemporary Western societies such as the United Kingdom, summed up by Jonasdottir (1994) with the question: “why, or how” (Chapter 1) do inequalities and asymmetries of power between women and men persist at the expense of women despite a context of formal equality in the law?

It is with this puzzle in mind that I chose to study the division of domestic labour in female breadwinner heterosexual households in the United Kingdom. Women’s higher contribution to domestic labour, relative to men’s, has long been understood in some of the literature on domestic labour as a result of their higher time availability and/or their lower economic power (Chapter 2). I wanted to examine the reverse situation, i.e. into heterosexual couples’ division of domestic labour where women earn more than their male partners, to assess whether this results in a reversal of domestic labour contributions, in other words, if men were doing more housework and childcare due to their lower economic power and/or higher time availability.

My primary interest was in the mechanisms and subjective experiences underlying the division of domestic labour between women and men in these households. I therefore used qualitative methods (Chapter 3) to answer the following overarching research question: how do women and men negotiate their division of domestic labour in female breadwinning households? (Chapter 1)

This thesis concerns how inequality between women and men is produced and reproduced within the negotiations of domestic labour taking place in some 21st century heterosexual households despite women’s higher economic power relative to their male partners, and despite women and men’s professed attachment to ‘gender equality’. Among the couples I interviewed, I found that women’s average contribution to domestic labour was 60%, and

about two thirds of households implemented an unequal division of domestic labour in which women were doing more (Chapter 4). Even among the households in which women and men domestic labour was shared equally or where men were doing more of the domestic labour, I found that traditional gender roles persisted to some extent. Overall, I argued (Chapter 7) that there was a marital contract underpinning the negotiations of the division of domestic labour of the couples I interviewed. As I discuss in the second section of this concluding chapter, this marital contract gave room for a non-traditional economic setting such as female breadwinning, while tacitly upholding traditional gender roles around unpaid labour in the household. Women were the main or sole breadwinners, but also tended to adopt the role of managers of the household and carers of the emotional sphere, while men tended to take on the role of helpers.

In the remainder of this concluding chapter, I first summarise my main empirical findings (section I below) before discussing theoretical contributions and limitations, as well as directions for future research (section II). These theoretical contributions are: 1) the mapping of the marital contract in a female breadwinning context, 2) supporting previous literature on the economic perspectives showing that the power provided by a higher relative income, lower time availability, and other individual resources are mediated by gender, and 3) adding nuance to previous literature on the gender perspectives through both the precise pinpointing of mechanisms of gender-deviance neutralisation and a broader understanding of power dynamics between women and men based by highlighting the crucial role of emotions and the relational level. The main limitations of this research lie in 1) the limited ethnic and socio-economic diversity of the participants, 2) the limited understanding of reasons and mechanisms behind why most female breadwinners I interviewed did not explicitly use their higher income during tension and conflict around

domestic labour, and 3) the incomplete data collection and analysis concerning the participants' emotions and their households' emotional dynamics.

I. Summary of empirical findings

One of the most striking findings in the interview data (Chapter 3) is a general gap between the division of domestic labour and participants' perceptions of equality (Chapter 4). The two-day time schedules and Household Portraits (Chapters 3 and 4) I used to get a measure of the participants' division of domestic labour show evidence of quantitative and qualitative inequality at the expense of women. Most couples reproduced traditional gender roles, with women doing more housework and childcare, and domestic labour being divided into patterns of 'feminine' and 'masculine' tasks and activities. This contrasts with the majority of the participants' subjective views on the importance of equality and their perceptions of equality in their households. I explain this contrast by drawing attention to the participants' specific understanding of 'equal sharing'. What the participants often meant by 'equal sharing' was not based on quantitative and qualitative equality as I measured it; several of them understood the idea of 'equal sharing' as being compatible with some unequal practices of housework and childcare in the relationship. I argue that this idea of 'equal sharing' being compatible with inequality can be understood in the light of the 'team' rhetoric used by the majority of participants. The 'team' they referred to was comprised of two gender-neutral and complementary individuals. This rhetoric underpinned and justified some of the women's and men's attitudes and limited aspirations to quantitative and qualitative equality in domestic labour.

The gap between the participant's perception of equality and their unequal division of physical domestic labour can be explained by two processes: women's higher mental load

and emotional work (Chapter 5). These processes manifest in the roles that women and men adopt: women as managers and carers in the emotional sphere, and men as helpers. The mechanisms underlying the emergence of the mental load and emotional work were an intricate set of mechanisms related to gendered standards, personalities, and men's inertia and resistance towards domestic labour. The tasks and activities that comprise the mental load and emotional work were rarely seen as labour by participants, but rather a function of personality traits. Some women I interviewed were constantly micromanaging the emotions in the household, including adapting to men's emotions. This adaptation was usually in reaction to some defensiveness from male partners concerning their contribution to domestic labour. In these cases, women developed strategies of anticipation of their partner's feelings while adopting a reassuring and non-confrontational style of communication towards their partners.

The question of how change in the division of domestic labour comes about was addressed by considering the influence of marital conversations and conflicts on power relations in the negotiations about domestic labour (Chapter 6). In their individual interviews, female participants were more likely to acknowledge inequality and express dissatisfaction about the division of tasks and activities, despite initial claims that their households were equal – claims which were usually made during the joint interviews and at the beginning of the individual interviews.

New circumstances such as increased working hours or the arrival of children provided women with an opportunity to induce change, especially when these circumstances were accompanied by open marital conversations. Conflict arose when there was a tension between women's power to name and define the change they desired and their partner's power to continue to benefit from an unequal status quo. When change failed to be achieved, female breadwinners tended to either externalise the conflict through the hiring

of a cleaner or to internalise the conflicts within and against themselves. The latter option came with some emotional costs, as highlighted in Chapter 6. I also find that there were boundaries limiting the scope of possible change in the division of domestic labour to an incremental change in the trajectory towards equality. Some barriers such as men's limited receptivity and women's limited sense of entitlement to equality also prevented change from taking place by limiting women's power to name and define desirable change for themselves.

The data revealed that change in the division of domestic labour was limited and difficult. Fundamental asymmetries in the marital contract between women and men had a direct impact on their negotiations around domestic labour. Firstly, a subjective asymmetry arose through comparison with other households and individuals who were usually perceived as less egalitarian. This resulted in women rationalising and minimising inequality, ultimately lowering expectations of their male partners and their own situations. Secondly, an emotional asymmetry also emerged when women's guilt and men's need for reassurance prevented them from identifying inequalities, negatively impacting women's positions and power in the negotiations. These two asymmetries contributed to a third hidden asymmetry: the unequal symbolic and financial value given to women's and men's labour. Despite female breadwinners' greater financial independence relative to their partner and women in other economic settings, these asymmetries persisted because women's option to exit – or to consider exiting – was sometimes limited by love and material barriers. These mechanisms often diffused dissatisfaction women felt over the division of domestic labour.

II. Discussion of theoretical contributions and directions for future research

The theoretical contributions of this thesis are the mapping of the marital contract in a female breadwinning context (sub-section A below), supporting previous literature discussing the economic perspectives (sub-section B), and adding nuance to previous literature on the gender perspectives (sub-section C). I also discuss some of the main limitations of this research

A. Mapping the marital contract in a female breadwinning context

Based on my empirical findings, I use the idea of the ‘marital contract’ as a heuristic tool to understand the power dynamics and negotiations of the division of domestic labour in female breadwinning households.

Inspired by Pateman’s (1988) theory of the sexual contract shaping the power dynamics between women and men in modern Western societies, I used the idea of a “marital contract” to highlight the interplay between gender as a wider structure of inequality and individual agency in the negotiations over domestic labour. She argues that the “male sex-right” (Pateman, 1988, p. 2) to access women’s bodies and labour is tacitly maintained in our societies despite laws which guarantee formal equality between individuals and does not differentiate between women and men. More specifically, men’s access to women’s labour is ensured through the marriage contract, as it is tacitly based upon a separation of roles between men as breadwinners and women as responsible for domestic labour.

Applied to the non-traditional economic setting of my sample of female breadwinning households, I argue that such a tacit contract – guaranteeing men’s access to women’s labour – did exist. The main finding concerning the marital contract I observe from my data is that women were the main or sole breadwinners, in addition to being responsible for the majority of domestic labour. In short, female breadwinning can indeed coexist with

traditional gender roles at home. In the couples I interviewed, the maintenance of a relationship where women earn more than their male partners was conditioned by their overall higher contribution to housework and childcare. These traditional domestic labour roles persisted in spite of women's status as the breadwinner, and the possibility this provided to several of them to hire a cleaner.

