

The men behind economically successful women: A focus on Dutch dual-earner couples

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Accepted for publication in *Géneros: Multidisciplinary Journal of Gender Studies*, 2012

Abstract

Using data from the Netherlands Kinship Panel Study, this paper compares the partners of economically successful women with those of women who have fared less well on the labor market. Economic success is measured as belonging to the top ten percent income bracket of the female sample. First, socioeconomic and cultural homogamy/asymmetry are investigated. With respect to education, homogamy is the dominant pattern. Income asymmetry, where husbands contribute most to the household income, characterizes the majority of couples, particularly in the older age groups. Gender asymmetry in cultural resources is predominant, with women having more modern gender role attitudes than men. Second, hypotheses derived from social capital theory and companionate theory are tested to examine how socioeconomic and cultural characteristics of male partners are related to women's economic success. Economically successful women tend to have high-income men, suggesting an accumulation of favorable resources. A larger share of the male partner in carrying out household tasks is positively related to a woman's success. Men's supportive behavior rather than their attitudes contribute to their wives' economic success.

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“What it meant to me: a happy life, of course, companionship, of course. A common objective, I think.”. *Denis Thatcher*

Over the past decades the rise in women’s educational level and their increased labor participation have led to a growth of their economic independence, a process accompanied by a decrease in the segregation of gender roles and in the prominence of gendered stereotypes (Esping-Andersen 2009). Despite these developments, women remain seriously underrepresented in the highest socioeconomic positions (Borrelli 2002; Kerr Miller, & Reid 2002; Meier & Wilkins 2002; Wirth 2004). A variety of explanations have been suggested: gender differences in human capital and employment history, biased selection processes, overt discrimination, in-group favoritism of those involved in selection processes, and women’s own preferences and ambition levels (Gorman & Kmec 2009; Storvik & Schöne 2008).

In this paper we focus on how women’s private lives affect their achievement of economic success. In particular, we address the issue of how male partners might contribute to their wives’ success. Contemporary couples tend to shape family, work, and leisure in less rigidly gendered ways compared with older generations (Gerson 2009). Partner choices may be affected by this process. According to Press (2004), women are increasingly interested in finding male partners with homemaker potential and egalitarian gender role attitudes, and more and more men seem to evaluate their potential spouses on the basis of their own achieved socioeconomic status rather than on more traditional criteria (Oppenheimer 1997).

From the existing literature on mating patterns two competing perspectives can be distilled. One argument is that modern couples choose partners who are similar to themselves with respect to education and income. Socioeconomic homogamy or “assortative mating” is

assumed to have become increasingly dominant over the past decades (Esping-Andersen 2009). An alternative view is that women, especially in countries where a strong male breadwinner ideology prevails such as the Netherlands, tend to choose male partners with sufficient socioeconomic resources to be potential breadwinners, whereas men tend to choose female partners who are promising as homemakers and mothers rather than as career-makers (Sweeney 2002).

We investigate Dutch dual-earner couples, with a particular focus on the contribution of male partners to their wives' economic success. First, we look at socioeconomic and cultural homogamy, examining whether patterns are different for couples in which the woman is economically successful, compared with couples in which she is less successful. Second, we perform an explanatory analysis of how the socioeconomic and cultural characteristics of male partners are associated with their wives' economic success.

Our intended contributions to the existing literature are twofold. First, the role of the male partners in their wives' achievement of economic success has not been extensively investigated before (but see Pixley's (2008) in-depth 51-couple study for an exception), and existing research shows mixed results, as we will see. Second, we add a cultural perspective to the predominantly socioeconomic focus in the existing research: we not only examine socioeconomic homogamy but also cultural homogamy by comparing cultural characteristics of women and men, such as their gender role attitudes.

We define a woman as economically successful when her income falls into the top ten percent of all women in our sample. Previous studies have often compared the economic success of women with that of their partners by converting the income of both partners to a full-time based contract. In this study we have deliberately chosen not to do so. The rationale is that by converting income, the focus is on differences in earning potential rather than on actual income inequality. The existing socioeconomic and cultural characteristics of the

couple are likely to be the actual reasons why the income levels of the couple do not mirror those that could have been achieved, would both partners work fulltime.

Background

Mating gradient and assortative mating

The concept of the “mating gradient” was introduced in the 1950’s to describe the phenomenon that men tend to marry women who are younger and who have a lower social status (Hill & Becker 1955; Hallenbeck 1966; Bernard 1982 [1972]). Becker (1981) analyzed marriage as a vehicle for specialization in home and market production, with women taking on the homemaker’s role, and men becoming breadwinners. Inevitably, this division of labor results in large discrepancies between the spouses’ respective socioeconomic resources. Such discrepancies have been found in a number of studies (Henz & Sundström 2001; Sundström & Duvander 2002; Verbakel & De Graaf 2008,2009).

In his recent book, Esping-Andersen (2009) claims that assortative mating is on the rise and the male breadwinner family is even becoming an “endangered species” (p. 1). Overall, the literature suggests that marriage is increasingly a union of socioeconomic equals (Kalmijn 1998; Mare 1991; Schoen & Cheng 2006; Smits, Ultee & Lammers 1998; Sweeney & Cancian 2004). When considering the relative socioeconomic position of partners, it is important to consider differences over the course of a marriage. Career-prioritizing decisions (Pixley 2008) can lead to income differentials between partners with similar levels of educational attainment (Verbakel, Luijkx, & De Graaf 2008). For that reason, we not only look at educational homogamy, but also at income homogamy.

