

The Third Shift Uncovered: A Qualitative Study of Invisible Household Labour and Gendered Power in Flemish Couples

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Preface

As I grew into womanhood, I've witnessed many women in my close environment lose their spark and grow full of resentment as they became mothers. Most of them blamed it on their unequal division of household labour, especially since women in the 21st century are held to a nearly impossible standard; you can be ambitious and pursue a career, as long as you're also a nurturing mother and household manager. Balancing these two roles drives them into exhaustion, even more so since they can't describe what exactly is causing this imbalance.

Over the past two years, I've dived into the rabbit hole of everything that goes behind managing a household, which stretches way beyond what we can see. Many women have, for centuries, been responsible for visible household labour, but also the coordination and emotional regulation behind it. These are tasks such as creating meal plans, signing up kids for camp, and monitoring everyone's wellbeing in the household. Such tasks are intangible and become draining when they fall on one person, which later creates resentment in relationships.

The concept of invisible labour is familiar to many, yet the term remains relatively unknown in both academic and societal contexts. Making something tangible is often the first step toward real change. With this thesis, I therefore hope to create more awareness and dialogue around this topic. Generally, we speak of a first shift (paid labour) and a second shift (visible household labour). To this, I would like to add a third shift to this: invisible household labour.

First of all, I'd like to thank Prof. dr. John Lievens, who has guided me through every step of this two-year-long academic adventure. His consistent feedback and belief in me has fed my passion for research even more and helped me create something I'm immensely proud of.

Second of all, I'd like to thank all 20 participants for sharing their stories with me and trusting me to bundle their thoughts and concerns into this thesis. Your voices matter more than you think.

Third, I'd like to thank my friends and family for listening to all of my ideas, struggles and thoughts and offering me new perspectives on them. Your interest in something so dear to me has kept me going.

Finally, as I approach the end of my Master's and the beginning of true adulthood, I'd like to thank my partner, Nick. In the beginning of this process, I was anxious about what would become of me when we move in together next year. However, alongside some disengaged fathers, I interviewed many emotionally intelligent and kind men who all reminded me of you. Therefore, reaching the end of this thesis has put those fears to rest.

I've seen a glimpse of our future, and it's nearly as radiant as you are.

Abstract

Although women's participation in the labour force has increased, the division of household labour has remained unequal, especially when it comes to invisible tasks like planning and emotional management. Most studies solely focus on visible household labour, while this study's focus also lies on invisible labour. Therefore, this study defines household labour as three-dimensional: visible, cognitive, and emotional.

Through 20 in-depth interviews with 10 heterosexual couples, I explored how couples with children discussed, experienced and justified their division, and how this varied across (researcher-constructed) household types. This qualitative study applied Reflexive Thematic Analysis, chosen for its flexibility in the research process, in line with the study's feminist orientation.

The study found that women, regardless of work status, consistently carry more of the invisible burden. There is rarely any active negotiation, but rather legitimization through internalized gender norms and moral expectations around motherhood/fatherhood. Even in more egalitarian households, women tend to take up more invisible labour. Interestingly, many participants reported satisfaction, which was often tied to feeling appreciated rather than to actual equality.

This study contributes valuable insights to the local Flemish context, where qualitative studies on invisible household labour remain scarce. It highlights the impact of invisible labour, which is why we need structural and cultural change to build households where women aren't expected to sacrifice their individuality for their families, and men are supported in becoming emotionally and practically involved fathers and partners.

1. Introduction

1.1 Background and Relevance

The coordination of a household, with its complex interplay of visible and invisible labour, forms the often-unseen backbone of a well-functioning family and society. After the second feminist wave of the 1960s, more women entered the labour market, gaining the opportunity to become (co-)breadwinners (De Tweede Feministische Golf: Intro, n.d.). However, while their participation in paid work has increased significantly over the decades, their share of unpaid household labour has not decreased.

Numerous studies, such as Greenstein (1996) in the USA, have confirmed this enduring imbalance. In Belgium particularly, Glorieux and Van Tienoven (2009) found that even in 2005, women performed five hours more domestic labour per week than their male partners. By 2013, the gap was smaller but remained substantial: women spent an average of 3.5 hours per day on housework and caregiving tasks, compared to only 2 hours for men (Glorieux & Van Tienoven, 2016). This condensed overview suggests that the division of household labour in the 21st century continues to be unequal, even as dual-earner households have become the norm.

Most of the studies on household labour, rely on quantitative methods to measure visible/time-bound tasks such as cooking, cleaning or laundry. Although these tasks form an important foundation, there lies more underneath (Fernández et al., 2016b).

Fortunately, since the 1970's, gradually more scientific attention has been paid to the importance of invisible forms of labour. These tasks include planning, anticipating needs, managing logistics, and regulating emotions, which are harder to measure but deeply embedded in our daily life. Hochschild (1989) introduced the concept of emotional labour, while Daniels (1987) laid the fundamentals of cognitive or mental labour. Decades later, Daminger (2019) expanded this perspective by analysing cognitive labour as a multi-step mental process of organising domestic life. Even current studies on invisible labour, are often quantitative and solely look at who carries the mental load with a slight focus on how this division impacts their well-being (Barigozzi et al., 2025).

That being said, these forms of labour are often strongly gendered and go unrecognized in both academia and the day-to-day awareness of couples themselves.

What is less understood, which is the focus of this study, is how this labour is experienced, discussed, and legitimised within heterosexual relationships.

Even when couples claim to value equality, in a seemingly more progressive country like Belgium, domestic arrangements often remain gendered.

This contradiction raises important sociological questions and suggests the division of labour is shaped and sustained through language, gender norms, and discursive practices. This builds on the idea that gender is not a fixed trait but something that is “done” through everyday interactions (West & Zimmerman, 1987). The original study only briefly discusses household dynamics, yet households can be considered perfect ground for actively reproducing gender.

This thesis builds on these insights by exploring how heterosexual couples with children construct meaning around the division of both visible and invisible household labour. While prior research has primarily focused on who performs household labour and how this impacts well-being or satisfaction, this study shifts the lens to *how couples talk about and justify their division of tasks*. It explores the meanings people attach to invisible labour and the ways in which gender norms are reflected or challenged in these narratives.

Although this is not a discourse analysis in the strict theoretical sense, the study is driven by the idea that language matters, and that gender is something people *do* and *explain* in everyday conversation. By focusing on couples in the Flemish context, a main gap in the literature is filled. While international research on invisible labour is growing, there’s a lack of (recent) qualitative studies on this topic in Flanders.

This research can also be beneficial for creating or adjusting scales used to measure household labour divisions and marital satisfaction (Ruppanner et al., 2017). Most importantly, unveiling and making invisible labour tangible can help couples to strive for a more equal division, which in the long run can benefit their general wellbeing.

1.2 Research Questions

The research questions for this study were initially formulated deductively based on insights from my bachelor thesis but were later inductively refined throughout the data collection process.

The final research question is: **How do couples with children organise and experience the division of (in)visible household labour?**

This is explored through the following subquestions:

1. How do couples describe the division of visible and invisible household tasks?
2. How do they experience this division in everyday life?
3. How do they justify the division of labour, and what role do gender norms play in this process?

1.3 Structure of the Thesis

This thesis is structured as follows.

First, the literature review will create a theoretical framework by introducing the key concepts and theories regarding visible and invisible household labour. These will be referred to most during the discussion of the results, which makes them crucial to understand. This will be approached through the theoretical lenses of doing gender, gendered moral rationalities, and the moral economy of time, with a focus on bargaining power and justification.

After that, chapter 3 explains the methodological approach and the justification of these choices. This includes a discussion of Reflexive Thematic Analysis, the coding process, and the typology of the household.

Chapter 4 then presents the findings, structured around both the types of labour (visible/invisible) and the three household types, and examines how couples describe, experience, and legitimise their division of tasks.

Finally, Chapter 5 discusses these findings in relation to existing research, followed by a conclusion that discusses policy-oriented applications and suggestions for future research.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Conceptualizing Household Labour

As previously mentioned, household labour forms the backbone of families and capitalist society. Although women entered the labour market since the 60's, their share of household work has remained similar. In the following literature review, we'll begin by conceptualizing what these different types of labour entail and how they are defined in the existing literature.

Household labour is often understood as visible, tangible tasks, but this view overlooks the significant role of invisible work. Many studies describe household labour as the second shift, referring to working women feeling as if managing the household is their second job (Brines et al., 1990). However, this study proposes a third shift, namely the invisible labour. Thus, it approaches household labour as a three-dimensional concept, consisting of visible, cognitive, and emotional labour.

Visible labour is often referred to as tasks that are quantifiable and result in a tangible outcome. Most studies categorize this type of labour into core household tasks, repairs, and childcare (Oinas, 2018). A study by the Flemish government further differentiates between caretaking tasks, family administration, routine household tasks, and repairs/garden upkeep (Audenaert, 2023). Another useful conceptual distinction is between routine and intermittent tasks, where the first type must be performed daily, such as cooking, while the latter occur periodically, such as mowing grass.

Although men have increased their contributions to household labour over time, women predominantly perform routine tasks, while men tend to be responsible for the intermittent tasks (Fernández et al., 2016; Lachance-Grzela & Bouchard, 2010).

Interestingly, most studies focus on tasks like cooking but rarely acknowledge the underlying work of planning meals, writing grocery lists, or anticipating preferences which are crucial examples of invisible labour.

Invisible labour, by contrast, primarily takes place in the mental and emotional sphere, making it difficult to observe or measure inequalities between partners. In this thesis, *invisible labour* is used as an umbrella term including both *cognitive* and *emotional* labour. While these concepts often overlap, they each highlight different dimensions of invisible work.

In her influential study, Daminger (2019) defines cognitive labour through four components: anticipating needs, identifying options to meet those needs, making decisions between those options, and monitoring the outcomes.

Emotional labour, on the other hand, refers to activities aimed at improving the emotional well-being of others and offering emotional support. This includes behaviours such as providing encouragement, listening attentively, and responding to the emotional needs of one's partner. The emphasis lies on caring for others' emotions, sometimes at the expense of one's own (Erickson, 2005). For example, when planning a party, preparing the guest list and organizing catering would fall under cognitive labour, whereas ensuring guests are entertained and feel comfortable would be considered emotional labour.

Invisible labour is frequently taken for granted and not always recognised as real work. Yet behind every meal, hobby, school decision, or doctor's visit lies significant unseen organisation. Research consistently shows that this burden disproportionately falls on women, often leading to relational imbalances (Ciciolla & Luthar, 2019b; Daminger, 2019).