The marital contract was more or less rigidly traditional concerning gender roles in the household, depending on the patterns of division of domestic labour couples found themselves in. Two thirds of the couples I interviewed implemented an unequal division of domestic labour at the expense of women, but in a third of households, women did the same as or even less than their male partners. Despite this tendency towards equality, I found that even couples with a more equal division of domestic labour also reproduced traditional gender roles to some extent, in addition to being characterised by specific material circumstances such as higher differences in income and time availability, and the near-systematic hiring of a cleaner. Some of these traditional gender roles were found in the way women took on the mental load and emotion work, as well as adopting a proactive, non-confrontational, and reassuring approach in "marital conversations" and discussions around hiring a cleaner.

A particularly interesting feature of this contract is that a rhetoric of 'gender equality' was used to bolster family cohesion without too much dissatisfaction over unequal practices. Even though individual women and men acknowledged some inequality during their individual interviews, they tended to emphasise perceptions of equality during their joint interviews and towards the beginning of their individual interviews. I argue that this perception of equality, combined with the 'team' rhetoric, were part of an 'official narrative' used by couples and individual women and men. The 'official narrative' was an important tacit element of the marital contract: practical inequalities could be tolerated and

justified as long as they were not consciously supported by traditional views of womanhood and manhood, and as long as individuals displayed theoretical agreement with ideas of ‘gender equality’. The coexistence of inequality and the ideology of ‘gender equality’ seemed to also rest on the idea that the division of domestic labour individual women and men implemented took place between two gender-neutral individuals who had complementary preferences.

Women’s individual agency and attempts to create change towards domestic labour equality with their partners took place within this tacit marital contract. Traditional gender roles were challenged and renegotiated to varying degrees, especially through “marital conversations” and conflicts which nonetheless tended to reproduce gendered dynamics. However, the boundaries of the negotiability of change framed the marital contract, meaning that for the relationship to be maintained, some change can be negotiable while other types of changes are impossible. These specific boundaries – namely the existing division of domestic labour itself, unavoidable tasks and responsibilities, and the unconscious processes and habits underlying the division of domestic labour – limited women’s individual agency to a few options in the face of their partners’ inertia.

The position and bargaining power of women and men in the negotiations of their division of domestic labour within this marital contract were biased by fundamental asymmetries. In practice, it was not two gender-neutral individuals who were negotiating from equal positions, but individuals influenced by gender within wider structures of inequality. The macro-level economic devaluation of women’s labour was reproduced at the micro-level of the households through various symbolic, financial, and emotional mechanisms underlying the marital contract between women and men at the meso-level.

There was some socio-economic diversity between couples in my sample (Chapter 3). Overall, the majority of the participants were white and lower or upper-middle class. At some points, I have explicitly referred to the influence of the participants ethnic and socio-context on some mechanisms. For example, women from ethnic-minority groups tended to compare their white male partners to men from their own ethnic group. Men in lower socio-economic categories were generally more resistant to the idea of hiring a cleaner, whilst female breadwinners from these socio-economic categories were sometimes willing to hire a cleaner but lacked the money to do so. The overall lack of ethnic and socio-economic diversity is a limitation of the thesis. Further research using the marital contract as a heuristic theoretical tool of understanding the interplay between the structural and individual level in a female breadwinning context (as well as other economic settings) could investigate its content and boundaries in other social and economic settings to assess its potential ethnicity- and class-based specificities.

B. Discussing the economic perspectives with the marital contract

In this thesis, I have attempted to understand the scope of the economic perspectives on the division of domestic labour within the context of the marital contract.

The socio-economic position of women I interviewed – based on relative earnings, socio-economic category, and educational attainment – and lower time availability relative to their male partners' played a role in the negotiation of domestic labour. These factors generally increased the power of individual women in the negotiation. When women were of higher socio-economic category and educational attainment, this tended to prompt households to prioritise women's career as they had a higher 'earning potential' than their male partners. Women's higher relative income was sometimes used as an argument to spur

change in men's involvement in certain domestic labour tasks. When women belonged to a higher socio-economic category, this also enabled them to hire a cleaner to achieve a better balance of domestic labour by decreasing their or their partner's individual contribution. Women's lower time availability meant that they were away from home longer, and that men had to take on some domestic labour responsibilities.

However, these factors only gave women power in some specific negotiations and were not enough to undo traditional gender roles and dynamics of power. My findings therefore support previous literature showing that women's economic power and the opportunity provided by women's lower time availability are mediated by gender (Tichenor, 2005, O. Sullivan 1997, Bittman and Wajcman, 2000; Vagni, 2019). They also support the critiques of gender-neutral theories which explain the division of domestic labour through variables which are understood independently from gender as a wider structure of inequality between women and men.

Most women I interviewed did not report using their higher relative earnings as motivation to increase their partners' contribution to domestic labour. My research does not provide enough material to answer the question of why female breadwinners do not explicitly use their higher economic power when negotiating change towards more equality. It would be particularly interesting to probe this question further by seeking to understand the mechanisms and processes taking place when women do explicitly use this argument. In these cases, targeted interview questions about women's motivations, men's reactions, and overall consequences could provide a better understanding of the relationship between power, gender, and money.

C. Discussing the gender perspectives with the marital contract based on specific emotional dynamics

By highlighting the existence of a marital contract guaranteeing men's access to women's labour which plays out at the meso-level intermediary between gender as a wider structure of inequality and individual agency and subjectivities, my findings support the idea that households function as gender factories (Berk, 1985). Through their contribution to domestic labour and the type of tasks they specialise in, women and men 'did gender' on a daily basis and reproduced such wider hierarchies in their households.

I also found some explicit mechanisms of gender-deviance neutralisation in the way some men in various situations of female breadwinning described their involvement in traditionally masculine tasks (Chapter 4) and conflicts over finances (Chapter 7). In these cases, there was an explicit compensatory reference and perceived need to assert their manhood in a context of female breadwinning, supporting previous literature taking gender perspectives (Brines, 1994; Greenstein, 2000)

There was also evidence of gender-deviance neutralisation in some of the men's emotional reactions in the negotiation of domestic labour. On the one hand, many men displayed limited receptivity, inertia, and defensiveness in the face of their female partners' demands for change towards more equality. On the other hand, there was some need for reassurance over their position in the family. In the cases of men's defensiveness, my findings show that the strongest defensive reactions generally came from men who were involuntarily unemployed, supporting previous literature. However, as I discussed in Chapters 6 and 7, I found these emotional reactions from men in all situations of female breadwinning, including men who were working full-time and those who contributed to domestic labour as much or more than their female partners. I therefore argue that the mechanism of gender-

deviance neutralisation does not adequately explain the overall domestic labour inequality and unequal power dynamics within my sample.

Moreover, I argue that the idea that gender-deviance neutralisation as a type of gender display by which women and men individually consciously perform identities of ‘woman’ and ‘man’ in alignment with what the individual knows is expected of her or his sex category is limited by my findings on the asymmetrical and relational emotional dynamics underpinning the marital contract. The individual and conscious performance of femininity and masculinity was only the tip of the iceberg of the gendered subjectivities of women and men. Women’s limited sense of entitlement (Chapter 6) and guilt (Chapter 7), as well as men’s limited receptivity, inertia, defensiveness, and need for reassurance (Chapters 5 to 7), did not mainly come from an individual conscious willingness to conform to the roles of femininity or masculinity, but rather resulted from deep-rooted unconscious habits of doing and thinking, inherited from gender socialisation as well as unequal power dynamics within the household. Rather than stemming only from conscious and compensatory gender performances, domestic labour inequality is also based on emotions as micro-level mechanisms in the reproduction of structural inequality between women and men in the household. I highlight the importance of the relational level by including considerations on how women’s and men’s reactions – as well as emotional reactions to each other’s actions – influenced their interactions, subjectivities, and contributions to domestic labour. I argue that the relational level allows better understanding of how power dynamics between women and men takes place in the emotional sphere. In these relations of power, women’s and men’s emotions do not emerge symmetrically and independently from each other: men’s emotions often trigger in unique ways specific emotions and reactions in women’s domestic labour behaviours. The emotional dynamic and economy of gratitude I find in

couples I interviewed both reflect and reproduce gender as a wider structure of inequality and hierarchy between women and men.