American women’s educational attainment has substantially increased over the past decades, and nowadays even exceeds that of men (Winslow-Bowe 2009). Similarly, women’s educational levels in the Netherlands have risen, and among the younger cohorts women are

even more highly educated than men (Hartgers & Portegijs 2009). We expect to find a pattern of educational homogamy in Dutch dual-earner couples, regardless of women's economic success (H1a).

Married women in general, but especially mothers, are more likely to face “penalties” – in terms of wages, employment breaks, and reduced job experience – compared with married men, for whom the marriage has rather the effect of a “premium” – higher wages, better promotion opportunities (Avellar & Smock 2003; Budig & England 2001; Dykstra & Fokkema 2000; Dykstra & Poortman 2010; Gash 2009; Korenman & Neumark 1991; Pollman-Schult 2010; Waldfogel 1997). In the Netherlands, (West) Germany and the United Kingdom the male breadwinner ideology has traditionally remained strong compared with, for instance, the Scandinavian countries. The number of women working in (relatively small) part-time jobs in the Netherlands is among the largest in Europe (Lewis et al 2008). Given the traditional predominance of a male breadwinner pattern in the Netherlands and the “motherhood penalties” described above, we expect a lack of income homogamy to be the dominant pattern. However, we expect income asymmetry to be smaller among the couples where the women are economically successful (H1b).

Cultural homogamy/asymmetry

Evidence that gender roles among couples where the woman is the main earner are changing, is mixed. Whereas Brines (1993, 1994) has demonstrated that wives do more housework than their husbands even when wives earn more than their husbands, Davis, Greenstein, and Gerteisen Marks (2007) found that among couples where the wife earns more, only men, and not women, report that the men in these couples do more housework compared with men whose partner equally contributes to the household income. Another American study showed that men increase their share in the household when the wife contributes a

larger portion of the household income (Bianchi et al. 2000). However, Cooke (2006) reported that although the division of housework became more equitable as wives' relative household earnings increased from none to about half, it then reverted to a more traditional division as wives became the primary breadwinners (see also Bittman et al. 2003; Brines 1994; Greenstein 2000).

The finding that women in the 21st century are still primarily responsible for caring and household chores illustrates how resilient traditional gender role divisions are (Bianchi et al 2000; Coltrane 2000. Since West and Zimmerman (1987) developed the concept of “doing gender”, little has changed: male and female partners in contemporary relationships, even those in dual-career couples, still tend to routinely accomplish gendered arrangements and act in accordance with traditional gender role prescriptions. Whereas egalitarian gender beliefs have been found to result in a more equal division of household work (Bianchi et al. 2000; Blair & Lichter 1991; Brayfield 1992; Budig 2004; Coltrane 2000; Coltrane & Ishii-Kuntz 1992), men are generally found to have less egalitarian beliefs than women (Davis, Greenstein & Gerteisen Marks 2007; Pixley 2008).

The tenacity of traditional gender roles and attitudes, especially among men, suggests that in addition to the income asymmetry discussed previously, there might also be a lack of homogamy in cultural attitudes – women adopting more egalitarian gender role attitudes than men. We expect, however, that the discrepancy in gender role attitudes is smaller among the couples where the woman is defined as economically successful, because for them the stake to achieve gender egalitarianism in their relationship is arguably higher (H1c).

Social capital theory and companionate theory

We use two theories to shed light on the characteristics of partners of successful women. The first is “social capital theory”, which emphasizes the network resources of the

male partners of successful women. The theory predicts that the partner's' socioeconomic resources and labor market characteristics can help to improve the other partner's socioeconomic position by providing access to personal contacts and information resources embedded in the network. Evidence for this positive effect has been found in several studies (Bernardi 1999; Bernasco, De Graaf & Ultee 1998; Brynin & Francesconi 2004; Brynin & Schupp 2000; Verbakel & De Graaf 2008). Our first hypothesis is that the male partners' socioeconomic resources are positively related to their wives' socioeconomic success (H2).

Secondly, we use the "companionate theory of marriage" to analyze how cultural resources of male partners contribute to their wives' success. While Wilcox and Nox (2006) used this theory to explain marital quality, we assume that male partners' "egalitarianism in practice and belief" facilitates their wives' achievement of success. On the basis of companionate theory, we assume that having a highly gender-traditional man as partner is an obstacle for a woman on her path towards socioeconomic success because he fails to contribute to reconciling both partners' ambitions of combining a career with a family. We therefore expect economically successful women to have partners who are – in the terminology of Pixley (2008) – less inclined to prioritize their own work, work fewer hours per week so that they have time to support their wives, have more modern attitudes towards working women, and take on a larger share of household tasks (H3a). We also expect economically successful women to perceive their partners as more supportive and to experience their relationship as more satisfactory compared with less successful women (H3b). Finally, we expect that especially the partners of mothers with resident children will demonstrate a lifestyle that is attuned to the requirements of their wives' career by showing both more egalitarian gender role attitudes and behavior (H3c).