2.2 Structural theories vs feminist theories

Throughout the years, many scholars have proposed different theories to explain the division of household labour, ranging from structural models that emphasise economic resources and bargaining power to sociological approaches that focus on gender norms and institutional expectations.

Although it's widely recognised that gender is the most important determinant of household labour, relative resource theory also gained popularity in the early 2000s (Greenstein, 2009).

Before discussing key structural theories, it's important to clarify the concept of bargaining resources. These typically refer to non-material assets such as education, income, or employment status, which can strengthen a partner's ability to negotiate a reduced share of household labour.

This leads us to relative resources theory, which claims that a partner's resources grant them decision power (Lachance-Grzela & Bouchard, 2010b). In this scenario, a man with a higher-paying job may justify doing less housework than his wife, based on their income difference. In short: more power equals more ability to bargain out of housework.

Similar theories such as the time availability perspective claim that the amount of free time determines the share of housework. Therefore, part-time working women are expected to perform more labour than their partners, purely based on their greater availability.

Regarding employment type, a study by McClintock (2016) found that men working in female-dominated professions (teaching, caregiving) perform more household labour than men in male-dominated roles, such as managerial functions. In other words, when men operate in professional spaces that challenge traditional gender norms, they may also reject those norms at home.

However, these theories are insufficient, since they don't explain why women who work as much or more than their partners still perform more household labour (Glorieux & Van Tienoven, 2016).

A possible explanation is offered by Bittman et al. (2003), who found that among Australian couples, women who out-earn their partners often take on more household work. This is referred to as the gender deviance neutralisation effect, where women unconsciously reinforce traditional gender roles when they feel they are violating others, such as being the primary or co-breadwinner. This behaviour can also be interpreted as a form of emotional labour, aimed at avoiding discomfort or tension by aligning with expected norms.

This brings us to gender as the main determinant of household labour, which leads many scholars to feminist theories.

The infamous doing gender theory by West and Zimmerman (1987) argues that gender norms are actively reproduced through day-to-day interactions. Through this lens, household labour becomes a way of expressing masculinity and femininity.

Tasks like cooking or remembering birthdays are not just practical responsibilities, but symbolise care and attentiveness, which are often culturally coded as 'female.' Thus, even couples who claim to be egalitarian can unconsciously reproduce unequal divisions.

Building on this, gendered moral rationalities focuses on how individuals justify their choices through a culturally appropriate moral lens. Women may frame part-time work or caregiving as ‘doing what’s right,’ even when it limits their freedom. These narratives make inequality appear natural, reinforcing existing divisions (Duncan & Edwards, 1999).

Together, these theories show that material and time-based explanations are insufficient. To fully understand the persistence of unequal divisions, we must also consider how gender is symbolically reproduced and morally justified, which is the central approach in this study.

2.3 Explaining and Justifying Inequality

2.3.1 Discursive and Rational Strategies

Although divisions of household labour are often unequal, couples rarely label them as such. Instead, they use discursive strategies or rational explanations to frame them as fair or even desirable. A Swedish study by Nyman et al. (2018) identified three strategies that (unconsciously) reproduce traditional gender roles: constructions of (un)suitability, placement of responsibility, and comparison.

The first strategy aligns with the most common justifications, usually based on competence or personality. Many men explain their limited involvement by saying their partner is simply better at things like cooking or has higher standards for cleanliness. A similar study by Van Hooff (2011b) confirms this, stating that women are more likely to do extra household work if their partner works longer hours or has a more stressful job, especially when they themselves work part-time. These justifications reflect both relative resources theory and the time availability perspective, as discussed earlier.

Therefore, employment status plays a key role here: only 12% of Belgian men work part-time, compared to 43% of women (Statbel, 2023). Many women reduce their hours after having children to provide childcare, while men’s careers remain unchanged. Couples often describe this as voluntary, even when the result is unequal.

Another frequent strategy is the placement of responsibility, where tasks like birthday planning or laundry are viewed as one partner’s thing, while the other ‘helps out’ when needed. This framing often involves active vs. passive language: women ‘take care of’ things, while men say ‘If she asks, I help’ (Nyman et al., 2018; Van Hooff, 2011b).

Lastly, some couples compare themselves to others in their social circle. They claim their division is ‘better than most’, which downplays inequality and shifts attention away from broader gender norms.

2.3.3 Satisfaction and Perceived Fairness

Interestingly, despite inequalities, couples don't always experience it as unfair. Gordon et al. (2022) found that emotional appreciation can significantly buffer the negative effects of unequal labour divisions. Women, in particular, are more likely to accept an unequal division, when they feel valued for their labour by their partner.

The study states that the perception of fairness doesn't solely depend on who does what, but rather on whether their contributions are acknowledged and appreciated. This is especially true for invisible labour, which often goes unnoticed and undervalued, potentially leading to resentment or dissatisfaction.

Thus, emotional dynamics between partners are crucial to understand how couples evaluate fairness and satisfaction in their division of labour.

2.4 Building on Existing Research

Multiple studies have confirmed that the division of household labour in the 21st century remains skewed, even in dual earner households. (Fernández et al., 2016; Lachance-Grzela & Bouchard, 2010). Although men's participation has increased, they mostly perform intermittent tasks, while women continue to manage routine tasks. Moreover, studies show that parttime and fulltime working women still perform more household labour than their partner, which contradicts theories such as time availability theory (Lachance-Grzela & Bouchard, 2010b).

Additionally, invisible labour remains underrepresented in quantitative studies, despite its crucial role in household management. As Daminger (2019) and Ciciolla & Luthar (2019) note, tasks such as planning, anticipating needs, and emotional support are time-consuming but rarely recognised as 'real' work.

Recent qualitative studies highlight the emotional impact of this imbalance, since women often report feeling overworked, unappreciated, and responsible for managing the entire household (Erickson, 2005). Even in egalitarian countries, few couples achieve truly equal divisions. However, this doesn't necessarily mean dissatisfaction: Gordon et al. (2022) found that feeling appreciated matters more than equal task division.

Together, these studies reveal that domestic labour is still shaped by gender norms and highlight the need for nuanced studies on invisible labour.

This study addresses that gap by adopting a qualitative approach that centres not only on what is done, but on how heterosexual couples with children in Flanders narrate, experience and legitimate the division of both visible and invisible labour.

In doing so, it contributes to a more situated and discursive understanding of how gendered inequalities in the household are reproduced or contested.

3. Methodology

3.1 Research Design and Approach

This qualitative study applied Reflexive Thematic Analysis (RTA), which was developed by Braun and Clarke (2006) to explore how heterosexual couples with children describe, experience and justify the division of (in)visible household labour. The core focus was on meaning making, which refers to individuals interpreting experiences, situations, and the world around them, often based on their existing knowledge and perspectives. Thus, RTA was the best fit because of its flexibility and focus on the active role of the researcher regarding theme development.

Since there's little research on invisible labour, a qualitative study seemed ideal to unravel the internal dynamics of how it is created and sustained.

The analysis was done through a constructivist approach, implying that meaning isn't just found in data, but actively constructed through the interaction between the researcher, the participants, and their context. Additionally, this study is influenced by a feminist research perspective, which emphasizes how everyday practices (such as household labour) are embedded in broader structure or gender, power, and social norms.

Instead of aiming for objective neutrality, the data was approached from a reflexive stance, based on feminist values and assumptions. Although feminist research is often misunderstood as being inherently 'anti-men,' this study does no such thing. The data were analysed as objectively as possible, acknowledging critical perspectives on men while also recognizing their positive progress.

The use of RTA allowed for a continuous openness to new insights, which was essential in capturing the complexity of how couples negotiate and make sense of household work. Initially, I focused on what the participants said, but I quickly realized the importance of how they were saying it, leaning more into discursive strategies.

3.2 Participant Selection and Sample Description

This study aimed to interview 15 heterosexual couples with children between the ages of 6 and 12. The age range was chosen to focus on households in which children aren't yet self-sufficient, have hobbies and an upcoming social life, which is an interesting phase for the division of labour. The only criteria were that the couples lived together at the time of the interview and had at least one child between the ages of 6 and 12.

Participants were recruited through a flyer via social media channels, and several middle schools were contacted. However, none of these were successful, which led me to the snowball method through family/friends' networks. This was the most successful and led to a final sample of 10 couples, or 20 individuals.

I aimed for a balanced distribution of part-time, full-time, and stay-at-home parents, to capture a broad range of arrangements. However, no stay-at-home parents could be recruited, which limits the scope of this study. The final sample included 3 dual full-time working couples and 7 couples in which the woman worked part-time.

While the research focused primarily on heterosexual gender dynamics, one lesbian couple was included in the sample. Given that the rest of the analysis centers on heterosexual norms and discourses, this couple was only partially included in the findings to maintain analytical coherence.

Most participants were white, middle-class, and had at least one higher education degree, mostly because they were selected from similar social groups. Thus, it must be noted that this demographic homogeneity limits the generalizability of the findings. This means that the results should be interpreted as situated within this particular social group.

3.3 Data Collection

The data were collected through in-depth, semi-structured interviews with each couple.

All interviews were done via Teams, according to their preferences. Each partner was interviewed separately, directly after each other, to limit social desirability bias within couples. The interviews lasted about an hour and were all conducted in Dutch, because it's more comfortable to discuss sensitive topics in your mother tongue. Thus, the quotes in the analysis are translated.

A general list of questions was used, covering themes such as daily routines, task division, mental load, perceived fairness, gender and negotiation. This list started off theory driven but was very flexible and became more data driven throughout the interviews.

Before each interview, participants were asked to fill in a short weekly task list to map visible household tasks. While this pre-interview survey helped with contextualizing the interviews, its data were not systematically analysed due to its irrelevance.

All participants received an informed consent form, which explained the research aims, confidentiality, and their right to withdraw at any time. Verbal and written consent was obtained from all participants before data collection began. Recordings were stored securely on a USB stick, and all names used in this thesis are pseudonyms to protect the anonymity of participants.

This study was conducted in accordance with the ethical guidelines of the University of Ghent and adheres to GDPR standards regarding data protection and privacy. Given the potentially sensitive nature of the topic, particular attention was paid to ensuring participants felt comfortable and respected throughout the process, by emphasizing the possibility of withdrawing from the study at any time.

3.4 Data coding and analysis strategy

The interviews were transcribed manually and analysed using Reflexive Thematic Analysis. This means the coding process was very iterative, which was necessary for the exploratory nature of the study.