As this research highlights the crucial importance of emotional mechanisms in creating and maintaining inequality within the household, it is also somewhat limited in its scope. A relative paucity of psychological knowledge around emotions when I designed my interview questions, I was not prepared to fully uncover all the mechanisms at play, despite including this theme very early in my interviews since it emerged frequently in my participants' responses. Informed by both psychology and sociology, further research on the division of domestic labour could dig even deeper into women's and men's differentiated subjective experiences and emotional reactions by asking more precise questions during joint and individual interviews. Moreover, the influence of emotional mechanisms in creating and maintaining inequality within the household is one piece of the puzzle in understanding how inequality between women and men persists, despite equality in the law. Therefore, further research investigating the intersection between emotions and gender as a wider structure of inequality could have the potential to unveil similar mechanisms in addition to domestic labour. An important emerging concept, caring masculinities, could help challenging our current understanding of the emotions underlying men's sense of manhood since it highlights the possibility of men's positive emotions towards care (Elliott, 2016).

My findings and theoretical contributions also enrich the critiques of contemporary "post feminism" and "corporate feminism" (Sandberg, 2013; Mavin and Grandy 2017), which argue for the inclusion of (some) women in higher positions in the labour market as a way to promote women's rights and 'gender equality', without fundamentally challenging the

underlying “hegemonic masculinity” (McRobbie, 2015). Indeed, women’s economic empowerment seems to be a necessary but insufficient condition to dismantle gender as a wider structure of inequality between women and men. Firstly, the economic empowerment of some individual women generally does not bring collective economic empowerment for women (Adkins & Dever, 2014). Sometimes, such individual economic empowerment even directly depends on the economic precarity of other women, who are hired as cleaners (Demetriou, 2015; Lutz, 2016) to perform domestic roles economically empowered women and their male partners don’t. Secondly, even the women who are economically empowered often cannot negotiate ‘gender equality’ in the household in the face of their male partner’s inertia towards domestic labour, as findings from the previous literature on female breadwinning (Chapter 2) and present in this thesis highlight. Ultimately, findings on women’s and men’s differentiated emotions and emotional reactions about domestic labour highlight the necessity for feminist movements to find ways to address asymmetric emotional dynamics between women and men.

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Appendices 1 to 7

[Word count: 10 758 words]

Appendix 1. Advertisement for recruitment of participants



Ethics Approval Reference: SOC_R2_001_C1A_17_03

Female breadwinning – Volunteers needed for research

The purpose of the research is to investigate how couples and families experience female breadwinning. The researcher is a PhD student at the University of Oxford (Department of Sociology, <https://www.sociology.ox.ac.uk/people/sarah-masson.html>)

The research involves :

- One 20/30-minute joint interview (with both members of the couple)
- One 45/60-minute individual interview with each individual

Interviews take place whenever and wherever it suits you.

Inclusion criteria :

- In a heterosexual relationship where the woman is the main breadwinner (i.e. she earns more than her male partner)
- Over the age of 18 and below the age of 65
- Both individuals agree to take part

To express interest and for further information regarding the research please contact: Sarah Masson – 07849839020 or sarah.masson@sociology.ox.ac.uk

Appendix 2. Transcript of Grace and Michael's joint interview

(duration: 20 minutes)

Grace [takes a note]: so we don't have a car, we could make it bike maintenance

Sarah (researcher): sure

G: if it's bike maintenance, then it's probably me [laughs]

Michael [nods]: yeah

G: driving

M [takes a note]: that's you, occasionally

G: do you want to be in there, with me helping?

M: I think it's more your job, so yeah

G [takes a note]: doing DIY, depends on the sort of DIY, Michael does the painting

S: there's one for painting

G: oh, is there? Oh ok, shall we keep it there to see what else is there?

M: yeah

G [takes a note]: deciding major purchases, together...[takes a note] Paperwork, shared equally

M: you probably do more of it

G: well yeah but that's only because I put things that I am more organise

M: because you put yours somewhere else than mine

G [takes a note]: overall budget and financial management, middle?

M: yeah

G: writing/phoning relatives and friends (puts in Rob's) [laughs]

M: [laughs]

S: do you do hers as well?

M: no [laughs]

G: but he does prompt me to [laughs]

M: not really, I draw the line at doing that

G: no [laughs]

M: I wouldn't get away with it in my family

G: my family don't mind because we're not organised [laughs]. I baked a cake for my mum a week later, she was quite pleased to have cake... [takes a note] Organising holidays

M: it's both

G: I was about to put it there ["mainly Grace" column]. It's partly because I've paid for them, and also Majorca, Germany, I did the organising

M: yeah ok

G: I'll put it as shared equally then, because I know you do organise sometimes as well... [takes a note] Remembering birthdays [laughs]

M: you wouldn't remember you own

G: occasionally I do a bit of remembering [laughs]... [takes a note] Relationships with neighbours

M: you are probably better with that than me I would say, just because of the boys

G [takes a note]: taking photos

M: we both do that

G: yeah... [takes a note] Organising social events with friends and family, I'd say that's a bit even, I do more friends and you do more family

M: yeah... [takes a note] Washing the dishes/doing the dishwasher

G: well I do a bit [laughs]

Putting the dishes away that's pretty even

M [takes a note]: yeah, so we have a cleaner so we don't really do that

G: we do a bit of it, I think we share equally when it's not done by the cleaner.

S: yeah, I'll have a few more questions about the cleaner so let me know whenever there's a task she does

G: she is essential for good harmony!

S: [laughs]

M [takes a note]: hand laundry is definitely you, I don't do any of that... [takes a note]

Ironing

G: shared equally when we have to do it

M [takes a note]: buying clothes and shoes, I'd say it's pretty equal these days, it used to be more you

G [takes a note]: drying clothes, I'll put it slightly that way because I probably do a bit more of it

M [takes a note]: contacting the landlord/dealing with the mortgage it's you... [takes a note]

Decorating definitely me

G: yeah

M [takes a note]: indoor and outdoor painting

G: I do a little bit, come on I just did this wall last week

M [takes a note]: gardening, more you than me

G: yeah but you help me

M [takes a note]: buying furniture and household items, it's pretty much in the middle

Household repairs or calling a professional, it's more you than me

G: yeah, having just done it this morning... [takes a note] Arranging babysitting that's mainly me I think

M: but who pays for that?

G: [laughs] it says arranging, it doesn't say paying for it... [takes a note] Making children's GP appointments that's me... [takes a note] Dealing with children when upset, mostly me

M: yeah

G [takes a note]: deciding to get a pet, or rather deciding to not get a pet

M: equally... [takes a note] DIY, I'd say it's shared, we do several DIY things together, like putting up the shelves, I hold while you drill because you're better at that

G: yeah I thought it would be slightly more there because I tend to do the drilling... [takes a note] Cooking dinner, there [takes a note] Mopping, we don't do any mopping, the cleaner does it

M [takes a note]: sweeping it's probably more you than me

G: yeah

M: dusting, I don't really do that

G: once in a blue moon, it's kind of like mopping isn't it? Goes to the cleaner... [takes a note] Cleaning the bathroom

M: possibly the cleaner

S: is the cleaner doing the bathroom?

G: yes

M: mostly

G: it's not that it doesn't happen

S: and the toilet as well?

G: she does sometimes, but it's mostly Michael... [takes a note] Hanging up clothes, even

M: the cleaner occasionally does it too... [takes a note] Did you think of all of these tasks?

S: uh it's not just me, there are also previous studies on this so I got inspiration from that and from previous participants... Is the hoovering done by the cleaner as well?

M: yeah

G [takes a note]: taking out the bins, that's a Michael job [laughs]... [takes a note] Cleaning the porch... [takes a note] Writing the grocery list, I do the online shop

M: both of us I'd say

G: yeah, ok... [takes a note] Planning meals more you, I do sometimes... [takes a note] Putting food shopping away it's you just because you get, well to be fair, sometimes it's me... [takes a note] Reading to children, a bit more me

M [takes a note]: changing nappies, we don't have to do that anymore

S: but who was doing it?