Of course, finding associations between women's economic success and socioeconomic or cultural characteristics of their partner does not inform us about any causal

connections between the two. Causality can actually run both ways: successful women select partners with appropriate resources, or partners adapt their behavior to meet the requirements of their wives career. With the data available to us we were not able to solve this issue. We will return to this issue in the conclusion.

Other influences

One of the strongest determinants of a woman's economic success is her educational attainment (Blossfeld & Hofmeister 2006). The actual number of hours a woman works, a woman's attitudes towards work and her gender role attitudes are also controlled for since they are likely to be involved in both their and their husbands' labor market and home behaviors (Pixley 2008; Winslow-Bowe 2009). Being married and having (resident) children is expected to have an impact on women's socioeconomic success. Married couples often have a more traditional division of labor than unmarried individuals (Brines & Joyner 1999). The couple's endorsement of traditional gender views and practices makes it less likely that a woman is socioeconomically successful. Having resident children hampers the socioeconomic success of women, especially in countries with a male breadwinner tradition like the Netherlands (Cooke & Baxter 2010). Especially mothers with resident children are therefore less likely to be economically successful compared with their childless counterparts. Also the women's age is a relevant control variable, since income is related to age.

Data and method

Data

We used data from the first wave of the public release file of the Netherlands Kinship Panel Study (NKPS). The NKPS is a large-scale multi-actor panel survey on family ties

among a representative sample of adults aged 18 to 79 residing in private households in the Netherlands (Dykstra et al. 2005) The data were collected by means of computer-assisted interview schedules. Data from the first wave were collected between 2002 and 2003. The overall response rate of the first wave was 45 %, which is lower than in comparable surveys in other Western countries, but similar to comparable large-scale family surveys in the Netherlands (De Leeuw & De Heer 2001; Dykstra et al. 2005). The multi-actor set-up of the NKPS offers useful data to study the characteristics of the men behind successful women, as both the female and the male partner report on their own socioeconomic and cultural characteristics. For the purpose of our study, we selected dual-earner couples who were living together, either married or unmarried. We decided to focus on women in the ages between 25 and 45. Below the age of 25, a low income would possibly not indicate a low level of success, but merely reflect that these women have not yet finished their education. We decided to focus only on women below the age of 46, because the proportion of women who remained on the labor market after marriage (and therefore could be economically successful) was substantially smaller for those born before 1956. Given the age restrictions in our sample, few couples (n=79) no longer had children living in their household. We decided not to incorporate empty nest couples in our analyses. Our final sample includes 1,418 couples.

Measures

Descriptive statistics of our variables are shown in Table 1.

Dependent variable: Women's economic success

Women were asked: "What is your net monthly income from employment?" When respondents did not know the specific amount of money they earned, they were shown a classification card with which they could approximate their earnings. The difference between the lower and upper bound of each category on this card was 200 euros. We took the average

of the lower and upper bound of the selected category as the net monthly income of respondents who did not know their exact income. We categorized women as successful when their earnings belonged to the top 10 percent of our sample. In order to be labeled as ‘successful’, women in our sample need to earn at least 1900 euros per month (which is approximately 2500 US dollars).

Independent variables

Men’s net monthly income. Men were asked about their net monthly income in the same way as women were (see previous description).

Information about *men’s education* was derived from the question: “What is the highest level of education you achieved?” Answers to this question were recoded into five categories: 0 (*up to primary*), 1 (*lower secondary*), 2 (*upper secondary*), 3 (*higher vocational*) and 4 (*university*).

Modernity of men’s gender role attitudes. Men were asked to indicate their level of agreement for four statements on gender roles: “A women must quit her job when she becomes a mother”; “It’s unnatural if men in a business are supervised or managed by women”; “It’s more important for boys than it is for girls to be able to earn a living later in life”; “Working mothers put themselves first rather than their families”. The answers to each statement ranged from 1 (*strongly agree*) to 5 (*strongly disagree*). Higher scores indicate that men have more modern gender role attitudes. Cronbach’s alpha for this scale is 0.78.

Men’s work attitudes. Men were asked to indicate their level of agreement for four statements on paid work: “I’m prepared to put in an extra effort if that helps the business I work for”; “I find it very important to do my job well”; “I’d rather work overtime than fail to get something done on time”; “My job is very important to me”. The answers to each

statement ranged from 1 (*strongly agree*) to 5 (*strongly disagree*). Higher scores indicate weaker work attitudes. Cronbach's alpha for this scale is 0.74.

Men's working hours. Information on work hours was derived from the question: "How many hours a week on average do you work? That is to say, actual hours worked, including overtime". When a respondent had several jobs, the numbers of hours of these jobs were added.

Division of household tasks. Men were asked to describe the division of household tasks between themselves and their partners. They were asked to report about three types of chores: preparing meals, fetching groceries, and tidying up and cleaning. Answers to each statement ranged from 1 (*always you*) to 5 (*always your partner*). Answers were recoded in such a way that a higher score indicates that the male partner performs the largest share of the household tasks. Cronbach's alpha for this scale is 0.79.