Initially, the coding tree was deductively created based on relevant literature (e.g. Daminger, Hochschild) and my own theoretical assumptions. However, during the coding process, the coding tree was inductively changed by the nuances and interesting themes brought up by participants.

The coding process was conducted in NVivo, which was helpful later on to explore patterns through matrix queries. While coding, attention was paid not only to what participants said, but also how they said it, such as the use of active or passive language. This discursive perspective became increasingly important as I noticed recurring patterns in the way inequality was naturalised or justified through everyday talk.

As mentioned before, NVivo was used for theme development and exploring patterns across household type and gender. This was particularly useful to see how the different household types described and justified their division. While these tools didn't determine the themes, they helped to structure the analysis and create more depth.

In line with RTA, the final themes were not seen as inherent in the data but as interpretatively constructed by me (the researcher), through a reflexive engagement with both the data and my own feminist positionality. These themes aimed to answer the main research question, while remaining sensitive to the complexities, contradictions, and context of each couple's experience.

4. Results

4.1 Overview of Household Types and Task Distribution

The first part of the analysis will focus on how couples describe the division of visible and invisible household labour. Instead of immediately examining how they experience or justify the division, this section will concentrate on the descriptive level: who does what, which tasks are mentioned, and how partners talk about these activities.

As mentioned before in the literature review, household labour is considered three-dimensional in this study, distinguishing between:

1. Visible labour (e.g., cooking, cleaning, laundry)
2. Cognitive labour (e.g., planning, remembering, scheduling)
3. Emotional labour (e.g., comforting children, resolving tensions)

All three of these categories were shaped through theory, but also confirmed through inductive coding (Damingier, 2019).

4.1.1 Typology of Household Task Distribution (Types 2, 3, 4)

To structure the analysis, couples were grouped into 4 household types based on the relative equality of their task division and awareness of gender dynamics. These types are in no way universal, clear-cut categories, but only an analytical tool to reduce complexity.

1. **Purely traditional:** This refers to the classic traditional division where one partner is the breadwinner, and the other is a homemaker. Unfortunately, my sample only contained working individuals, which is why type 1 won't be discussed any further in this study.
2. **Strongly gendered:** In Type 2 households, both partners are employed, yet the domestic and caregiving workload still falls heavily on the woman. These couples often rely on traditional role expectations, even when this division is not explicitly problematized. Women in these households often perform the majority of both visible (e.g., cooking, cleaning) and invisible labour (e.g., scheduling, emotional care), while men contribute in a more limited or auxiliary way. This division is present in couple 1, 2, and 3.
3. **Partially equal:** A Type 3 households show a more conscious attempt at sharing responsibilities, with men participating more actively in certain tasks. However, women still tend to carry the mental load and take on more invisible labour. These couples often express awareness of the imbalance, but this does not always translate into actual change. This division is present in couple 4, 5, 6, 7, and 8.

4. **Equal:** In Type 4 households, partners deliberately aim for an equitable distribution of both visible and invisible labour. These couples actively communicate about tasks, and both partners take initiative. Men in these households often manage complex planning (e.g., bills, vacations, emotional support for children) alongside women's contributions. This division is present in couple 9 and 10.

The analysis in the following sections will be organised around this typology and the three types of labour described above. To reduce complexity and keep track of their partners, the initials of a couple will always match, such as Benjamin and Bella. For more information on the couples and their types, please look at appendix C.

The next chapter explores how each household type describes their visible and invisible labour division, followed by a deeper look into how they experience and justify that division.

4.2 Description of Visible and Invisible Labour Division

4.2.1 Visible Labour

As previously stated, visible household labour refers to tasks that are tangible, easily observed, and produce physical outcomes (Daminger, 2019). These often include cooking, cleaning, laundry, and childcare during morning/evening routines.

Although men have increased their contributions to visible household labour over time, a clear gendered pattern persists regarding the type of tasks performed (Fernández et al., 2016; Lachance-Grzela & Bouchard, 2010). Women predominantly perform routine tasks, which occur (almost) daily and are most time-consuming, such as cooking or laundry.

Lana for example states: *"I make sure there's a hot meal every day for dinner,"* followed by Phoebe: *"The laundry is completely my job, the washing, the folding, the ironing, putting it in the closets."*

Men, in contrast, often take responsibility for intermittent or 'masculine-coded' tasks that occur less frequently but are perceived as physically demanding or technical. For example, Harvey says: *"All the technical things in the house such as repairs, that's my job,"* and Benjamin highlights the seasonal nature of such tasks: *"During the winter, I definitely do less, but when it's time to maintain the backyard, I have an extra weekly burden."*

These patterns are nuanced by household type, which influence the division of visible labour. Type 2 couples, often with strongly gendered divisions, feature women using active language that signals ownership and responsibility over household tasks. Phoebe states, *"I wake up at 5am, and I make sure everything is ready for my family's morning routine,"* while Lana adds, *"When he takes the kids swimming, I take care of the laundry and the dishes in the meantime."*

Men in these couples tend to use more passive language and rely on “orders” from their partners, as Peter describes his role: *“If she asks me to read a book (to our child), I will do it.”* This ‘if she asks...I’ll do it’ dynamic is present in many couples and will be discussed in depth later.

Type 3 couples show more mixed or active language among men, indicating a greater involvement in household tasks. Tiana shares, *“I drive the kids around for their hobby’s, and I also make sure the basement is always organised,”* while her partner Tom adds, *“I set the breakfast table, research good schools, buy the birthday and Christmas gifts, those are usually things that I take care of.”*

Despite this increased involvement, traditional gendered task divisions remain visible, especially regarding intermittent or technical jobs. Edward explains, *“I usually do the more periodic tasks, such as cleaning out the gutters. I think I do the more ‘manly’ tasks, like painting, repairs, and car-related stuff.”* Even in the study’s only lesbian couple, Margot attests to the persistence of these norms: *“Sometimes I talk to my friends and think...at least they have a man who can do the typical man jobs, such as repairs.”*

Type 4 couples don’t have a completely equal division but make conscious efforts to recognize and fairly distribute labour. Ruben explains his role in supporting the household: *“I wake up and I set up breakfast for everyone. Afterwards I leave for work and drop the kids off at school, so Roxanne can sleep in a bit in the morning.”*

Roxanne complements this by describing shared responsibilities: *“He usually makes the doctor’s appointments, but he dislikes going to them, so I take the kids to the doctor.”* This collaborative approach is confirmed by Harvey and Hailey, who describe shared grocery shopping and lunch preparation.

A noticeable trend is the increasing involvement of men in ritualized tasks, especially cooking. However, according to Van Hooff’s (2011) findings, their engagement often differs from women’s experiences. Men tend to view cooking as a leisure or creative activity rather than an obligatory chore. Tom says, *“We both cook, but I think I like it more and want to put more effort into it,”* while Luke enjoys experimenting with recipes, but only when he has time.

Conversely, women sometimes express frustration or dislike toward cooking, especially when rushed or combined with other duties. Phoebe admits, *“I hate cooking, but I do it, so my family eats healthily,”* while Hilde comments on the quality gap: *“If he cooks, it’ll just be something easy or microwavable.”*

This contrast reinforces the idea that women experience housework as a necessary (moral) obligation, while men can approach tasks like cooking on their own terms (Van Hooff, 2011).

This phenomenon, as previously discussed, is called gendered moral rationalities (Duncan & Edwards, 1996). This refers to the internalised societal expectations of what it means to be a 'good mother.' These norms often result in women feeling morally accountable for maintaining a clean and well-managed household, even in contexts where men are not held to the same standards.

Lastly, almost every couple describes their division of labour as something that “grew naturally,” without explicit negotiation. Peter states: *‘It just grew naturally throughout the years.’* This lack of conscious discussion will be revisited in the next section.

4.2.2 Invisible Labour

As the core focus of this study, invisible labour must first be approached through the lens of awareness, or rather the lack thereof.

As mentioned earlier, Daminger defined invisible labour as the 4 cognitive processes that underlie household functioning: anticipating needs, identifying options, decision-making, and monitoring outcomes. These tasks are often intangible, continuous, and difficult to verbalize, making them harder to recognize or value. While Daminger distinguishes four cognitive stages, this study validates that in practice, invisible labour is also often interwoven with visible tasks, such as coordinating logistics while cooking or emotionally supporting children during routine activities (Daming, 2019).

When asked about their initial perception of invisible labour, a striking gendered and type-based pattern emerged. Most participants had never heard of the term invisible labour, yet nearly all women were able to pinpoint exactly what it meant by giving clear examples. Elena for example reflects: *‘I think it’s tasks you automatically do, like helping the kids with homework while you’re cooking dinner or ordering new clothes for the kids.’* Tiana adds how her invisible labour was invalidated: *‘I used to feel very bad when Tom would come home from work and say I hadn’t done anything all day, but it felt like I had done so much throughout the day, but I couldn’t really explain it.’*

In contrast, men, especially from type 2 couples, struggled to articulate or identify invisible labour. Peter mentions: *‘I don’t really know what it entails; I can’t really imagine anything,’* while Benjamin reduces it to more technical examples: *‘Maybe paying the bills because it’s invisible?’*

However, in Type 3 and 4 couples, a gradual shift in awareness appears. Nick (type 3) clearly states: *‘It’s small things such as replacing the toilet paper or making doctor’s appointments for the kids.’* Ruben (type 4) adds to this: *‘Like finding and signing kids up for summer camp.’*

To sum up, despite their intangible nature, cognitive and emotional labour form the backbone of household functioning.

Regarding the division of invisible labour itself, we also come across gendered patterns. Across the sample, women took on the majority of cognitive and emotional tasks. The most frequently described responsibilities were managing family calendars, organizing birthday parties, meal planning, mentally tracking household stock, and supervising their children's (emotional) wellbeing/health.

Melanie reflects on her emotional labour during exam week: *'Bram is studying for his exams now, so I try to motivate him by making his favourite foods, encouraging him, and helping him study.'* Natalie talks about the pressure of meal planning: *'Nick does the groceries, but I have to make a week menu and give him a shopping list.'* Lana adds to this idea of planning ahead: *'I always make sure to buy new clothes for my children online ahead of time, like making sure they have new winter coats for next winter.'* These examples clearly mirror Daminger's cognitive processes such as anticipating needs and decision making (Daming, 2019).

Surprisingly, even in type 4 households, which are supposedly most fair, women report being the default parent, particularly when it comes to emotional labour. Hailey shares how her youngest child is overly attached to her: *'We try to do nighttime routines together, Joe gets very fussy, and Harvey doesn't always have the patience, so I just do it.'* Roxanne similarly explains how she usually steps in when there's a conflict with another child at school.