M: you

G: more me

M [takes a note]: putting children to bed, I'd say that pretty much equal these days... [takes a note] Disciplining children

G: I do it's just that you think I'm not doing it as hard as you do [laughs]

M: yeah we have different ways of disciplining them, I'm more shouty [laughs]

G: yes... [takes a note] Worry, I don't really know what to do with that one

S: if it doesn't inspire you just leave it

G [takes a note]: comforting, that's certainly more me

M: yeah

G: but with a bit of help from you, you're not completely insensitive

M: [laughs]

G [takes a note]: helping with social/emotional problems, that's a bit like that one it's not really your thing

M: no

G [takes a note]: helping with financial problems

M [takes a note]: I don't think we do a lot of that

G [takes a note]: when we do it any of it I'd say it's equal... [takes a note] Driving lifestyle choices... [takes a note] Organising children's birthday parties

M: that's definitely more you than me

G: yeah but you were quite good last time I think

M: uhh vaguely

G [takes a note]: contacts with school/day care team

M: probably a bit more you than me

G: yeah... [takes a note] Reading childcare or parenting material

M: we don't do any of that, don't believe in it

G [takes a note]: bringing children to outdoor activities, well I've done the football lately although it's meant to be you

M [takes a note]: but it's indoor

G: oh yeah

S: yeah but outdoor as in outside the house

G: yeah so I take them to football and swimming lessons

M: yeah it's more you but it's not like I don't do anything

G: no... [takes a note] Playing with children, that's pretty even

M: yeah so we've been doing work in this house and several things have gone wrong and so that's why the decorating is here, it's been on me and so the weekend I'd be spending most of my time decorating and Grace deals with the boys. So it was pretty grim, now it's getting more even I think

G [takes a note]: making decisions about children's behaviour, I'd say even... [takes a note]

Supervising children

M: probably more you

G: yeah as you said, but it's getting more equal... [takes a note] Morning routine

M: equal

G: I tend to do their breakfast and get things ready

M: I tend to tidy up after you're all gone

G [takes a note] : long-term planning of children's activities, we do that together

M: yeah

G [takes a note]: caring for sick children, it depends who's off

M: yeah

S: ok, do you think there's anything missing from the list of tasks?

G: because we don't have a car whenever we travel we spend some time booking train tickets and stuff, but it's pretty even

S: you can add that if you want

M: I think a few of these things at the moment over there and there will probably move there at least [points at the 'shared equally' column], it's just there because it's been easier to say "you do the work all day and I'll deal with that", "I'll deal with the decorating and you'll deal with the tradesmen", you know. Apart from this that's all fairly uncontroversial

G: but a lot isn't going to change, lawn maintenance, taking out the bins, it's always gonna be you

M: that might move over there a bit

G: but also you'll always cook more dinner than me

M: paperwork should probably move a bit more over there. Cause basically you lived here, you moved here in 2007 and you know more people around and I know more people through the boys.

G: I'm trying to think if we do something else, you've got activities, food, holidays

M: you're probably gonna do than more than me cause you're more organised

G: yeah

M: as I'm looking at mine it looks like I don't do a great deal [both laugh]

G: you do plenty, I'm not complaining. A lot of these are just things around the boys. It looks there's a long list but the decorating has been a big job as well.

S: and so what do you think of the result? Are you surprised?

M: no

G: no because what we try to do is, what our approach is we try to do things together, split 50/50, but we know there are certain things one of us is better at

M: or like more. So bike maintenance, I used to get my bike fixed by somebody and I like to think about what we're gonna need so I don't mind, as long as I don't do all the cooking, it's 60/40 probably I think.

G: so we try to play to our strengths but other than that the sort of principle is 50/50 unless there's something that particularly bothers us or we're better at doing and then we adjust it accordingly

M: I grew up in a very tidy house and Grace grew up in an untidy house

G: an untidy farm [laughs]

M: so consequently your childhood experience is nowhere near how tidy my parents' house was, which I'm pleased about because I think my mum was spending too much time cleaning. And equally for you the way we do things is an improvement compared to your family

G: to me this house is spotless [laughs]

M: it is but you didn't see the house I grew up in believe me [laughs]. So yeah it's finding that balance and the cleaner does some of the cleaning, we don't do a great deal in terms of hoovering, that's mostly done once a week by the cleaner.

G: and it's just one of those things I think could become, so before I met Michael I had various places and a flat before here, and the cleaning is the thing that causes frictions in relationships very obviously, so you know, it's really important for us to recognise that. We're not particularly keen to do it either of us, so we get a cleaner and then it's clean enough to keep him happy and he isn't cross with me for not doing it.

S: how often does the cleaner come?

M: 1 to 2 hours a week I'd say

S: ok, does any of you want to add something

G: no that's fine

M: no.

Appendix 3. Household Portrait of Fernanda and Patrick

Loretta	Mainly Loretta (with Kevin helping)	Shared equally	Mainly Kevin (with Loretta helping)	Kevin
Planning the shopping list	Buying furniture and household items	Buying clothes/shoes	Washing the dishes/doing the dishwasher	Taking out the bins
Calling a professional for household repairs	Laundry	Storing clothes	Putting the dishes away	Car maintenance and repair
Grocery shopping	Putting the food shopping away	Worry	Ironing	Gardening
Paperwork	Tidying the bedroom	Cooking dinner	Driving	Lawn maintenance
Baking	Organising social events with friends	Preparing lunch		Minor DIY
Overall budget and financial management	Comforting (partner, children)	Deciding major purchases		Taking photos
Organising holidays and family times	Drying clothes	Tidying the living room		Painting (indoor and outdoor)
Planning meals	Responding to request or need for attention	Preparing breakfast		Decorating
Remembering birthdays	Making and changing beds	Writing or phoning relatives/friends		Tidying and washing the garage
Paying bills and taxes	Helping with social/emotional problems	Planning couple dates		
Dealing with the mortgage				

Appendix 4. Transcript of Logan's individual interview

(duration: 1 hour 7 minutes)

Sarah (researcher): do you have any other comment about this Household Portrait and the way you and Amy share things in the house?

Logan: No, I think it's more of a personality thing, the reason why we're in a position that we are. I think it'll be interesting to see what Amy thinks once she has digested the amount of stuff we've got as shared. Sometimes it's hard to realise until you put it down like this. Apart from some free time I get, where I watch tv or have a walk outside, it's childcare, work and sleep.

S: and would you say that the way you shared things is the result of explicit reflections and discussions or is it just how it goes?

L: it's naturally how we kind of fell into. I think that part of this is related to our personalities, I don't think either of us have been forced into doing these tasks. Amy has grown up with a lot of her family being tradespeople, so that means that she's naturally easier to do that whereas I like to do the cleaning up work around that. I wouldn't say that it's anything else that it's the way we are naturally.

S: and what do you feel about having responsibility for some tasks and activities?

L: fine. At the moment it's quite new adjusting to working backshift and I've now come to the point where my body is used to it. During the working nights I probably to get 3.5 hours of sleep so I suppose the stress comes from making sure that when Amy comes in from work at 5:30 pm there's a meal on the table, and she's not gonna have to comment or constantly think about "ok I need to tidy this or I need to do that". I think the stress comes from making sure that Amy is coming home, not because she'll get annoyed, just because if I'm home all day then I can make sure everything is tidy and that she'll come back with

a meal on the table. The stress only comes from making sure that our night time life is as easy as possible.

S: uhuh. And during the joint interview at some point, I think Amy mentioned about outsourcing tasks and delegating. So you don't really outsource today right?

L: not really. Gardening and the cleaning of the house is the only thing we would delegate and the gardening I suppose is a male type of thing, I like to do the gardening and I like to say I've been able to do that, put some flowers and watch some grow or cut the grass. The cleaning thing is more that I don't like the idea of someone in my house cleaning it. I suppose even with the childcare state of things, because when I was working full-time during the day before, the amount of money I was bringing home every month at the bank, if you were to take away how much was spent on childcare, it's what I'm getting just now. So the choice was between paying someone to do childcare or me changing my work patterns. So it's a personal choice that unless we'd be a lot more financially better off then it doesn't make sense really to work those extra hours just to pay for someone to be in childcare. Julia [young child] has the option of going to extra school care in the evening but again that costs extra money so it doesn't make sense. I have no problem in outsourcing DIY, like painting the house, I have no problem because it's down to a skill thing whereas I think gardening, cleaning and childcare is something we can quite easily do if we can find the time I suppose. Once David [toddler] is on this feet he can be part of the gardening while I'm cutting the grass and that's kind of fun I suppose whereas at the moment it feels more like a chore.

S: uhuh, and would you say that you and Amy have different standards of cleaning, tidying, and childcare?

L: I think cleaning and tidying probably, yes

S: what direction?