Women were asked five questions on *partner support*. They filled in to what extent their partner supported them "In decisions about [their] work or education", "When [they] have worries or health problems", "In [their] leisure time activities and social contacts", "With all kinds of practical things [they] need to do", and "In personal matters that are on [their] mind". Answers range from 5 (*no support*) to 20 (*much support*). Cronbach's alpha for this scale is 0.85.

Women were asked to indicate their level of agreement for four statements related to *relationship satisfaction*: "We have a good relationship", "The relationship with my partner makes me happy", "Our relationship is strong" and "The relationship with my partner is very stable". Answers to each question range from 1 (*strongly agree*) to 5 (*strongly disagree*). Answers were recoded so that higher scores indicate higher relationship satisfaction (recoded scores range from 0 – 16). Cronbach's alpha for this scale is 0.95.

Unfortunately, information on men's viewpoint regarding partner support and

relationships satisfaction was not available. Since the literature shows that perceived support rather than actual support predicts women's behavior and feelings (e.g. Meier, McNaughton-Cassill & Lynch 2006), we thought it relevant to include these measures.

Control variables

Information about *women's education*, *women's working hours*, *women's work attitudes*, and the *modernity of women's gender role attitudes* was derived from the same questions as were posed to the men, Cronbach's alpha for women's work attitudes is 0.71, for the modernity of their gender role attitudes 0.75.

With respect to *marital status*, we differentiated between: 1 (*married*) and 2 (*cohabiting unmarried*).

Regarding parental status, we created one dummy variable, *resident children*, with value 1 if the couple had children living in their household.

Woman's age was measured in years.

Analyses

Our analyses consist of two parts. The first analysis focuses on socioeconomic and cultural homogeneity or asymmetry. We present the findings graphically for four age groups (25-30, 31-35, 36-40, 41-45) to approximate possible cohort and/or life course differences. The couples were categorized on the basis of the female partner's age. Homogeneity differentials between couples in which the woman is economically successful and couples in which she is less successful are analyzed with T-tests.

Next, we perform binary logistic regression analyses to examine associations between characteristics of male partners and women's economic success. The reason for opting for logistic regression analyses is that we are interested in couples in which the women's earnings

fall in the top ten percent of the income scale (the definition we chose for a woman's economic success). As we expect that especially the partners of mothers with resident children will be inclined to support their wives' career, we include interaction terms for having resident children.

Results

Homogamy

Figure 1 shows the dual earners' relative levels of educational attainment. Homogamy is the most common pattern for both the full sample and the couples in which the woman is economically successful. The percentage of couples with similar levels of education is larger in the latter group, lending support to hypothesis 1a.

As can be seen in the left panel of Figure 2, income asymmetry characterizes Dutch dual-earner couples. Across all age groups and for the majority of couples, the male partner falls into a higher income category than the female partner. The proportion falling into a higher income category is approximately 75 percent for men in the age group 40-45, and about 55 percent for men in the youngest age group. The right panel of Figure 2 shows the relative monthly earnings for couples in which the woman is successful. A different picture emerges: the majority of economically successful women have partners who fall in the same income category. The results lend support to hypothesis 1b. Among couples in which the woman is successful, income homogamy is witnessed. The results presented in Figure 1 lend support to our hypotheses 1a and 1b.

Figure 3 is based on relative hourly wages in order to shed light on the question of whether the majority of men have higher levels of income than their partners because they have higher hourly wages or because they have longer workweeks. As the left panel of Figure 2 shows, men have higher hourly wages compared with their partners. The gender difference

is largest in the oldest age groups. The right panel of Figure 2 shows relative hourly wages for couples in which the woman is successful. In approximately 60 percent of couples, regardless of age group, the woman has the highest hourly wage. Apparently, the men mainly have higher incomes because they work longer hours compared with their female partners.

Finally, Figure 4 reveals the relative modernity of gender roles in couples. The woman has more modern gender role attitudes than her male counterpart in the majority of couples. Asymmetry rather than homogamy in gender role attitudes is the dominant pattern for Dutch dual-earner couples. Homogamy in gender role attitudes is observed only in couples where the woman is between the ages of 40 and 45 and has been categorized as economically successful. The findings provide little support for hypothesis 1c.

Table 1 shows that the average income of men with less successful partners is more than 700 euros per month lower than that of men whose partners are successful women. On average, successful women earn slightly more than their partners. In contrast, less successful women earn on average almost 1000 euros per month less than their partners. Partners of successful women have higher levels of educational attainment than partners of less successful women, and have more modern gender role attitudes. There are no significant differences between the couples with respect to men's work attitudes, nor with respect to men's work hours. In couples where the woman is successful, the male partner has a significantly larger share in the household than in couples where she is less successful and successful women feel significantly more supported by their partners than less successful women. There are no significant differences between the two types of couples in terms of relationship satisfaction. Couples in which the woman is successful are less often married and less often have resident children compared with couples in which the woman is less successful. There are no significant differences between successful and less successful women in terms of age.

Odds of women's economic success

Table 2 shows the results of the binary logistic regression analyses predicting conditions under which women's net monthly incomes fall into the top ten percent. The full model also includes the interaction terms with having children living at home. For ease of interpretation, the results are discussed in terms of odds ratios.