This feeds into the idea of Hochschild, that women are often expected to manage not just the household but also its emotional climate, smoothing tensions, providing comfort, and handling conflict. These expectations are frequently legitimized through gendered beliefs that women are inherently better at nurturing, even in households striving for equality (Hochschild & Machung, 1989).

That being said, we shouldn't overlook the invisible labour men perform, especially in type 3 and 4 households. Male partners also take on significant cognitive tasks such as planning holidays, registering children for summer camps, maintaining shared grocery lists, and monitoring household supplies. Tom shares: *'I like to do research on fun activities for the kids, especially during the summer. I also do most of the (birthday) present shopping throughout the year.'* Ruben also mentions how he uses the car rides home as a way to connect and check in emotionally with his child.

Conversely, in type 2 households, men's contributions to invisible labour remain limited or are often confined to 'manly' domains, such as managing finances or dealing with contractors. Interestingly, some type 2 men do show involvement in emotional labour, such as checking in with their children after school or supporting them through panic attacks. Peter shares: *'Our son struggles with panic attacks, so I do breathing exercises with him to calm him down.'* This indicates that emotional engagement is sometimes more present than mental load sharing. Overall, this contrast implies that while some men actively engage in the mental load, its distribution and the types of tasks still reflects broader gendered patterns.

Across the interviews, invisible labour was rarely discussed explicitly between partners, and often only came up during the interviews. This absence of awareness and recognition already points to its hidden status.

Especially in type 2 households, men struggled with describing their partner's cognitive or emotional workload in detail. They are often unaware of the mental load or reframe it as part of visible labour.

For example, Luke is partially aware of Lana's mental load but chooses to distance himself from it: *'If the kids need new clothes or bills need to be paid for after-school care... if those don't come to my mailbox directly, I don't have visibility on them. So, I also don't know whether they're happening.'* However, Lana mentions in her interview that normally both partners receive the school bills, but she always pays them.

This reveals a pattern where men may remain detached from household logistics, even when the information is readily available to them. Luke positions himself as dependent on his partner for access to this knowledge, illustrating how women's invisible labour often remains unrecognized unless explicitly verbalized or delegated.

Another example is when Peter states: *'Phoebe does all the child related stuff, like taking care of them,'* without specifying which tasks or how those are coordinated. From a discursive point of view, he minimizes the complexity of his partner's work by reducing a broad range of tasks to a vague generalisation.

By contrast, type 3 and 4 couples showed a higher degree of recognition, even if implicitly. Male partners address more details on their partner's mental load, such as Tom: *'Those invisible tasks are really time consuming, and Tiana does a lot of them, like making sure the kids have a ride to certain activities or organising sleepovers with other parents.'*

A notable pattern during the analysis of invisible labour, echoing earlier observations on visible labour, is that women consistently use active language when describing their own mental load, but also when referring to their partner's contributions. Kate for example says: *'Kevin really keeps track of the kids' clothing (sizes) and always buys them new ones during the sales.'* This active framing suggests both a strong sense of ownership and a heightened recognition of their partner's efforts. This is likely because they manage a significant mental load themselves and are therefore more familiar with verbalising it.

Men on the other hand, when speaking about their partner's contributions, tended to rely more on general or admiring statements, rather than detailing concrete efforts. This gap between how invisible labour is done and how it is talked about once again reinforces its discursive invisibility.

In sum, while visible labour has gradually become more fairly divided, invisible labour remains deeply gendered. Women's use of active and specific language reflects great awareness of both their own and their partner's contributions. In contrast, male partners, especially from type 2 couples, often rely on vague generalities, revealing how mental labour remains unspoken and unrecognized. As Daminger (2019) mentioned, these tasks are structurally difficult to identify and value, while Hochschild (1989) showed how emotional labour is naturalized as women's work. This reveals how gender norms not only shape who performs invisible labour, but also who is expected to notice and value it, even in (type 4) households striving for equality.

4.3 Experiences and Perceptions of Household Labour

Now that we've discussed how couples describe household labour, we can delve into how they experience this division. This section will explore how couples perceive their division as fair, but also how they navigate feelings of (dis)satisfaction through conflict and communication.

4.3.1 Perceptions of Fairness and Satisfaction

During the coding phase, a five-point scale ranging from (1) *unfair and frustrating* to (5) *fully satisfied* was created. This inductive scale emerged after noticing that inequality did not always equate to dissatisfaction

The full scale was as follows:

1. *Unfair and frustrating*
2. *Unfair, but not upsetting*
3. *Neutral or unspoken*
4. *Reasonably satisfied with minor frustrations*
5. *Fully satisfied*

In practice, only levels 2, 4 and 5 were assigned, which means that extreme dissatisfaction or complete neutrality were less commonly expressed.

This study found that several individuals reported being satisfied, despite their clearly unfair/gendered division of labour. A particular example is Phoebe and Peter (type 2), where both parties agree that Phoebe does nearly all the household labour. Nonetheless she says:

'I wouldn't say our division is fair, but he appreciates everything I do, so I don't mind. He always praises me and is thankful, while there are men who are very ungrateful. That's not the case for us at all. He knows what goes into managing a household, and always offers me (external) help in case I need help with cleaning etc.'

This quote aligns perfectly with a study by Gordon et al. (2022), who argued that appreciation can buffer the negative effects of unequal labour on relationship satisfaction. Thus, as mentioned by Phoebe, validation reduces feelings of frustration due to an unequal division.

To further validate this theory, we notice a strong difference compared to Lana and Luke, who are also a type 2 couple. Lana highlights how the absence of recognition can intensify dissatisfaction. *'I don't feel appreciated for what I do and I'm very unhappy, I think it's unfair that I have to do everything even though we both work.'*

This supports the idea that perceived fairness isn't solely dependent on an equitable division of household labour, but is also strongly influenced by the validation and appreciation of these tasks.

A possible explanation for this can once again be found in gendered moral rationalities (Duncan & Edwards, 1996). This sense of validation or recognition may function as a source of emotional reward, reinforcing existing gender norms rather than challenging them. Women often internalise dominant norms on how to be a good mother or wife, which associates their self-worth with caregiving and sacrifice. Feeling appreciated for their domestic labour can therefore reinforce a positive self-identity, even with an unequal division (Duncan & Edwards, 1996).

This raises important questions about whether appreciation functions as genuine support, or whether it helps sustain unequal arrangements by emotionally compensating them.

Another important nuance is how type 3 and 4 couples describe a fair division. Fairness is rarely associated with a perfect 50/50 split. Instead, many describe their division as balanced even if one partner takes on slightly more tasks. These couples often stress mutual appreciation and the idea of complementarity: that each partner contributes in ways that suit their strengths or personalities.

Tiana (type 3) explains this well: *'We may not do the same things, but they're both important. So I do think it's equal, because we're a team.'*

Kevin (type 3) adds to this: *'Objectively, I think I do more than her, but I don't really mind. There are many things that I dislike doing, which she takes over for me.'*

These narratives imply that fairness is not only about the number of tasks performed, but also about how each partner values the other's contributions.

4.3.2 Differences by Gender and Employment Status

So far, gender has been the primary axis along which household labour is divided, but employment status is another relevant mediator in how this division is experienced. While all men in this sample worked full-time, both full-time and part-time working women were represented. This coincidentally happened to be a good representation of the current situation in Belgium, where only 12% of Belgian men work part-time, compared to 43% of women (Statbel, 2023).

A remarkable similarity between full-time and part-time working mothers, is their similar household workload. At first glance, you'd expect the division between two full-time working partners to be more equitable because of similar working hours. However, multiple studies have shown that, even in this scenario, women still perform the majority of household labour. A recent survey in the USA showed that full-time women do 1.8x more housework than full-time men (Gender Equity Policy Institute, 2024). Kate points out: *'Wednesdays are the busiest day of the week for me, I'm picking the kids up from school, taking them to soccer, doing as many household tasks as possible like laundry. I just barely have time for myself those days.'*

Hailey adds to this: *'I feel a lot of pressure, because sometimes it feels like they still expect you to do full-time amount of work, but just in less days.'*

Interestingly, all women in the sample who currently work part-time, admit to leaving full-time employment after having children. Many link their decision to the unaffordability of childcare, but also because they couldn't manage their household labour anymore. Lana shares: *'That's the reason I started working part-time, just so I could finish the housework.'*

Notably, this dynamic is also present in type 3 couples such as Elena: *'It really felt like I needed that extra day to get everything done around here.'*

Conversely, none of the men mentioned being overwhelmed with housework to this extent or considering working part-time. These cases support the idea that domestic responsibilities are not passively filled with leftover time, but rather actively diminish women's labour market positions.

To understand why women may perform more domestic labour even as co-breadwinners, Bittman et al. (2003) propose the concept of gender deviance neutralization. This implies that women who adopt roles considered deviant from traditional gender norms, such as becoming the co-primary breadwinner in this case, may unconsciously compensate by adhering to other gendered expectations. This might present itself as an attentive mother or domestic caretaker, and by doing this, they try to alleviate the perceived imbalance in the relationship.

Hailey, for example, mentions the internal dilemma she faces: *'It's tricky, because you want to spend quality time with your family, but also keep up with the housework. At the same time, you also want to work because that's also interesting.'*

This act could also be framed as emotional labour, because women are not only performing more housework, but also managing relational dynamics to avoid conflict, shame or guilt (Hochschild, 1989).

In sum, both gender and employment status shape how household labour is experienced. While men's full-time employment is rarely questioned, women's working hours are often reduced to accommodate domestic demands. This is framed as a voluntary choice, but is clearly structurally gendered.

In the next section, we turn to how couples justify this (unfair) division, and how they manage tensions or conflicts.

4.4 Discursive Legitimation of the Division of Labour

Based on the interview data, two categories were created: Explicit and implicit justifications. Explicit justifications refer to conscious explanations for the division of labour, while implicit legitimations rely on vague language or gendered assumptions.

By discussing themes such as employment status, moral reasoning, and internalised gender norms, this section will analyse how couples make sense of their division and how these justifications both reflect and reproduce broader social expectations.

4.4.1 Explicit Justifications and Moral Reasoning

In many interviews, participants offered explicit justifications for how household tasks are divided. These were usually related to capability, employment status, or personality differences. These were especially common in type 2 couples, where all three categories are frequently mentioned. Phoebe for example says: *'Well he's the biggest earner with a very busy job, and I have more time so it's only logical I do more.'* Peter adds to this that Phoebe does all the cooking, simply because she's better at it.