L: I'll probably do 80% of what needs to get done and Amy comes and does the rest. She does the 20%, but maybe it's the 20% that takes a little bit longer. So I'll do most of the visual stuff, so if someone comes in the house it's clean and tidy, but behind the TV or the bed no one ever sees... [laughs] Childcare I think Amy sees it a bit differently but I don't think anyone would do as good a job as me and Amy in terms of looking after David and Julia. Whereas Amy is maybe more accepting of other people's way of doing childcare and having maybe lower standards. She's definitely got more of a personal pride about it than I do. Whether that's a gender thing or not, I don't know, obviously Amy is quite strong on gender equality and stuff like that so we have this kind of conversations and I suppose I like to wind her up about it. So yeah, sometimes there's a bit of a male or laziness thing about doing some stuff but if it needs to get done it gets done.

S: and do you have to remind her to do stuff around the house?

L: most of the tasks that she needs to be reminded to do are based around finances. So she obviously knows she's got a bank account but she doesn't know how to access it. She doesn't need to be reminded for stuff around the house, but the kind of finances and insurance and the calling people I suppose yeah, she needs to be reminded but she's busy so I can understand.

S: uhuh. And how has the way you share tasks evolved over the years?

L: obviously it's evolved in the sense that we've got children so there's more tasks involved. The finances side of things that's always been my thing. I think most of the tasks that Amy does has stayed fairly similar. Obviously it's only within the last year that I've kind of taken on more of the tasks because of the fact that I'm at home. And obviously since David is born I'm trying to take some strain off her because she usually spends her

whole day at work and when she comes back she's got to do the bedtime routine so I'm trying to take as much as I can because I know how hard the role she's got to do during the day is. But I suppose the housework and finances and dog stuff that's always been more or less like that. I've always been the dog walker and the one that kind of manages the money and insurances, and she's always kind of done the little bits and made sure that everyone got a present for their birthday and reminding everyone about that. So I think that's stayed fairly the same but I've picked up more of the mundane tasks.

S: would you say that it was a big effort for you to take on those mundane tasks?

L: I think so, I think that hardest thing for me was to adjust to a few things, to the number of hours I'm working. I thought I would be less fatigued but now I'm a lot more tired during the day. The days that I am working the night shift, the following day it's hard to do as much with David because I'm tired. Yeah, I think there's a lot more efforts involved and I suppose it makes you realise how much the other person is doing when you're not around or when you're not doing it. But yeah, I suppose the hardest thing is coping with the lack of sleep. I never required lots of sleep before but dropping to what was probably 6 hours of sleep to 3.5 you kind of feel the difference. But as I say there's a lot of stuff we were doing anyway and it's good to see how much we do share and a lot of the tasks that Amy is doing solely or I'm doing solely we get some enjoyment in them, I like walking the dogs and when Amy comes home she doesn't want to go out again so there would be no point for her to walk the dogs. And she enjoys baking. So I think a lot of the tasks that we do solely on our own, we do it because we actually have that enjoyment doing them, as opposed to there's a effort required.

S: Alright. So now we can move away from the topic of housework and childcare, but before that I have a few general and descriptive questions to ask you, to get a general view of the socio-economic characteristics of the participants

L: sure

[excerpt removed for data anonymity]

S: ok, thank you! Now the first topic we can talk about is your family history

L: yeah, ok

S: what were your parents' job when you were a child/teenager?

L: before I started school my mum was a nursery teacher. So we used to stay in England and then my mum and dad split up when I was about 7, after moving to Scotland. My dad travelled a lot so a lot of my day to day was with my mum. When they split up we would go to my dad's every couple of weekends for the weekend so it's been very much around my mother up until I was 17 or 18. 1 big brother and 1 big sister.

S: did you contribute to the housework back then?

L: yeah, we would do little bits here and there, help in the garden, wash cars. It was financially motivated and that came more from my dad than my mom. I helped my mum because it was a single-parent household and I helped my dad because he was giving me money for it so I'd wash his car and get 3 pounds. He also paid me to be his cleaner at some point.

S: uhuh and were your brother and sister doing the same?

L: no, but they were older so they would help around, but the gardening and tidying was more me.

S: Ok. The next topic is about your current job situation and daily life. Can you tell me more about your work history and educational background?

L: lost all focus in secondary school and just left at the end of fifth year and got a full-time job at 16/17. If I had a bit more support at home and a better crew around me then it might have been different but I just wanted to go get a job and have money. And pretty much since I've left school I've always been in some sort of job. My career has always been very much either in a sales job or customer services or working in banks, selling people something. It's always been kind of medium level roles, it's never been massively challenging, it's not really been a career so to speak and that's partly why we are in the position we are now. Most of the roles I do I could leave for a few years and then pick up again because the jobs I've done have always been about talking to people so my ability to talk to people and have communication with them is not gonna change so if I take a few years out to do what I'm doing I can then pick up somewhere else. So yeah it's been fairly standard, there's never been a career path, and that's what obviously Amy has. And again, that's partly why we're where we're at, because she has somewhere that she can go whereas most of the jobs I've done I can get a little bit more money and some progression but nothing massive. And the last job I had before this one today, we were both at crossroads with our jobs, Amy with her PhD and I had the opportunity to start another job. So I tried for a year where we were both technically working full-time but personally I think I put too much of a strain on the household stuff because I had to leave the house earlier and I was getting back late or either one of us wasn't getting quality family time during the week. It's down to the fact that we've made the decision to have one of us with the kids before and after school, so if we don't want that we could both work full-time chasing a career but I don't have that desire, my desire is to make sure the kids are ok. And Amy's desire is to go and obviously she's a lot brighter than me, she's got a more defined and structured career

path that she can follow and I think that if I was to kind of demand that I was able to work full-time, then I would stop her be able to do what she's doing. And in my opinion her career path leads to somewhere better than where my career path would. Sometimes I suppose in a joke-y way it's also a bit of laziness from my part where I don't have the focus, like I could never do what Amy is doing or what you're doing for example, I don't have the attention span or the desire to do it. Whereas now I leave just before the kids go to bed and I get back a few hours before they get up so I get a few hours and then I get the spend time with them during the day. And I work 4 nights a week so it means that Amy gets to do her uni stuff. I think it works, it works well for me. And because I'm working for a bank, the benefit from a career point of view is that if in 4 or 5 years I decide that I want to go back to full-time during the day then I can just say to them I want to work during the day now. So hopefully it will work.

[Questions to determine NS-SEC - excerpt removed for data anonymity]

S: could you describe me a typical day during the week?

L: ok so I wake up at 7:30 am and then Amy and I will both sort the kids, between 7:30 and 9 it's a family time, get breakfast, get everyone sorted. Between 9 and 12, David and I will do something, so either walk the dogs or go to a class. Between 12 and 1 is lunch, then David will have a sleep, and I'll have a sleep and then we'll get Julia from school at 3. 3 to 4 tends to be snacks and homework, then we'll play or do whatever we want to do, then from 5 to 6 cooking dinner and then I get ready to leave for work at 7pm, I work from 8 to 2am and I finally sleep. When David has a nap it's my time. If I'm not working it can be anything really.

S: ok and when did you start working at the bank?

L: I started in October. If I was to continue working day time we would have to put David in nursery and have Julia in after school care and it would cost 600 or 700 pounds a month so with the salary I was having... I wasn't enjoying my job at the time, and it got to the point whereby Amy earned enough, I could then afford to drop a small amount of salary and also the fact that we wouldn't need childcare technically means that we're not financially worse off by the fact that I'm working full-time. I was planning to leave the job but it had its benefits because I could work from home a couple days a week but working from home for me would involve not being able to take care of the kids. So when Amy is working from home I can take care of David whereas if I'd been working from home as well it wouldn't be possible. So it was time for a change.

S: and how was it for you to change your sleeping pattern?

L: it was harder than I thought. I don't tend to need a lot of sleep so I'm kind of coping better than maybe others would but it has been harder than I thought. And also part of the problems is maybe that it takes me longer to catch up than I thought. My last working day is on Wednesday night and I have long weekends but I tend to just fall asleep watching tv on Thursday night so Amy and I have Friday night and Saturday night to have time and kind of sit and watch television. But I am planning to change the shift and get less days working in the office. But I've adjusted quite quickly to be honest, Amy finds it hard during the nights I'm working because obviously she's responsible for getting the kids to bed and also David still wakes up during the night so Amy has to deal with that and then wake up in the morning. So there's an element of guilt attached to what I'm doing because sometimes it feels like because I was the one who drove the idea of working at night, there's an element of guilt because I know she's got to wake up at 7 o'clock and get the kids fed and then do either a full day at work or at uni. When David sleeps through then it's fine, she's totally comfortable with that but if she had to sort him several times during the night

it's harder. But I'm a lot more comfortable in my mind that this is the right thing and in the long-term this is the best thing for us.