On the basis of social capital theory, we expected that economically successful women would have partners with a similar level of income. The results show indeed that the odds of being a successful woman increase with a higher income of her partner. However, men's educational attainment is not significantly related to women's odds of being economically successful. Hypothesis 2, which expected a positive association between both partner's socioeconomic characteristics, is only confirmed as far as income is concerned.

Based on companionate theory, we expected male partners of economically successful women to be supportive of their wives' career, both in their attitudes and their behavior. Contrary to our expectations, men's gender role attitudes, work attitudes, and work hours are not significantly related to the women's odds of being successful. However, the more household chores the male partner performs relative to his wife, the greater the odds for her to be successful. A more supportive partner and higher relationship satisfaction as perceived by the woman are not related to her odds of being economically successful. The results lend partial support to hypothesis 3a, and no support for hypothesis 3b. Economically successful women do not experience more support from their partners or feel more satisfied in their relationship compared with women who are less successful.

The results for our control variables show that a woman's odds of being economically successful are significantly higher when she is more highly educated, works more hours per week, and is older. Her odds of being economically successful are significantly reduced when

she is a mother and has children living at home. Work and gender role attitudes, and marital status showed no associations for women's odds of economic success.

Finally, we expected that characteristics of partners would make the greatest difference if children were living at home. To investigate this expectation, we ran interactions of the partner's gender role attitudes, partner's work attitudes, partner's work hours, division of household tasks, support from partner, and relationship satisfaction with having resident children. These results show that the odds of being an economically successful woman increase significantly when she feels more supported by her partner in case the couple has resident children. The other interaction terms were not statistically significant in the full model. The order of entry of the interaction effects in the model mattered for these results: when entered first, the interaction of the division of household tasks by having resident children was significant ($B = 0.235$, $e^b = 0.115$). It lost significance when the interaction term of partner support by having resident children was also included in the model. With the introduction of all interaction terms, the coefficient for the division of household tasks became insignificant, suggesting that the partner's help with the organization of a household that includes children makes women feel particularly supported. Feeling supported, in turn, helps mothers economically advance in their career.

Conclusion and discussion

In this paper, we aimed to contribute to the literature by (a) focusing on the role of male partners in women's socioeconomic success; and by (b) adding a cultural perspective to the socioeconomic emphasis in the literature on homogamy. We assumed that the "mating gradient", which predicts that men choose female partners who have a lower socioeconomic status than they have themselves, would still not have completely lost its force in a country

such as the Netherlands with its strong male breadwinner ideology and its persistent cultural climate favoring women to work in small part-time jobs.

Assortative mating is evident as regards educational levels: in the majority of Dutch dual-earner couples, partners have similar levels of educational attainment. However, there is no homogamy in terms of net income levels. Gendered income asymmetry is the dominant pattern among the majority of Dutch dual-earner couples, consistent with the “one-and-a-half income” model described by Visser (2002). Despite having similar educational levels, partners apparently take decisions over the course of their relationship that lead them to favor the man’s career. Visser attributes the one-and-a-half income model to the late and rapid arrival of married women in the Dutch labor force and the dearth of child-care provisions in what has traditionally been a strong breadwinner welfare state. Income homogamy is visible in only a selection of the couples, namely those where women are earning an income in the top ten percent of all women in our sample. The partners of these women are equally or slightly less economically successful than their wives, and they tend to have the same level of education. Couples where the woman is economically successful show similarity in roles rather than role reversal (the woman contributing most to household income). Our findings are in line with recent work showing increasing inequality across households due to an accumulation of favorable and unfavorable resources (McLanahan 2004; Verbakel et al. 2008).

We derived hypotheses from social capital theory and companionate theory about possible associations between the partners’ socioeconomic and cultural characteristics and their wives’ economic success. While men’s level of education showed no association with their wives’ economic success, men’s income was positively associated with the odds of their wives’ economic success. Contrary to expectations, if men had modern gender roles, weaker work attitudes, and short work weeks the odds that their female partners were economically

successful were not significantly higher. Furthermore, and also contrary to expectations, the satisfaction women experienced in their relationship showed no association with their odds of economic success. The only characteristics that mattered were the male partner's share in household tasks (as reported by him) and perceived supportiveness (as reported by her). Economically successful women have partners who report performing a larger share of the household tasks. Women who perceive their partners as supportive have higher odds of being economically successful, particularly when children are living at home. Taken together, the findings suggest that men who "stand by" their wives in the sense of helping out at home and being available when needs arise, foster their wives' economic success. As companionate theory suggests, men's contributions to household tasks, and the assessments that their wives make of the "emotion work" (Hochschild 1979) that men do in relationships, appear to be crucial determinants of women's economic success. The findings show furthermore that men's supportive behaviors, rather than the modernity of their attitudes count.

Incorporating a cultural perspective to analyses of homogamy, as we have done in this article, shows that pervasive cultural asymmetry between genders is the general pattern, even among couples in which women are successful. Women tend to have more modern gender role attitudes than their male partners. Whereas we fully agree with Esping-Andersen's (2009) advocacy of the need for welfare state reforms that facilitate women's opportunities to achieve socioeconomic success, we are less optimistic about his expectations that men will gradually come to embrace more gender equality to achieve a better match with women's "new roles". Even if men will eventually develop more gender-egalitarian attitudes, our study clearly demonstrates that "embracing equality" is not enough. We found that concrete behavioral support provided by the partners of successful women was more important for their wives' success than endorsing egalitarian gender roles.