This echoes the 3 strategies by Nyman et al. (2018), especially constructions of (un)suitability which refers to legitimizing an unequal division through competence or personality.

However, connecting to earlier observations, Phoebe stated how much she dislikes cooking and only does it out of necessity. This discrepancy points out how people often naturalise competencies in order to legitimise unequal divisions. This aligns perfectly with Van Hooff's (2011) argument that women's tasks are often framed as stemming from inherent skill or preference, rather than structural expectations.

A notable pattern, especially in men from type 2 couples, is using their full-time work status or income as a bargaining resource. Luke, for instance says: *'She definitely does more around the house, but then again I also work and earn more, which allows us to uphold a certain standard of life.'* Peter adds to this: *'It's not necessarily fair, but I contribute in other ways by for example earning more money.'*

This corresponds to relative resources theory, which claims that the partner with more resources, such as income or job prestige, will have more bargaining power to reduce their household labour (Noppe, J., Vanweddingen, M. & Weekers, K. 2021). Thus, it's quite predictable that these full-time working men use it as a justifying resource.

However, this theory does fall short in fully explaining the gendered nature of household labour, considering the data shows that, even when both partners work full-time, women consistently perform more household labour. This suggests that task division is not merely a matter of bargaining power but is also shaped by persistent gender norms and internalised expectations.

When comparing explicit justifications across household types, a clear shift emerges: while type 2 couples frequently justify their division of labour, type 3 couples do so far less often, and type 4 couples rarely engage in explicit justification at all.

Edward (type 3) for example blames his lack of contribution to the laundry on skill: *'Elena does all the laundry, because I don't know how to do it. Perhaps because I don't really want to do it either.'* Elena accepts his incompetence, which reproduces the gendered labour division.

A striking contrast between Edward (type 3) and Peter (type 2) is the rejection of the idea that his higher income entitles him to contribute less at home: *'Sure, I earn more but that's for the entire family. I don't expect Elena to compensate for that by doing more housework.'*

As previously noted, type 4 couples barely use any explicit justifications, and when it does occur, it often serves to legitimise a deliberate choice for equality rather than to excuse imbalance.

Ruben, for example, stresses how important an equal division is to him: *'My parents were very traditional, and I've always wanted to do things differently. Roxanne and I both wanted to work full-time, so we actively tried to divide the household labour in a fair way.'*

These examples correspond to the findings in a study by Blain (1994), which shows that dual-earner couples often frame their domestic divisions through discourses of agency. This refers to emphasizing personal choice, shared values, and moral commitment, which means household labour becomes not just a set of tasks, but a reflection of their identity and ethics as a partner/parent (Blain, 1994).

While type 4 couples most explicitly adopt this framing, like we saw with Ruben, it is also present in type 3 couples. Even when their arrangements are only partially equal, they often justify them in ways that emphasize fairness, mutual respect, or individual strengths.

To sum up, these different forms of justification show how couples negotiate labour division, but also how they create moral narratives around them, which reflect, reproduce, or challenge certain gendered expectations.

4.4.2 Implicit Justifications and Gender Ideologies

As discussed, some couples used clear, reasoned explanations to justify their task division. Others relied on subtler narratives that present inequality as something that emerged naturally, rather than being actively constructed. Across all interviews, personality traits, routines, and internalised gender roles played a key role in their justification.

Nearly every couple, regardless of type, justified their division through personality. This often involved the distinction between ‘Type A’ (organised, anxious, proactive) and ‘Type B’ (relaxed, reactive, tolerant) personalities (Samaras & Galanakis, 2022). In most cases, couples consisted of a type A partner with a type B partner, which led to a consistent pattern of justifying inequality through personality.

Luke (type 2) says: *‘Lana is super organised. She notices everything and is much better at keeping track of things than me.’* Bella (type 2) echoes this: *‘I think I’m very organised like my mom, and Benjamin is the complete opposite, I think he just doesn’t see work like I do.’*

Interestingly, type 3 and 4 men are more often Type A, unlike the more laid-back men in type 2 households. Tom (type 3), for example, takes on more cognitive labour, because Tiana is forgetful: *‘She could plan a party, buy all the decorations, but forget the cake and invitations. It can be a bit much sometimes, but I don’t mind, we complement each other nicely.’*

Kevin (type 3) also links his household engagement to his job: *‘I do most of the planning at home, but I think it’s also because of my job (as a manager). I have like 20 excels on different trips, finances, renovations. I don’t believe in turning off a professional button, that’s a myth.’*

This quote in particular challenges a common discursive strategy: the supposed work and home switch. Many men in high status positions, perform a lot of cognitive labour at their job, yet do not transfer these skills to the domestic sphere.

In this sample, Luke for example performs a high position manager job, but still describes himself as very chaotic and forgetful at home.

Kevin's quote stands in direct contrast with the findings of McClintock (2016), who discovered that men working in female-dominated professions (teaching and caregiving) perform more household labour than men in male-dominated roles, such as managerial functions. In other words, when men operate in professional spaces that challenge traditional gender norms, they may be more likely to reject those norms at home as well.

By saying this, he consciously challenges the widespread 'work/home switch' logic and emphasizes that opting out of household planning is often a matter of will, not skill.

In addition to personality, many couples stated that their division 'just grew naturally', without any explicit negotiation. Elena reflects: *'It grew quite naturally, especially since I was home more, it just made sense, but it never felt wrong.'*

This again mirrors the concept of 'doing gender' (West & Zimmerman, 1987): the idea that gender is reproduced through routine interactions rather than deliberate choice. Framing their division as 'organic' dismisses the structural gender norms that shape who does what.

As discussed earlier, this also plays out in assumptions about what tasks men should do. Christopher (2024) found that even egalitarian couples view certain chores as inherently male, leading to male gatekeeping. This refers to a dynamic where men assert control over tasks tied to their masculinity.

Additionally, some participants mentioned essentialist beliefs about caregiving. Phoebe, for example (type 2) reflects: *'It's natural for women to be close to their children, especially since we carry them. Cooking, laundry, caring for your children, it's just something feminine.'* Nick (type 3) offers a similar sentiment by describing his wife as the 'warm, nurturing' mother, while he plays the role of the 'strict dad.' Such views reproduce cultural scripts of mothers as intuitive and emotionally attuned, and fathers as practical or distant.

Across interviews, most men grew up in traditional households. Many said they wanted to do it differently, by being more involved as partners and fathers. Kevin (type 3): *I really wanted to be an active dad, unlike my own father. It means having less time for hobbies or friends, but it's about choosing what you value.'*

Benjamin (type 2) also claims to reject his upbringing: *'I definitely do more than my dad ever did, like I've never seen him mop.'* Yet in practice, his involvement remains minimal, suggesting his 'progressiveness' is symbolic rather than transformative.

Among type 3 men, valuing a partner's career was sometimes framed more as personal benefit than as commitment to equality. Kevin states: *'I find it important that she works, because I want her to have something interesting to say in the evening.'* This logic centres male stimulation, rather than structural fairness.

By contrast, type 4 couples described a more reciprocal approach. Ruben says: *'I dislike how society pushes dads into traditional roles. After the birth of our child, I had to go back to work after 10 days, which automatically pushes the parents into certain roles. We both wanted to keep working full time, so we had concrete discussions on how to divide the workload as equally as possible.'*

In this case, equality was not just a value, but a shared project. These dynamics align with Van Hooff (2011), who argues that heterosexual couples often unconsciously reproduce traditional divisions, even when they preach egalitarian ideals.

To conclude, many couples rely on implicit narratives, such as competence, habit, and personality, to naturalise their division of labour. These discursive strategies present inequality as the organic result of individual differences rather than structural gender norms. Even couples who value fairness often reproduce traditional roles in practice, affirming Van Hooff's (2011) observation that a belief in egalitarian ideals is not enough to prevent them from falling into a traditional division of labour.

4.5 Summary of Key Findings

This study explored how visible and invisible household labour is divided, experienced, and justified within 10 heterosexual couples with children. Based on the interviews and literature, three types of household labour were identified: visible, cognitive, and emotional.

Couples were categorized into three main household types, ranging from strongly gendered (type 2), partially equal (type 3), to equal (type 4). In type 2 households, women carried the bulk of both visible and invisible labour, often without explicit negotiation, and their partners showed limited awareness of this imbalance. In contrast, Type 3 couples showed more shared responsibilities and awareness, yet the mental load was primarily taken up by women. Type 4 households actively pursued equality, with men also engaging in invisible labour.

Unsurprisingly, Invisible labour emerged as the most unequally distributed domain, often unrecognized by male partners and rarely discussed openly. Women used active, detailed language to describe their own and their partners' contributions, while (particularly type 2) men relied on passive language or the 'If she asks me to, I will do it'. This discursive pattern reinforces the invisibility of mental and emotional labour.

Despite clear inequalities, several women expressed satisfaction, especially when their work was appreciated. This implies that emotional validation can moderate dissatisfaction, even in unequal divisions. Justifications, explicit or implicit, for the division varied: type 2 couples used employment status or perceived competence, while type 3 and type 4 couples framed equality as a deliberate moral choice. Most participants also pinned the division on their personality differences or described it as something that “just happened,” naturalizing gendered expectations.

Overall, the findings highlight how invisible labour remains deeply gendered, shaped by structural gender norms, individual experiences/morals, and bargaining resources. Even in households striving for fairness, traditional patterns often resurge in subtle ways, while minimizing the constant influence of gender in domestic life.

5. Discussion and Conclusion

5.1 Interpreting Division Patterns in Light of Theories

As discussed, relative resource theory posits that someone with more bargaining power can negotiate themselves out of household labour. Income is often cited as the most significant bargaining resource, which was confirmed in my study. However, this theory only applied to type 2 men who used their jobs to avoid household labour. Peter states: *'It's not necessarily fair, but I contribute in other ways by for example earning more money.'* This justification was less present in type 3 or 4 households, where men earned more but still viewed household labour as a shared responsibility. This suggests that income-based bargaining is not universal but shaped by gender norms and relational expectations.

Additionally, time availability was also invalidated since it claims that having more free time equals more housework. Yet, both full-time and part-time working mothers perform nearly the same amount of household labour. Even in couples where both partners work fulltime, women still do more, which will later be explained by gender deviance neutralization theory.

This study also confirms the gendered task pattern described by Fernández et al. (2016): women predominantly perform routine tasks, while men mostly do technical or intermittent ones. Typically, these tasks are also coded as feminine and masculine. This varies by household type. In type 2, men almost exclusively do masculine tasks, while type 3 and 4 men also contribute to routine work.