S: alright. Now I have a few questions about your family life.

L: sure!

S: What are the things you most enjoy doing with your children?

L: out with the dogs, definitely. Obviously, David isn't quite there yet but I like exploring, just go for 3-4-5 hours and explore the forest. But I like seeing the kids be happy and doing stuff together. Anything they enjoy is good for me. Amy and I both prioritise the kids first so we don't have much time left for just the two of us but it's fine.

S: and are you happy with your work-family balance?

L: I am definitely.

S: and what are your biggest challenges of being a father in your situation?

L: probably making sure that, at the moment with David it's making sure he's got enough during the day. I'm conscious of the fact that because I'm a bit tired it's easier for me to put him in front of the telly for 20 minutes while I have a coffee. Also because we live in a small village there is a bit of a concern and worry that David isn't getting enough interactions with other kids but we'll get that sorted. Just kind of trying to stay as energetic when I don't have much energy.

S: and how would you describe your relationship with Amy?

L: between Sunday and Wednesday there's not much of a relationship because I'll see her for half an hour in the morning and half an hour at night. In previous jobs that we've worked we did communicate during the day but now I'm not allowed to have my phone out so when

I go to work we can't really exchange with texts and catch up with things. So on the days I'm working we don't really get a chance to chat. I think that there's elements of strain there because we are not seeing each other, but then I still think that recently she's been less stressed about not getting enough sleep and she's been at home a bit more. I think it's hard but I'm still resolute it's the right thing to do because the other option is we are all leaving the house at 8 o'clock in the morning and we all come back at 6/7 and it's already bedtime whereas this way at least we get some time together. Every month it gets a little bit better basically, and we have some catch-up times during the weekend. Sometimes Amy can get quite stressed and overworry a lot about the fact that we don't see each other much during the week but actually it's the same for everyone in the UK, between Monday and Friday they have time for work and sorting the kids. So I consider we're actually quite fortunate to get a few hours during the day where we can do stuff. I think I'm a bit more positive about the short and middle-term than Amy, she can get quite stressed about it.

S: and so would you say she's supportive of your daily life and also big life changes?

L: I think so. The previous job that I was in as I said it wasn't quite working out but at that time I had a good salary, I had a company car and I was at home a couple of days a week, which to Amy was ideal at that time. But whenever we have a bad week, whenever David is not sleeping or we've not seen each other a lot then she kind of refers back to "but you've given up all of this" but sometimes she kind of forgets that I was gonna leave that job anyway. So sometimes I think she can resent me for technically giving up the job and obviously there's times where I preferred walking away than trying to make it work but at the same time I was comfortable enough that it wasn't gonna work out. So I think that she supports my decisions but sometimes from a career point of view she can look back. But I think it's worked to the benefits, by me not staying in the job she can do what she was supposed to be doing which is the academic side of things. Also I don't think she always

realises that waking up after 3 hours of sleep is hard and daily tasks can become a struggle, so sometimes she comes back home and doesn't understand why I didn't do some tasks during the day but it's because I'm tired. It's easier said than done when you're tired.

S: and do you have arguments or tensions about that?

L: yeah absolutely. Usually it lasts for a couple of days and then we're kind of back to normal. I think sometimes I'm less willing to back down and Amy as well, we both got quite strong opinions about things and neither of us backs down about it. So sometimes we have an argument and Amy gives the silent treatment for a couple of days whereas I still continue to talk to her, not because I'm thinking that we've moved on but because we still need to communicate with each other. But as I said I don't think there's anything that's causing a massive strain. I always think in terms of how things are gonna get better and things are hard but we could be in a much worse position.

S: ok and is money ever a topic of tension or disagreement?

L: daily [laughs]. I check my bank account every single day and make sure all bills are paid, checking my plans. I kind of micro manage money a lot, possibly too much but also I think Amy spends too much money on clothes for children. So sometimes we have packages of clothes arriving at the door and we fight a lot about that because I don't necessarily see the need for them to have as much as they do clothes wise. But apart from that most of the stuff we're pretty aligned. We used to spend a lot of money on clothes for ourselves before the kids, now we don't tend to treat ourselves with anything. Again it's all about the kids, making sure they get what they need and what they want, and maybe sometimes we need to be more selfish about ourselves because I think Amy and I can get a bit down about when was the last time we treated ourselves, bought a new pair of jeans or a new top or something. But the day-to-day money I think we're fine, I have a spreadsheet so we know where we're

at. Obviously we'd like to have more money but we don't struggle. There's just this constant arrival of clothes, but Amy is quite good about it because she's on all these Facebook groups and she exchanges clothes with other mums and dads and stuff not everything that comes to the door was paid for but a lot of it was and I think sometimes she tries to sneak under the radar and I would see it two months later on her account. Because yeah we have a joint account but I also have access to hers, she doesn't have any interest in accessing mine. So when she gets paid on her account I leave enough on it for her bills and stuff but I redistribute most of it here and there for our expenses. So yeah I might be overreacting but I also have good reasons sometimes, I think we'd be in a different financial situation if I wasn't checking. When we first met we lived way beyond our means, we didn't have huge salaries but went in debt and I think we'd do the same kind of mistakes today if I wasn't like that, so yeah it can lead to some tensions.

S: and how do you solve those tensions when they arise?

L: I think generally she kind of gets the point I'm trying to make. It's not about saving money, it's just to make sure that we're not constantly spending money, like when I go somewhere I take lunch whereas Amy buys lunch, all those little things that sometimes add up and at the end of the month it's money we could have spent for the family instead on coffees and other stuff. We don't fight as much about money as 18 months ago. Obviously I'm not bringing as much money into the house but I'm still contributing a lot to the house, and obviously Amy is doing a lot and she's bringing a lot of money into the house. It's hard to put a value and find what's the equivalent financial input I'm putting to the house because I'm not actually bringing in as much but me being at home looking after David if you could put a financial value on it what would that be? Obviously that's gonna be the same for the rest of our life, Amy is always gonna bring in a lot more money than me but it's about trying to balance out what my financial impact is on the house.

S: uhuh and would you say that she's the main breadwinner of the household?

L: yeah absolutely, she earns two to three times more you know

S: and is it something you're happy with?

L: yeah I don't feel that I'm less of a man because she brings more money in. She's just very fortunate that she's focused and is doing something that she loves doing. She's in a job and she's lucky enough to have an education and career path like that. I've got no issues really.

S: and do you feel grateful for her contributions?

L: yeah absolutely

S: and do you tell her?

L: yeah I think so. I tell her that I'm proud of her, for what she's done. I don't say that I'm grateful but I suppose I don't necessarily think that I would get that back either. I think sometimes Amy thinks that I've chosen this path because I can't really be bothered, which is right to a point. I don't specifically say I'm really grateful for what you're doing but I say I'm extremely proud of her, I know she's done really well and she will do really well. Obviously the result is that it allows me to not work as much as other people would have to. I don't think I necessarily say I'm grateful for the fact that you're bringing this money and I can be at home and not to have to work as much.

S: and do you think she feels grateful for your contributions and does she tell you?

L: no she doesn't tell me. I don't know. I think sometimes yes she does

S: and if Amy wasn't as career-driven, would you be happy doing the same things you're doing now or would you be doing more work outside?

L: I don't know, I wouldn't struggle working more, if I had to work Monday to Friday 8 to 5 I would absolutely do it. With me it's an economic necessity, it's about bringing in more money so if I had to I would. There have been opportunities in our lives where I had the chance to focus on my career but I've just not chosen to take them, due to maybe my own preference not to follow that but I've never been in the position of telling Amy that she doesn't need to work anymore because I earn enough whereas now Amy is in that position where the extra income she brings in allows me to be at home more.

S: Ok. The next topic is about your social life and activities. How often do you go out with friends?

L: never. Since we've moved down here from Glasgow I don't speak to anybody that I used to. When we had Julia a lot of our social circle was around other parents but we've slowly drifted out of touch with them. My friends are my children [laughs]. To be honest I'd rather spend the day with Julia than with other people I used to hang out with. I suppose the flip side is that it does have an emotional impact, at certain times there are some conversations you'd like to have with a brother or a father or a friend but I don't have anybody around me for that. I'm also quite fortunate that the jobs I do I end up getting quite friendly with the people at work. That kind of call center environment, there are a lot of people who are quite happy to be open and share so a lot of my emotional stuff that I have to unload on people probably gets done at work.