Our study was conducted in the Netherlands, a country where the majority of adult women is *not* economically independent (De Hoog, Van Egten, & De Jong 2010). In 2008, for example, 70% of the women aged 15-65 had a paid job, but only 46% had an income at or above social welfare level (70% of the net minimum wage, which is the definition of “economic independence”). Dutch women’s labor force participation rates have increased substantially in recent decades, but the growth is virtually exclusively attributable to a growth in part-time work (Beckers, Hermans, & Portegijs 2009). By international standards, Dutch women are seriously underrepresented in higher positions (Lückerath-Rovers 2010; Wirth, 2004). It is important to consider the Dutch context when viewing our results. The economically successful women in our study (the top ten percent) have reasonably moderate incomes (around 2500 US dollars net per month), and an average work week (including overtime) of 37 hours. Though the economically successful women in our sample represent the top end of the pay scale of women in the Netherlands, they are probably fairly representative of well-educated working women in other advanced countries.

A few limitations of our study should be mentioned here. Firstly, there were data restrictions concerning our choice of the dependent variable. Women’s occupational status or employment history would have been interesting alternative indicators of success. Whereas our dataset does contain detailed information on occupations and employment history of the main respondent, no information concerning occupation status and employment history was available for the partner of the main respondent.

A second limitation is that we were not able to disentangle possible “selection effects” from “adaptation effects”. If a successful woman has a companionate partner who shares in the household, has she selected such a partner, or has her partner adapted to the career requirements of his wife by sharing in the household? Despite the longitudinal nature of the NKPS dataset, it was not possible to conduct analyses allowing us to draw conclusions in

causal terms. To unravel issues of causality, one should study couples from the start of their relationship and examine how their relationship and their employment and income patterns develop and take shape over the years. Up to this moment, the NKPS dataset consists of two waves, which are on average three years apart. Although the availability of two waves of data enables us to investigate changes in earnings, it is unlikely that large shifts, such as those where women shift into or out of the “successful” category, were too rare to warrant longitudinal analyses. This is why we have avoided using causal terminology throughout this article.

Twenty years ago Arlie Hochschild (1989) spoke of the “stalled revolution”: women have changed while men are staying the same. Recent empirical studies (England 2010; England & Li 2006) show that, after a period of substantial change in the direction of more gender equality, gender change in areas such as women’s employment rates or the desegregation of occupations and fields of interest among college students, has again stalled. While women are increasingly taking working positions previously limited to men, there are few changes in the opposite direction. For men, there is little incentive to move into traditionally female occupations or activities such as homemaking, due to the persistent cultural devaluation of characteristics and activities associated with women. For women, to be able to achieve success, our study shows how important it is that their male partners actively translate their egalitarian gender role attitudes into concrete behavior. Yet, this sharing of household tasks, though it has increased since the 1960s in many Western societies, is not common among contemporary couples (Sullivan 2006).

There seems to be an inextricable knot between men’s tendency to “stay the same”, continuing inequality between genders, and motherhood; the combination of these factors seems to act as a forceful impediment to women’s achievement of economic success. Unravelling this knot will remain an important challenge for future dual-earner

couples. A growing awareness among men that “staying the same” is a crucial element in this knot, would greatly advance matters.