This aligns with doing gender by West and Zimmerman (1987), which emphasizes that gender is reproduced through daily (household) tasks. The division is often described as logical, habitual, or simply the result of circumstances, with several participants stating that it 'just happened' that way. Such accounts reflect how unequal arrangements are naturalised, masking the gendered assumptions that underpin them.

Even Margot, in the study's only lesbian couple, reflected on the gendered nature of tasks: "Sometimes I talk to my friends and think... at least they have a man who can do the typical man jobs, such as repairs."

Participants drew on various discursive strategies to justify the division of labour, including references to capability, time, and personality. Especially in type 2 couples, Phoebe explained: "Well, he's the biggest earner and I have more time so it's only logical I do more." Peter added that Phoebe does all the cooking simply "because she's better at it." These justifications reflect what Nyman et al. (2018) call constructions of (un)suitability, where inequality is legitimised through gendered ideas of competence, habit, and preference.

5.2 The Influence of Gender Norms on Experiences of Labour

While the previous section outlined structural and discursive explanations for the division of labour, this section turns to how participants *experience* and *internalise* these patterns

Most women in this study reflect on their division emerging naturally rather than through negotiation. This perception reflects both doing gender and what Duncan & Edwards (1996) call gendered moral rationalities. This refers to the moral obligation (for women) to manage the household and internalized social expectations on how to be a good mother or wife.

Across all types, the results show that women consider cooking a necessary chore, while men can approach it on their own terms (Van Hooff, 2011). Phoebe (type 2), for example, says she hates cooking, but does it so her family eats healthily. This statement shows an underlying moral expectation, where mothers are responsible for the health and wellbeing of their families, regardless of their preferences.

This moral framing also extends to emotional labour, where gender roles persist even in supposedly egalitarian couples. Roxanne (type 4) states: *'Every time there's a conflict at school or at home between the kids, I usually resolve it, and it can get exhausting.'*

This aligns with Hochschild, since women are also expected to manage the household's emotional climate. These expectations often stem from gendered beliefs that women are inherently better at nurturing (Hochschild & Machung, 1989).

Additionally, the results showed some women carry essentialist beliefs themselves, such as Phoebe: *'Cooking, laundry, caring for your children, it's just something feminine.'*

By following these norms, women often associate their self-worth with caregiving and sacrifice. Feeling appreciated for their domestic labour can therefore reinforce a positive self-identity, even with an unequal division (Duncan & Edwards, 1996). Natalie (type 3) mentions how her partner compliments her for being a warm and nurturing mother, which makes her feel good about herself.

Together, these examples show how even supposedly equal arrangements remain shaped by persistent cultural scripts.

5.3 The Role of Employment Status in Task Sharing and Satisfaction

As previously discussed, the employment status of each partner strongly influences how tasks were divided and how these arrangements were perceived. This section explores how full- and part-time work shape the experience regarding the division of labour.

While part- and full-time working mothers perform similar hours of household labour, it's important to consider the reason behind it. The gender deviance neutralization theory by Bittman et al. (2003) claims that women who out-earn their partners often take on more household work to unconsciously reinforce traditional gender roles when they feel they are violating others, such as being the primary or co-breadwinner.

This pattern also emerged in my study: full-time working women often report frustration about doing more than their partner, again debunking time availability theory, since they work similar hours. Bella (type 2) for example says: *'When he gets home and says he won't do something because he's had a long day, I get angry because we work similar hours and those tasks will fall on me.'*

Still, many continue to perform more household labour, often framing this as part of being a good mother. Hailey (type 4) admits: *'It feels very conflicting because you want to take care and spend time your family, but you also want to work.'*

Nevertheless, most full-time working women did have more egalitarian divisions, likely due to similar bargaining resources. Roxanne (type 4) stated: *'We both (wanted to) work fulltime, so we made sure to divide things equally.'*

Conversely, part-time working women describe having less bargaining power, because they work less. Kate points out: *'Wednesdays are the busiest day of the week for me...It makes sense because I have more time, but I just barely have time for myself those days.'*

Additionally, they all admitted to reducing their hours after having children, to compensate for the costs for daycare or to manage the household next to their job. Their partners, however, rarely mentioned a similar pressure to do so.

This clearly shows that part-time working women feel overwhelmed by their workload but still justify it through time availability and internalised gendered moral norms.

5.4 Invisible Labour and Couple Dynamics

Invisible labour, though often overlooked, plays a crucial role in shaping couple dynamics. This section explores how such labour is distributed, perceived, and emotionally experienced within households. First, as Daminger (2019) stated, the mental load often goes unnoticed due to its invisibility. In this study, most type 2 men struggled with verbalising what invisible labour entailed and gave vague definitions such as Benjamin: *'Maybe it's like paying the bills because it's invisible?'*

Conversely, type 3 and 4 men did have clear understandings of what it was, mainly because they performed it alongside their partner. Kevin (type 3) for example, mentions how his wife plans birthday parties for the kids and addresses many forms of cognitive labour, such as making and sending invitations.

Most women described invisible labour indirectly through the 4 cognitive stages of Daminger (2019): anticipating needs, identifying options, decision-making, and monitoring outcomes. In practice, women described invisible labour as intertwined with visible tasks. For example, when they spoke about taking care of their sick child, they mentioned tracking their temperature and making doctor's appointments, alongside just tucking their child into bed and making their favourite meal.

Many studies have emphasized the importance of acknowledgement and appreciation, which can buffer the negative effects of unequal labour on relationship satisfaction (Gordon et al, 2022). This was echoed in several interviews, where women admitted that appreciation mitigated their frustration about doing more. Phoebe (type 2) says: *'I do a lot more, but I don't mind, because he's always appreciative and thankful for it. Many men don't even do that.'*

A lack of this recognition often produces subtle tension, especially when one partner underestimates the planning or coordination done behind the scenes.

Finally, a gendered pattern emerges, since many women mention how they feel responsible for managing the household. Elena (type 3) admits: *'It's not just about keeping the house clean, but it's important to keep things running smoothly. I'm also more organised, so I make sure we follow a tight schedule.'*

This sense of responsibility often reflects internalised expectations around gender and care, reinforcing the idea that women are the natural household coordinators.

5.5 Implications for Policy and Gender Equality

The findings of this study emphasize the importance of creating more equitable divisions of household labour through policies. First, I propose the government encourage fathers to take up paternity leave after the birth of a child, to strengthen the father-child bond but also prevent women from being pushed into traditional roles early on.

Secondly, public campaigns could be used to challenge current norms, which state that women are natural household managers. The goal would be to shift the cultural narrative around care and responsibility, such as Sweden's 'Dads can too' campaign, which portrays posters of fathers preparing lunchboxes etc. By normalizing male caregiving, we can reduce the moral and emotional burden women often feel to do it all.

Such initiatives are essential to address the structural and cultural roots of gendered divisions in domestic work.

5.6 Limitations and Methodological Reflections

While this study offers in-depth insights into the gendered division of household labour, several limitations must be acknowledged.

First, although I conducted individual interviews to prevent social desirability bias, sometimes people's perceptions of the task division were inconsistent. This introduced interpretative challenges and highlighted the subjective nature of self-reported data.

Secondly, due to the use of the snowball method, the sample consisted mainly of white, middle class heterosexual individuals. This limits generalizability and reduces intersectional nuances.

Finally, due to difficulties finding participants, my sample size was relatively small with 10 couples. This means the household types were constructed from a limited number of cases. While useful for exploratory analysis, a larger and more diverse sample could help validate and refine these typologies across different social contexts.

5.7 Directions for Future Research

Building on this, future research would benefit from a broader sample that includes same-sex couples and families from varied ethnic and socioeconomic backgrounds. This would allow for broader generalization and add intersectional nuance to the current conclusions.

It would also be valuable to focus on how task divisions evolve before and after having children, as prior studies have shown traditional patterns may become more pronounced during this transition (Zoch & Heyne, 2023). Another interesting perspective is the influence of online discourses, such as the recent rise of 'tradwife' culture on social media. Future research could focus on how such narratives influence how young women will approach household labour.

Finally, while time diaries aren't ideal for capturing invisible labour, other efforts such as large-scale quantitative surveys with detailed items (e.g., 'planning weekly meals') can make this dimension more measurable.

5.8 Final Reflections

This study has revealed that household labour remains gendered in the 21st century, even in couples striving for equality. Invisible labour in particular, still mostly falls on the women, which is legitimized through internalized moral norms, and gendered discourse. Although many couples were satisfied, this was often tied to validation rather than equality. We can conclude that beside structural changes, a culture shift is also necessary to challenge gendered assumptions. Addressing these norms is crucial to build households where women aren't expected to sacrifice their individuality for their families, and men are supported in becoming emotionally and practically involved fathers and partners.

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Appendices

Appendix A: Interview Guide

Structuur

1. Ethiek/ inleiding
2. Openingsvragen
3. Introductie: concepten bevragen
4. Transitievragen:
5. Sleutelvragen:

Intro en contextvragen

*Dank je wel voor je deelname. Ik wil vandaag met je praten over de verdeling van de taken die minder zichtbaar zijn in het huishouden, ook wel *invisible labour* genoemd, en hoe je deze taken ervaart en verdeelt in jullie huishouden.*

Voor we daaraan beginnen zou ik graag wat meer over je te weten komen.

- Zou je wat meer over jezelf kunnen vertellen? (Dingen zoals je naam, wat je doet voor werk, hoelang je je partner al kent en hoe oud jullie kind is?)
- Je hebt al een enquête ingevuld over de zichtbare huishoudelijke taken. Ik zou graag deze kort met je overlopen.
 - Hoe is het invullen verlopen? Was er iets van discussie onderling tijdens het invullen?
- Kun je kort iets vertellen over hoe jullie de huishoudelijke taken hebben verdeeld, met de nadruk op wie welke verantwoordelijkheden heeft?

Perceptie van invisible labour

1. Definitie en erkenning

Ik ga jullie zometeen wat meer informatie geven over wat invisible labour juist is, maar ik ben benieuwd wat jullie hier zelf onder verstaan?

- Hoe zou je zelf het verschil beschrijven tussen zichtbare en onzichtbare huishoudelijke taken?

In mijn onderzoek wordt invisible labour beschouwd als een overkoepelende term voor emotional en cognitive labour. Onder cognitive labour valt het plan en coördinatie aspect van huishoudelijke taken, terwijl emotional labour meer gaat over rekening houden en inspelen op de gevoelens van gezinsleden.