S: and what do you do with your free time?

L: when I have free time it's probably be more about just pottering around in the garden, walking the dogs, try and do stuff like that.

S: and do you get any comments about your position, the fact that you take care of your children?

L: usually it's positive. Most of the men in this village are factory workers and most women are in the care sector so most of the people doing the pick-ups are mums. Interestingly that team that I trained with, I was the only male so I do tend to get kind of comments like "oh that's really good that you're doing that as a man", it's not sexist but just that perception that it's women who would have to consider doing that. But yeah I've got no problem with that. Actually people love me because they think "oh he's such a nice guy because he's put his career on hold to look after the kids" but actually this is what I want to be doing. So there's never anything negative about it. In my previous role there was encouragement for both parents to be flexible workers and the last job I had they didn't quite get their head around the fact that I preferred staying at home with the children and that I enjoyed it. It depends on the role you're doing I think, whether you'll get comments about it. Some women say "oh that's great, that's such a good thing what you're doing to allow your wife to do career stuff". A lot of the guys maybe don't see it that way, but I don't know, I never heard anything.

S: statements

1.strongly disagree 2. I'm not sure about that one. When Amy first went back to work, she was actually out for 5 days a week and I think she maybe struggled with Davida little bit at that time, to form that bond, whereas when she started to be at home a bit more they started to form more of a closer bond. In the early age I think it would maybe impact on creating that relationship. No opinion 3. strongly disagree 4.strongly disagree 5.strongly disagree 6. strongly disagree

S: when you think of yourself in a couple of years, what would you like to see?

L: I would like to see Amy and I with more time. Obviously, we've made the decision to have a second child but I think one of the negatives of having this kind of age gap between

children is difficult, Julia is 7 and you can take her anywhere whereas we both feel we kind of reset the clock a bit with David so in 2 years it would be good to be focusing on us as a couple. As I say we both probably focused too much on the kids and we don't have a strong family network supporting us so a lot of the childcare and babysitting we don't ask for help because we know it's not gonna happen and I think it stops us focusing on each other. So I hope we'll be able to spend more time with each other and career wise I'll probably be doing the same thing but I'm happy it perfectly fits with what we're trying to achieve at home. I think Amy is looking forward to start the PhD because so far she had to follow a master timetable. She's probably a bit nervous because she wants to stay working but she wants to cut back her hours but she's concerned that her work won't allow her to cut back more and will tell her she needs to leave and she doesn't want to do that and I think her job is working well with the PhD she's doing. So I would hope that in a couple of years she can have a balance between the two and still have some time at home with the kids during the week. And I hope I can change my shifts to 3 nights instead of 4. Everything we're doing now works for the family but it doesn't work for Amy and I so hopefully we'll have a bit more time and energy to focus on each other but we always remind ourselves that what we're doing is right for the family.

S: ok, do you have anything to add?

L: it's been quite interesting and that's been very useful to put that down. I think it's really affirmed what we think of our situation, it's not that she's doing the man of the family and I'm doing the female, we're just both fortunate and comfortable doing those jobs. I'm quite happy being at home, being the "homemaker" so to speak. And when you put that down you see that there's a lot we do together.

Appendix 5. General Interview Protocol

The following questions were guidelines for the joint and individual interviews. Since these interviews were semistructured and aimed to look like a conversation, I did not ask each of these questions when participants' answers provided the data I need.

- **End of the joint interview - after the completion of the Household Portrait**

Do you think there's something missing here that would be relevant to your household?

What do you think of your Household Portrait? Are you surprised by what you see?

Are you satisfied with the way you share these tasks? Why?

Could you easily swap tasks?

Do you have a cleaner (+ frequency and number of hours)?

Individual Interview:

- **On domestic labour**

Is there anything you want to add regarding this table? Any new comment?

Is this allocation of tasks a result of an explicit reflexion or is it just how it goes?

What tasks do you like to do?

How do you feel about having responsibility for certain tasks?

Do you have to remind him/her to do some of these tasks and activities?

What would you change if you could? Have you talked about it with your partner?

How has the division of labour changed over the years and why?

Would you say that you and your partner have different standards of cleaning, tidying, childcare...etc?

- **General and descriptive questions the socio-economic characteristics of the participants**

How old are you?

Are you and your partner married?

How many children do you have? (+ age of children)

How would you describe your ethnic group? White (English/Welsh/Scottish/Northern Irish/British/Irish/other white background – which one?)/ Mixed or multiple ethnic groups/ Asian or Asian British/ Black, African, Caribbean, Black British/ Other ethnic group⁵

- **On family history**

What was your parents' job when you were a child/teenager?

How did they share domestic tasks and childcare?

How was your relationship with your parents?

Did you contribute to the housework as a child?

- **On work history, daily life and unemployment**

Can you tell me about your educational background and work history (until today)?

If unemployment: What happened? How long has it been? Are you looking for a job?

How many hours a week do you spend on the job?

⁵ As designed and categorised by the UK national Census: <https://www.ethnicity-facts-figures.service.gov.uk/uk-population-by-ethnicity/national-and-regional-populations/population-of-england-and-wales/latest#by-ethnicity>

[Questions to determine NS-SEC⁶: what is your job title? What type of sector/industry?

How many employees in your workplace? Do you have any responsibility for supervising other? If so, how many people do you supervise?]

How do you feel about your current job situation?

Can you describe a typical day? (e.g: yesterday – including the evening time) + weekends

Are you doing everything you would like to do?

How important is work/career for you? Why?

Do you sometimes feel insecure, stressed, depressed or frustrated about work?

If children

How often do you get involved with your children?

What are the things you most enjoy doing with them?

Are you happy with your work-family balance?

What are the biggest challenges of being a father/a mother in your situation?

- **On the relationship with the partner**

How would you describe your relationship with your partner?

Has it always been like that?

Would you say that you (your partner) earn(s) 1) 55% to 65% n 2) 65% to 85% n 3) or more than 85% of your household's total income?

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<https://www.ons.gov.uk/methodology/classificationsandstandards/standardoccupationalclassificationsoc/soc2010/soc2010volume3thenationalstatisticssocioeconomicclassificationnssecrebasedonsoc2010#the-questions-to-ask>

Would you say that you are (she is) the main breadwinner?

Are you comfortable with that today? And before?

Is s/he supportive?

What have been some of the biggest challenges or problems in your relationship? How did you deal with it?

Have there been ways in which your job situation has affected your relationship? Any change of behaviour from her/him?

According to you, what are the advantages and disadvantages of your current situation?

Do you think you both equally decide what's going on in the house?

Do you feel grateful about your partner's contribution? What kind of contribution do you think of?

How do you handle finances (what type of bank accounts)?

Is money sometimes a topic of disagreement between you two?

- **On social life and activities**

Can you tell me about your friends and acquaintances?

How often do you go out with friends?

What kind of activities do you do with them?

What do you do with your free time?

Do they know about your current situation? What did they say? What do you think about their opinions? Same questions with family and co-workers.

Do you ever get criticism from any source about the way you are doing things? Praise?

From whom are you likely to receive those messages?

- **On gender ideology**

Ideally, who do you think should be the financial provider of your family?

What would you like to change about your situation?

Participant reads out these statements (Jorat et al., 2012) and tell me if you 1) Strongly agree, 2) Agree, 3) Neither agree nor disagree/have no opinion, 4) Disagree, 5) Strongly disagree:

A) A working mother can establish just as warm and secure a relationship with her children as a mother who does not work.

B) Most of the important decisions in the life of the family should be made by men

C) If a wife (woman) works on the job as many hours as her husband, he should spend as much time in housework and childcare as she does

D) A (married) woman should not work outside the home if her husband can comfortably support her.

- **Ending part**

When you see yourself in one or two year(s), what do you see? what you like to see?

Is there anything you want to add?