Figure 1: Relative Educational Attainment, by Age group, in Percentages

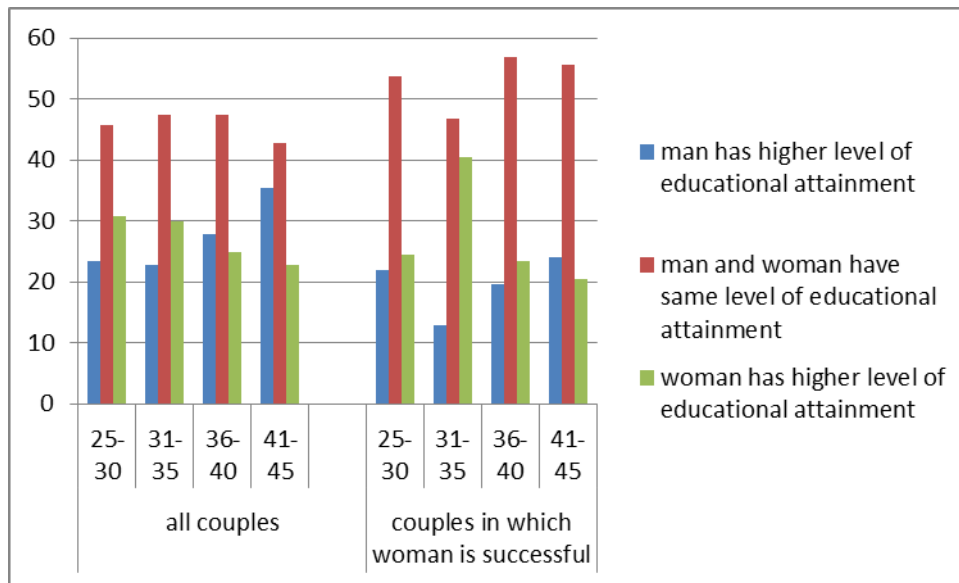


Figure 2: Relative Monthly Earnings by Age Group, in Percentages

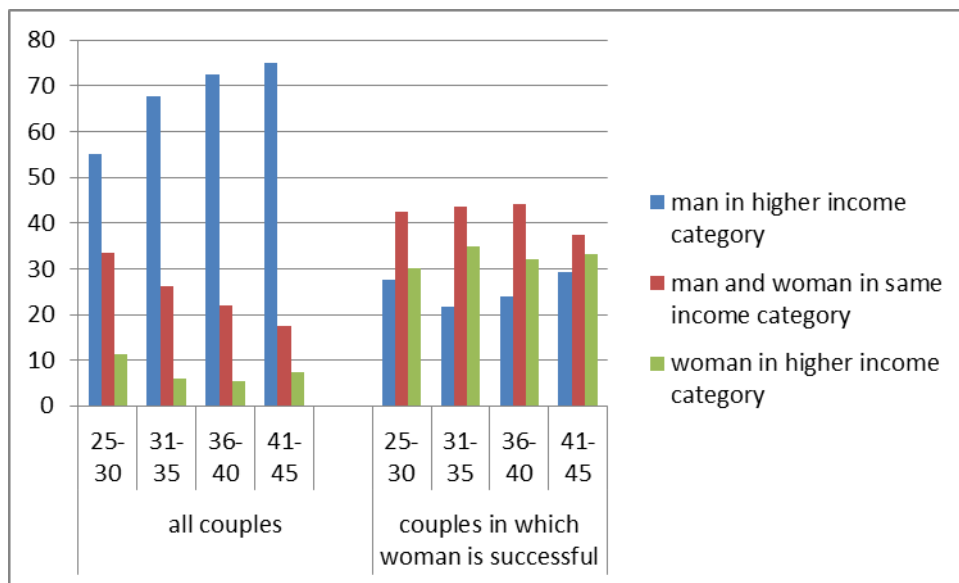


Figure 3: Relative Hourly Wages by Age Group, in Percentages

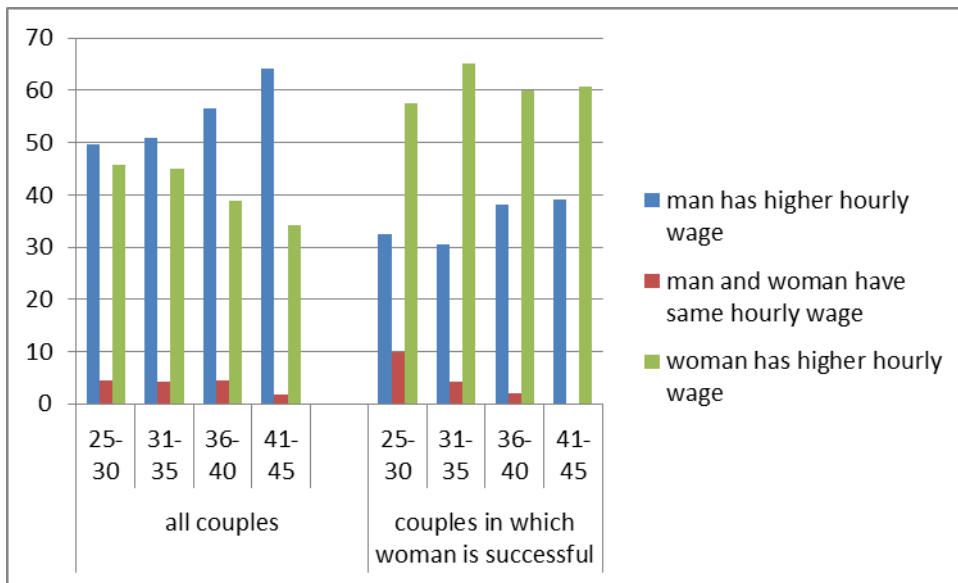


Figure 4: Relative Modernity of Gender Role Attitudes, by Age group, in Percentages