Een goed voorbeeld is bv het plannen van een verjaardagsfeestje, waarbij je uitnodigingen opstelt, een taart bestelt en de cadeautjes koopt, terwijl emotionele arbeid eerder gaat over het gelukkig houden van alle gasten en rekening houden met hun voorkeuren of behoeften.

Boodschappenlijstjes maken, meal prep

Kleren bijhouden van kinderen, was plannen

Opzoekwerk over kampen, scholen...

emotional labour: groothouden voor kinderen, er zijn voor hen

Dit zijn inderdaad dingen die misschien voordehandliggend lijken, maar er zit een heel mentaal proces achter.

- Hoe ziet de taakverdeling eruit als het gaat om de zorg voor jullie kind? Wie neemt welke verantwoordelijkheden
- op zich?
- Hoe verloopt bij jullie het plannen en regelen van alles rond de kinderen en hun activiteiten? Wie neemt doorgaans het initiatief?
- Hoe ga je om met de emotionele arbeid die bij het ouderschap komt kijken, zoals het troosten, ondersteunen of motiveren van jullie kind? Wie neemt deze rol meestal op zich?
 - Op welke manier uit zich dat?
- Kun je voorbeelden geven van taken die je doet, waarvan je het gevoel hebt dat ze door je partner niet worden opgemerkt?
- Beschouw je deze taken als een aparte soort arbeid of eerder als iets dat vanzelfsprekend is binnen het huishouden
- Welke taken vind je (over het algemeen) het meest belastend of tijdrovend?

- Hoe ga je daar dan mee om?
- Op welke momenten heb je dit onderwerp met je partner besproken? Hoe verliepen die gesprekken, en welke reacties kreeg je?
- Welke impact heeft dit op jouw emotioneel welzijn en dagelijks leven?
- Weaponized incompetence
- Voel je je gewaardeerd voor de taken die je doet?
 - Hoe belangrijk vind je dat jouw werk erkend of gewaardeerd wordt?
 - Wat betekent erkenning voor jou?
- In welke mate voel je je gelukkig met de huidige taakverdeling?

2. Bargaining resources

- Hoe maken jullie afspraken over wie welke huishoudelijke taken op zich neemt?
 - Op basis van welke factoren maken jullie deze beslissingen?
- Welke rol spelen factoren zoals tijd,
- genderrollen, of inkomen in deze verdeling? *(noem hier factoren die bij bovenstaande vraag nog niet vermeld zijn)*
 - Zijn er nog andere factoren die invloed hebben op de verdeling van onzichtbare taken in jullie huishouden, zoals gezondheid, persoonlijkheid of vaardigheden?
- Kun je een voorbeeld geven van een onderhandeling en hoe de uiteindelijke beslissing is genomen?
- Kun je uitleggen waarom bepaalde onzichtbare taken bij jou terechtkomen? Zijn er specifieke factoren of voorkeuren die een rol spelen?
- Hoe denk je dat jouw werkstatus (bijvoorbeeld voltijdse of flexibele uren) invloed heeft op het aantal onzichtbare taken dat je op je neemt?
 - Welke invloed heeft jouw arbeidsstatus op de verzorging van de kinderen?
 - Merk je dat bepaalde onzichtbare taken automatisch bij jou terechtkomen omdat jouw werkstatus meer flexibiliteit toelaat?

- Hoe voel je je daarbij?
- Hoe zou je de taakverdeling in jullie huishouden omschrijven, bijvoorbeeld qua eerlijkheid?

3. Genderrollen

- Welke rol spelen de traditionele rolpatronen in jullie huishouden?
 - Hoe zou je jouw huishouden beschrijven op dat vlak?
 - bespreek cultuur aspect indien van toepassing
- Heb je het idee dat bepaalde onzichtbare taken als vanzelfsprekend bij jou terechtkomen vanwege je gender? Kun je een voorbeeld geven?
- Merk je dat bepaalde taken rondom de zorg voor jullie kind automatisch bij jou terechtkomen vanwege je gender? Kun je hier een voorbeeld van geven?
- Hoe was de rolverdeling in jouw huishouden vroeger als kind?
- Op welke manier hebben verwachtingen van familie, vrienden, of de maatschappij een invloed op hoe jullie taken verdelen? Hoe reageer je daarop?
- Ben je tevreden met de verdeling van taken tussen jou en je partner die voortkomen uit al dan niet traditionele genderrollen? Zijn er bepaalde taken of verantwoordelijkheden die je liever anders verdeeld zou zien?

4. Slotvragen

- Is er nog iets dat je wil toevoegen over de manier waarop zichtbare en onzichtbare arbeid bij jullie verdeeld is?
- Hoe ziet jouw ideale taakverdeling eruit?
- Hoe denk je dat de taakverdeling bij jullie thuis invloed heeft op jullie relatie? Zijn er specifieke momenten waarop je de impact ervan voelt??

Dankjewel voor je deelname aan het interview, deze bijdrage zal erg waardevol zijn voor mijn onderzoek!

Appendix B: Coding Scheme / Codebook

THEMATISCHE MAP – Reflexive Thematic Analysis

Thema 1: Ervaring en betekenisgeving van onzichtbare arbeid

Hoe beleven koppels de onzichtbare arbeid in het dagelijks leven?

- **Subthema: Emotionele en mentale belasting**

- Angst en verdriet verwerken
- Overbelasting
- Geen overbelasting
- Erkenning / Geen erkenning
- Waardering
- Tevredenheid / Ontevredenheid

- **Subthema: Tijd en organisatie**

- Persoonlijke tijd en gezinstijd
- Minder me time
- Time management
- To do lijstjes opvolgen
- Dagelijkse routines
- Plannen en coördineren

Thema 2: Mechanismen van taakverdeling

Hoe komt een traditionele verdeling tot stand, ook zonder expliciete afspraken?

- **Subthema: Impliciete afspraken en gewoontevorming**

- Mate van aanpassing
- Taken volgens capaciteiten

- Taken volgens gendernormen
- Traditioneel vs. progressief
- Overnemen ouderlijke rolpatronen
- Afzetten tegen ouderlijke rolverdeling
- **Subthema: Persoonlijkheidskenmerken en communicatie**
- Chaotische/georganiseerde persoonlijkheid
- Eigen standaard
- Weaponized incompetence
- Niet kwalijk nemen / Met opzet

Thema 3: Rechtvaardiging en onderhandeling binnen koppels

Hoe verantwoorden partners een (on)gelijke verdeling van onzichtbare arbeid?

- **Subthema: Communicatie en conflict**
- Bespreking taakverdeling
- Conflictmanagement
- Ervaring met conflict
- Kwalijk nemen / Niet kwalijk nemen
- Teamgevoel
- **Subthema: Gelijkheid en verdelingsprincipes**
- Eerlijke / Oneerlijke verdeling
- Kunnen rekenen op / Niet kunnen rekenen op
- Procentuele verdeling
- Wie beslist / Wie voert uit

Thema 4: Invloed van arbeidsstatus en context

Hoe beïnvloedt voltijds/deeltijds werk en externe factoren de beleving van arbeid?

- **Subthema: Arbeidssituatie en tijdsdruk**
 - Impact deeltijds werken
 - Impact voltijds werken
 - Waarde aan job
 - Ontslag of burn-out
- **Subthema: Externe hulp en ondersteuning**
 - Grootouders en familiehulp
 - Gebruik huishoudelijke diensten
 - Opvang
 - Resto's

Thema 5: Onzichtbare arbeid in de praktijk

Welke taken vallen onder onzichtbare arbeid, en hoe worden ze verdeeld en beleefd?

- **Subthema: Cognitieve arbeid**
 - Boodschappenlijstjes maken
 - Administratie en rekeningen
 - Gezinslogistiek
- **Subthema: Emotionele arbeid**
 - Kinderen troosten
 - Partner ondersteunen
 - Sociale integratie kinderen
 - Emotionele steun bieden
- **Subthema: Kindgerelateerde coördinatie**

- Kindgerelateerde activiteiten
- Brooddozen / Ochtend- en avondroutine
- Vakantie- en reisplanning

Appendix C: Participant Profiles and Household Types

Koppel nummer	Pseudoniem	Geslacht	Arbeidsstatus	Aantal kinderen	Persoonlijkheidstype	Verdeling procentueel	Type huishouden	Kwalijk nemen	Tevredenheidsschaal
1	Phoebe	Vrouw	Deeltijds	2	Georganiseerd	90/10	2 Nee		2
1	Peter	Man	Voltijds	2	Chaotisch	10/90	2 Nee		5
2	Bella	Vrouw	Voltijds	1	Georganiseerd	90/10	2 Nee		2
2	Benjamin	Man	Deeltijds	1	Chaotisch	10/90	2 Nee		5
3	Lana	Vrouw	Deeltijds	4	Georganiseerd	85/15	2 Ja		1
3	Luke	Man	Voltijds	4	Chaotisch	15/85	2 Nee		2
4	Elena	Vrouw	Deeltijds	2	Georganiseerd	65/35	3 Nee		5
4	Edward	Man	Voltijds	2	Chaotisch	60/40	3 Nee		5
5	Tiana	Vrouw	Voltijds	2	Chaotisch	40/60	3 Nee		4
5	Tom	Man	Voltijds	2	Georganiseerd	60/40	3 Nee		5
6	Kate	Vrouw	Deeltijds	2	Chaotisch	40/60	3 Nee		5
6	Kevin	Man	Voltijds	2	Georganiseerd	60/40	3 Nee		5
7	Margot	Vrouw	Deeltijds	3	Georganiseerd	60/40	3 Nee		4
7	Melanie	Vrouw	Sabbatical	3	Georganiseerd	40/60	3 Nee		5
8	Natalie	Vrouw	Voltijds	2	Georganiseerd	60/40	3 Nee		5
8	Nick	Man	Voltijds	2	Georganiseerd	40/60	3 Nee		5
9	Roxanne	Vrouw	Voltijds	2	Chaotisch	70/30	4 Nee		5
9	Ruben	Man	Voltijds	2	Georganiseerd	30/70	4 Nee		5
10	Hailey	Vrouw	Deeltijds	2	Georganiseerd	60/40	4 Nee		4
10	Harvey	Man	Voltijds	2	Georganiseerd	40/60	4 Nee		5

Appendix D: Consent Forms

All consent forms were signed digitally when participants signed up for the project. All the interviews happened over Teams as well. The consent form was repeated verbally before the interview began, so participants were completely aware of it. Therefore, I don't have any physical signatures.