Appendix 7. Codebook (excerpts)

- **First step: Coding**

- **Example: excerpt from Karen’s (main breadwinner) individual interview**

<p>Yeah so I think initially, in the first few weeks, we had loads of ready meals, he would just go to the supermarket and buy something that went in the oven. And for housework, his perception of housework and my perception of housework were two different things. So his perception was, if he tidies up, puts everything in piles, then it’s done. Whereas I’m, you know “is the floor clean? Is it clean around the place? Is it dusted?”. So it would potentially be thick levels of dust in the bedrooms and our perception of what was an acceptable level of cleanliness. And I’m not that fussed, I don’t need it beautiful, I haven’t got OCD with it, you know. And I said to him “you know, we’ve never had a dirty house because we had a cleaner or I’ve done it so either we get a cleaner or you do it but we can’t have neither”. And we had quite a heated exchange for quite sometime where he said “no I don’t want a cleaner because it looks like I’m failing and we can do it ourselves”. And in the end I persuaded him that actually if we got a cleaner it would solve the issue. And it did solve the issue.</p>	<p>Lagged adaptation to new role (man)</p> <p>Different perceptions; different standards (food, housework: cleaning)</p> <p>Higher standards (woman)</p> <p>Communication about standards</p> <p>Proposition to get a cleaner once again (woman)</p> <p>Tension/conflict (origin and process):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Refusal (man) • Emotion/subjectivity (reasons) • End of the conflict (man accepts → problem solved)
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- **Second step: Identifying codes**

- **Example: the mental load (emerging code)**

- *Definition:* ‘mental load’ refers to the mental juggling between domestic labour tasks and the constant thought processes underlying the implementation of such tasks
- *Origin:* individual interview with Emma (sole breadwinner) – first set of interviews I conducted with a female breadwinner couple. This code was also supported by the literature on the division of domestic labour.

Excerpt from Emma’s individual interview:

Sarah [researcher]: I see. So, what would you change if you could, about this table and your relationship?

Emma: I think him taking on more of the burden of deciding major things, and more about sort of **mentally taxing tasks** like for example we’ve talked about moving and I said “I’m working I just don’t have time to look for places, go and visit them while working and doing all of the things I’m doing”. But we sat down and I said “these are the locations that I want, that I’m happy with, go fourth”. And he searched and sent me two places that didn’t really meet any of the criteria and then he gave up and kind of didn’t do anything. And I was like “oh ok, so does that mean you want to stay here until you get a job?” and he was like “yeah yeah that’s what I wanna do”. So yeah, that burden of... kind of like if he doesn’t do it then it’s my issue to find somewhere to live. I’d like him to take those things and that burden from me.

The exact expression ‘mental load’ was used by eight women in their individual interviews, such as Rosie (main breadwinner):

I think the main thing, and we touched on this, is the mental load. I think it’s very interesting because of the things he would do he would only do them if I asked him. Like the grocery shopping, that’s more towards the shared area but he would only go with a list that I prepared. And actually as everybody knows, the preparation and the thinking time and the sort of emotional investment and working it all out is a big percentage of the execution of the task. And yeah I don’t have anything else to add, it was really interesting.

When participants did not directly use the exact expression ‘mental load’, this code was associated to words and expressions (when the context was relevant) such as: *mental, thinking, prepare, organise, plan, anticipate, ask him to, remind him, remember, he forgets, he doesn’t notice, manage, worry*

- *Importance:* mental load is important to the research because it calls attention to the mental processes involved behind physical tasks of domestic labour
- *Reflection:* the code ‘mental load’ is found almost exclusively in women’s individual interviews, which reveals that the mental processes involved behind physical tasks of domestic labour are their responsibility. This code helps understanding how and why women contribute more to domestic labour than their male partners.

Appendix 8. Aggregated Household Portrait of households in Group A

Women's side	Shared equally	Men's side
Mopping	Cleaning bathroom	Sweeping
Dusting	Cleaning toilet	Hoovering
Making and changing beds	Tidying living room	Tidying and washing the garage
Baking	Tidying bedroom	Taking out bins
Hand laundry	Cleaning porch	Planning meals
Ironing	Setting the table	Grocery shopping
Sewing and repairing clothes	Putting dishes away	Writing the grocery list
Buying shoes/clothes	Cleaning the kitchen	Putting food shopping away
Mortgage	Hanging up clothes	Lunch
Bills	Drying clothes	Dinner
Paperwork	Buying furniture and household items	Washing dishes
Overall budget	Driving	Preparing breakfast
Planning couple dates	Deciding major purchases	Laundry
Organising holidays	Helping with financial problems	Decorating
Organising social events	Writing friends	Painting
Remembering birthdays		Gardening
	Taking photos	Household repairs
Worry	Comforting	Car maintenance
Helping with social/emotional problems	Driving lifestyle choices	Doing DIY
Making children's GP appointments	Putting children to bed	Relationship with neighbours
Long term planning	Disciplining children	Morning routine with children
Supervising homework	Supervising children	

Organising children's birthday parties	Feeding children	
Changing nappies		Bringing children to outdoor activities
	Dealing with children when upset	Caring for sick children
	Playing with children	
	Making decisions about children's behaviour	Contacts with school/day care team
	Reading to children	School drop-offs/pick-ups
	Deciding to get a pet	Feeding pet
		Petting pet
		Checking pet's health
		Walking dog/changing litter tray

Appendix 9. Aggregated Household Portrait of households in Group B

Women's side	Shared equally	Men's side
Dusting	Sweeping	Mopping
Cleaning bathroom	Tidying living room	Tidying and washing garage
Cleaning toilets	Tidying bedroom	Taking out bins
Hoovering	Cleaning the porch	
Making and changing beds		Ironing
Planning meals	Grocery shopping	Decorating
Writing the grocery list	Putting food shopping away	Painting
Baking	Setting the table	Gardening
Preparing lunch		Car maintenance and repair
Preparing breakfast	Cooking dinner	Driving
Cleaning the kitchen	Washing dishes	Doing DIY
Hand laundry	Putting dishes away	
Hand laundry		
Sewing and repairing clothes	Mortgage	
Hanging up clothes		
Buying shoes/clothes	Paying bills and taxes	
Drying clothes	Helping with financial problems	
Buying furniture and household items	Writing friends	
Household repairs	Planning couple dates	
Deciding major purchases	Driving lifestyle choices	
Paperwork	Supervising children	
Overall budget	Disciplining children	
Organising holidays	Bringing children to outdoor activities	

Remembering birthdays	Making decisions about children's behaviour	
Relationship with neighbours	Playing with children	
Taking photos	Supervising homework	
Organising social events with friends	Dealing with children when upset	
Worry	Reading to children	
Comforting	School drop-offs and pick-ups	
Helping with social/emotional problems	Feeding pet	
Morning routine with children	Petting pet	
Putting children to bed	Deciding to get pet	
Feeding children	Walking dog	
GP appointment	Checking pet's health	
Caring for sick children		
Long-term planning		
Organising children's birthday parties		
Contacts with school/day care team		
Arranging babysitting		
Changing nappies		

Appendix 10. Aggregated Household Portrait of households in Group C

Women's side	Shared equally	Men's side
Mopping	Tidying and washing the garage	
Cleaning the kitchen	Painting	
Sweeping	Preparing lunch	Taking out bins
Dusting	Washing dishes	Car
Cleaning bathroom	Ironing	Driving
Cleaning toilet	Deciding major purchases	DIY
Hoovering	Writing friends	Petting pet
Making and changing beds	Walking dog/changing litter tray	
Tidying living room		
Relationship with neighbours		
Driving lifestyle choices		
Checking pet's health		
Tidying bedroom	Disciplining children	
Cleaning porch	Playing with children	
Planning meals	School drop-offs and pick-ups	
Grocery shopping	Reading to children	
Writing the grocery list	Feeding pet	
Baking	Deciding to get pet	
Putting food shopping away	Taking photos	
Setting the table		
Cooking dinner		
Preparing breakfast		
Hanging up clothes		
Decorating		
Putting dishes away		
Hand laundry		

Laundry		
Cleaning the kitchen		
Sewing and repairing clothes		
Buying clothes/shoes		
Drying clothes		
Mortgage		
Gardening		
Buying furniture and household items		
Household repairs		
Bills		
Paperwork		
Overall budget		
Helping with financial problems		
Planning couple dates		
Organising holidays		
Remembering birthdays		
Organising social events		
Worry		
Comforting		
Helping with social emotional problems		
Morning routine with children		
Putting children to bed		
Supervising children		
Feeding children		
Bringing children to outdoor activities		
GP appointments		

Caring for sick children		
Long term planning		
Making decisions about children's behaviour		
Supervising homework		
Organising children's birthday parties		
Contacts with school		
Dealing with children when upset		
Arranging babysitting		
Changing nappies		