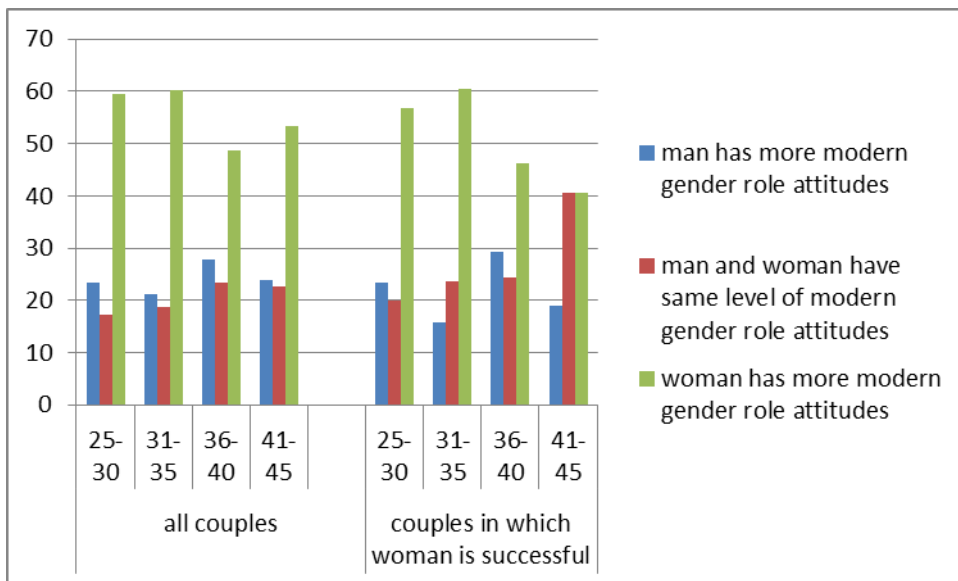


Table 1: Mean and Standard Deviations for Variables in the Analysis, by Women's
 Successfulness ($n = 1418$)

Variable	Mean (S.D.)		Range	Sign
	Less successful women	Successful women		
Income women	918 (484)	2593 (768)	0-6700	***
Income partner	1866 (896)	2578 (1113)	0-8000	***
Hourly wage women	9.9 (5.2)	19.2 (8.8)	0-75	***
Hourly wage partner	11.4 (6.0)	15.6 (6.2)	0-85	***
Educational level woman	2.2 (0.9)	3.1 (0.9)	0-4	***
Educational level partner	2.2 (1.0)	3.0 (1.0)	0-4	***
Gender role attitudes women	17.5 (2.3)	18.4 (1.9)	4-20	***
Gender role attitudes partner	16.4 (2.6)	17.4 (2.6)	4-20	***
Work attitudes women	8.1 (2.2)	7.4 (2.2)	4-20	***
Work attitudes partner	7.7 (2.2)	7.5 (2.2)	4-20	n.s.
Work hours women	24.4 (10.3)	36.7 (9.8)	0-45	***
Work hours partner	42.4 (9.4)	42.0 (10.5)	0-60	n.s.
Division household tasks	4.0 (2.1)	5.4 (2.4)	0-12	***

Support from partner	16.7 (2.7)	17.1 (2.5)	5-20	*
Relationship satisfaction	13.8 (2.7)	14.0 (2.3)	0-16	n.s.
Married	0.7	0.6	0-1	***
Resident children	0.8	0.6	0-1	***
Age women	35.5 (5.7)	36.0 (5.8)	25-45	n.s.

Source: Netherlands Kinship Panel Study, wave 1.

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$.

Table 2: Determinants of Women's Economic Success; Binary Logistic Regression Analysis

(n=1418)

	Base Model			Full Model		
	B	e ^b	p	B	e ^b	p
<i>Social Capital theory</i>						
Income partner	.001	1.001	***	.001	1.001	***
Educational level partner	.097	1.102	n.s.	.090	1.094	n.s.
<i>Companionate Theory</i>						
Gender role attitudes partner	.009	1.009	n.s.	-.032	0.968	n.s.
Work attitudes partner	.018	1.018	n.s.	-.037	0.964	n.s.
Work hours partner	-.011	0.989	n.s.	-.015	0.986	n.s.
Division household tasks	.128	1.602	**	-.002	0.998	n.s.
Support partner	.044	1.045	n.s.	-.148	0.863	*
Relationship satisfaction	-.042	0.959	n.s.	-.003	0.997	n.s.
<i>Controls</i>						
Educational level woman	.884	2.421	***	0.926	2.525	***
Work hours women	.124	1.133	***	.124	1.132	***
Work attitudes women	-.025	0.976	n.s.	-.025	0.976	n.s.

Gender role attitudes women	.020	1.021	n.s.	.033	1.033	n.s.
Marital status	.185	1.204	n.s.	.139	1.149	n.s.
Resident children ^a	-.022	0.979	n.s.	-7.419	0.010	**
Age women	.063	1.065	**	.062	1.064	**
<i>Interactions</i>						
Gender role attitudes partner* Resident children				.060	1.062	n.s.
Work attitudes partner*Resident children				.091	1.095	n.s.
Work hours partner*Resident children				.009	1.009	n.s.
Division household tasks*Resident children				.160	1.173	n.s.
Support partner*Resident children				.359	1.431	***
Relationship satisfaction*Resident children				-.120	0.887	n.s.
Constant	-13.426			-9.308		
% Successful women	10					

^a Reference category: childless. Source: Netherlands Kinship Panel Study, wave 1.

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$.

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Acknowledgements

This paper is based on data from the Netherlands Kinship Panel Study, which is funded by the ‘Major Investments Fund’ of the Netherlands Organization for Scientific Research (NWO), under grant 480-10-009. Financial and institutional support for the NKPS also comes from The Netherlands Interdisciplinary Demographic Institute (NIDI), Utrecht University, the University of Amsterdam, Tilburg University, Erasmus University Rotterdam, and the Royal Netherlands Academy of Arts and Sciences (KNAW). An earlier version of this paper was presented at the tenth joint meeting of the Netherlands Sociological Association and the Flemish Sociological Association in Groningen, May 10, 2010.