In het kader van mijn Masterproef aan de UGent, doe ik onderzoek naar de (onzichtbare) huishoudelijke takenverdeling. Het eerste deel van het onderzoek bestaat uit een survey, wat later gevolgd wordt door een interview. Graag vraag ik u om deel te nemen aan deze korte survey, waarbij u reflecteert over de afgelopen week. De vergaarde informatie zal enkel toegankelijk zijn voor mij en mijn promotor prof. dr. John Lievens. Alle data worden discreet verzameld, en zullen in Juli 2025 permanent verwijderd worden.

Indien u vragen heeft over de verzameling, verwerking of veiligheid van uw gegevens, mag u altijd een mail sturen naar Adriana.SinhaRoy@Ugent.be.

Gelieve onderstaande voorwaarden grondig te lezen, voordat u begint aan de survey. 1) Ik neem vrijwillig deel aan deze wetenschappelijke studie 2) Ik weet dat ik me op elk ogenblik uit deze studie mag terugtrekken, zonder een reden voor deze beslissing op te geven. Deze beslissing zal geen (negatieve) gevolgen veroorzaken. 3) Ik heb bovenstaande informatie gelezen en ben voldoende geïnformeerd over het doel en de duur van de survey. 4) Ik weet dat ik rechten heb om mijn privacy te vrijwaren (o.a. inzage, verbetering en verwijdering). Ik ben op de hoogte van wie ik kan bereiken, indien ik vragen heb hierover. 5) Ik geef toestemming om voor de doelstellingen van deze studie persoonsgegevens van mij te verzamelen, verwerken, bewaren, analyseren en erover te rapporteren.

- Ja, ik heb bovenstaande informatie gelezen en ik ga akkoord
- Nee, ik ga niet akkoord

Appendix E: DMP form

Data Management and Ethics form

FOR STUDENT RESEARCH AT THE FACULTY OF POLITICAL AND SOCIAL SCIENCES OF GHENT UNIVERSITY

Title of the research project and date

Title	The third shift uncovered
Date of first version DMP	14/05/2024
Date of last update (if applicable), please specify changes made	28/07/2025 I adjusted the box on gaining information regarding people's sexuality, because I have a lesbian couple in my sample. I also adjusted some methodological aspects, because I ended up doing a normal survey instead of diary entry survey.

Name of the researcher(s)

Name researcher(s):	Adriana Sinha Roy
Name supervisor (s):	John Lievens
Department:	Politieke en Sociale Wetenschappen (Sociologie)
E-mail address contact person:	Adriana.sinharoy@ugent.be

Data management PLAN

What

A Data Management Plan (DMP) entails all actions needed to ensure that data are secure, easy to find, understand, and (re)use; not only during a research project, but also in the longer term. In all cases, it is an excellent tool to manage your research project.

WHY

Research data constitute the evidence needed to verify and validate published claims.

All researchers, including Bachelor and Master students, carefully need to think through how data are organised, managed properly not only **before** but also **during** the research project and **after** the project has finished. This is done in a DMP.

A DMP shows that researchers adhere to the **principles of responsible research**. It will enable:

- Your data to be re-used for **follow-up or new research**
- Research findings to be **reproducible** (a fundamental principle of good research)
- The researcher(s) to **safely store** and **find** his/her data (a DMP will make you think about how to avoid the consequences of unexpected events, such as a stolen laptop or corrupted files)
- Compliance with **legal** and **ethical guidelines** (for this reason, most organisations and virtually all funding agencies require a DMP prior to approval or funding)

In other words, a DMP will help you to think carefully about your data management. For this reason, writing a DMP is a **good practice**. This document helps you to think through the data management process. You are asked to fill out the text boxes. Expand the boxes if needed.

Personal data or not

Please first indicate the type of data you will collect or create:

- ☐ No personal data (i.e., no information about an identified or identifiable natural person)
- ☒ Personal data (i.e., any information about an identified or identifiable natural person)

Please note: A natural person is considered to be identifiable if he or she can be identified directly or indirectly using the collected data. Information that at first sight doesn't appear to be traceable to a person can therefore still be personal data. This may be the case if the person in question can be identified by combining the collected data with additional information (cf. GDPR).

If you will collect or create personal data, please indicate **what** personal data you will collect (several options may apply)

- ☒ identifying information (e.g., name, address, email address, IP address, etc.)

☐ information revealing gender identity, ethnic origins, political views, or religious beliefs/practices

☐ information on a person's sexual behaviour or sexual orientation

☐ information related to criminal convictions and/or offences (e.g., forensic information or self-reported crime)

☐ genetic, biometric or health information

Data formats, contents, and modes of collection

What data will be collected and how? Describe:

- the contents (e.g., attitudes towards migrants, voting preferences, mental health, etc.)
- the types (e.g., numerical, textual, audio-visual, multimedia, etc.)
- the format (e.g., spreadsheets, databases, images, audio files, (un)structured texts, etc.)
- the mode(s) of data collection (e.g., surveys, interviews, experiments, derived/compiled from other sources, etc.)

In dit onderzoek wordt invisible labour bestudeerd aan de hand van een survey en interviews. Via de survey wordt gepolst naar welke taken elk individu ongeveer uitvoert gedurende één week. Dit is dus tekstueel materiaal en wordt via Qualtrics opgesteld en verzameld.

Vervolgens wordt er per individu een interview afgenomen, wat zal worden opgenomen met videobeeld (indien de participant toestemt). Hierin wordt informatie verkregen over de huidige takenverdeling, de bargaining resources van elk individu en hoe zij als koppel de verdeling organiseren. Bovendien zal er gepolst worden naar hoe zij zich hierbij voelen en welke rol hun (gender) identiteit hierin speelt.

Dit is dus audiovisueel materiaal, dat eerst getranscribeerd zal worden en tot slot gecodeerd zal worden in Nvivo.

How will the data be documented?

- Describe how you will ensure that the data remain understandable or interpretable (after data collection), how the data are prepared – if relevant – for reuse, and how you will make the results from your research independently reproducible for others.
- Explain who will be responsible for the data documentation.

Ik zal als onderzoeker verantwoordelijk zijn voor de data documentatie. Het programma Nvivo laat toe om overzichtelijk in elk interview te werken en eventueel met (matrix) queries bepaalde patronen bloot te leggen. De codeboom wordt inductief opgesteld en kan hergebruikt worden door andere onderzoekers op langtermijn.

Explain how and where data will be safely stored and backed up

Describe how you will make sure that access to the data will be restricted for third parties (e.g., via passwords on documents, ...) and how you aim to avoid accidental loss of data (e.g., by making back-ups and by storing (electronic) documents in different places). Identify who or what parties will have access to the data (i.e., name and function/position).

De audio/video files, transcripten en Nvivo files zullen opgeslagen worden op mijn persoonlijk OneDrive account van de UGent. Dit account is wachtwoord beveiligd, maar de data zal tegen 08/2025 overal verwijderd worden. De data van de survey zullen opgeslagen en verwerkt worden door het programma 'Qualtrics'. Buiten mij, zal enkel Prof. Dr. John Lievens toegang hebben tot de data.

Plans for sharing or providing access to data

In most cases, data are to be destroyed after the research project has finished and has been assessed. There may, however, be reasons to preserve the data for a longer period. If so, what are the plans for sharing or providing long-term access to the data? Will the whole dataset be preserved, and in what form?

Which data should be preserved? **Why** and for **how long**? Pay explicit attention to the preservation of non-anonymous data. Who will be responsible for data management and preservation in the future?

Het kan interessant zijn om de codeboom te bewaren, zodat toekomstige onderzoekers zich eventueel hierop kunnen baseren of dit verder kunnen ontwikkelen.

Ethical and legal issues

WHY

Research must comply with the highest ethical principles. Thus, the rights, dignity, and welfare of anyone involved must be protected, and the research must be conducted in a transparent and independent manner. Researchers play an active role in assuring participants (and broader society) that research is conducted in a responsible manner. Note that ethical issues relate to both issues of **legal protection** (e.g., anonymity, data storage and use) and issues related to a **professional attitude** (e.g., clearly explaining your research intentions to participants, considering how the research may potentially affect participants, etc.)

This implies that researchers, including Bachelor and Master students, carefully need to explain to anyone involved what the research objectives are, how the research is carried out, how research participants are protected, and what happens to the data.

If you are **not** working with **personal data**, ethical issues boil down to a thorough explanation of how you conducted the research in a transparent and independent manner.

1. Consent form (required when you work with personal data)

If you work with personal data¹, it is likely that you will use an informed consent form when carrying out a survey, interviews, focus groups, participant observations, etc.

In this form it is necessary to²:

- Explain the objectives of your research in a language understood by the participants (i.e., avoid academic jargon)
- Explain what you expect the participant to do and explain that they have the right to withdraw from the research project at any stage (e.g., even during or after an interview) without any formal explanation on their behalf
- Explain what you will do with the data
- Explain how personal information and details are protected (anonymisation, pseudonymisation)

¹ If you conduct research on participants that lack the legal age to make informed decisions, you need consent from parent(s) or guardian(s).

² Please note that this is a non-exhaustive list of elements of an informed consent form. Feel free to add issues to the form.

- Explain – if applicable – whether participation may imply risks (discomfort, anxiety) and benefits (compensation for participation). If there are risks, provide the participant with contact details where they can ask for support
- Explain how data will be stored, for how long, and who is responsible for data storage
- Include your name and contact details

Please indicate whether you will use a consent form:

☒ I do make use of an informed consent form (please attach that form to this document).

☐ I do not make use of an informed consent form. Explain **why** you do not use an informed consent form.

2. Other issues

The previous sections will likely cover 95% of the ethical issues that emerge in your research activities, but other ethical questions may (likely) arise in your project. Here are two *examples*.

First example: You intend to do research on discrimination in the housing market and – as an experimental design – you send letter to landlords which are signed with fictive names, some of these are clearly Flemish names, others suggest the senders are from another country. In fact, you are deceiving the landlords – but possibly this can be condoned. Nonetheless, it is necessary to explain *why* you take this approach.

Second example: You are observing youth gangs with the objective to understand why youngsters become members. During your observations you witness a criminal activity. From a legal perspective, you are supposed to report this to the police. From an ethical perspective, people may likewise say that your legal duty trumps the importance of your scientific work, but what if you suspect that the police officers in question are corrupt? How does this suspicion change your ethical assessment of the situation?

Please use this box to reflect on any ethical issues not covered above.