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## **The Men Behind Economically Successful Women: A Focus on Dutch Dual-Earner Couples**

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# The Men Behind Economically Successful Women: A Focus on Dutch Dual-Earner Couples

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## Abstract

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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. First, socioeconomic and attitudinal within-couple homogamy is investigated. Second, hypotheses derived from social capital theory and companionate theory are tested to examine how socioeconomic and attitudinal 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 material resources. Men's supportive behavior rather than their attitudes contribute to their wives' economic success.

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**Keywords:** women's economic success, homogamy, inequality, partner's behavior, partner's attitudes

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

*Denis Thatcher*

**D**espite the rise in women’s educational level and their increased labor participation, 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, and women’s own preferences and ambition levels (Gorman & Kmec, 2009; Storvik & Schöne, 2008).

In this study we focus on how women’s personal lives affect their achievement of economic success. We know that having a partner and children may act as an impediment for a woman’s occupational success or even for the likelihood of her being employed (Cooke, 2011; Dykstra & Fokkema, 2000). This may be a reason for career-oriented women to remain unmarried and/or childless (Cooke, 2011). In this study, we aim to find out which factors influence a woman’s economic success if she does have a partner. In particular, we address the issue of how characteristics of the male partners may relate to their wives’ success.

Partner choices may be affected by less rigidly gendered ways in which contemporary couples tend to shape their family and work (Gerson, 2009). 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 achieved socioeconomic status rather than on more traditional criteria such as their attractiveness or their potential as a housewife (Oppenheimer, 1997; Sweeney, 2002). The existing literature on mating patterns suggests that socioeconomic homogamy or “assortative mating” is becoming increasingly dominant over the past decades (Kalmijn, 1998; Mare, 1991; Schoen & Cheng, 2006; Smits, Ultee, & Lammers, 1998). Esping-Andersen (2009) even claims that the male breadwinner family is becoming an “endangered species” (p.1).

We start our analyses by testing the validity of Esping-Andersen's claim for the Netherlands, a country where a strong male breadwinner ideology still prevails. We provide a description of the socioeconomic and attitudinal homogamy of Dutch dual-earner couples, exploring whether patterns differ for couples in which the woman is economically successful, compared with couples in which she is less successful. We continue by performing an explanatory analysis of how the socioeconomic and attitudinal characteristics of male partners are associated with their wives' economic success.

We hope to achieve three aims with our study. Firstly, we aim to qualify claims such as Esping-Andersen's, that assortative mating is uniformly on the rise by distinguishing between socioeconomic and attitudinal homogamy, and by differentiating between economically successful women and those who are less successful. Secondly, we hope to amend for the lack of empirical work on the role of male partners in their wives' success. So far studies investigating women's economic success have focused the role of parenthood (e.g., Sigle-Rushton & Waldfogel, 2007), on the effect of the women's income on marital quality (Brennan, Barnett, & Gareis, 2001) or on the time spent on housework (Gupta, 2007).

Thirdly, we add a "cultural" perspective to the predominantly socioeconomic focus in the existing research: we not only examine socioeconomic homogamy but also attitudinal homogamy by comparing women's and men's 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. A common way of comparing women's and men's incomes is by converting the income of both partners to a full-time based contract. We have deliberately chosen not to do so. By converting income, the focus would be on differences in earning potential rather than on actual income inequality. The existing socioeconomic and attitudinal 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, if both partners worked fulltime.

## **Background**

### **Socioeconomic homogamy**

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. This specialization can lead to large discrepancies between the spouses' respective socioeconomic resources (Henz & Sundström, 2001; Sundström & Duvander, 2002; Verbakel & De Graaf, 2008, 2009). Moreover, over the course of a marriage career-prioritizing decisions can lead to income differentials between partners with similar levels of educational attainment (Pixley, 2008; Verbakel, Luijkx, & De Graaf, 2008). However, overall the literature suggests that marriage is increasingly a union of socioeconomic equals (Esping-Andersen, 2009; Sweeney & Cancian, 2004).

Both in the USA and in the Netherlands, women's educational attainment has substantially increased over the past decades, and nowadays even exceeds that of men (Hartgers & Portegijs, 2009; Winslow-Bowe, 2009). We therefore expect to find a pattern of educational homogamy among 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; Cohen, 2002; Dykstra & Fokkema, 2000; Dykstra & Poortman, 2010; Gash, 2009; Korenman & Neumark, 1991; Pollman-Schult, 2010; Sigle-Rushton & Waldfogel, 2007; 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 part-time jobs in the Netherlands is among the largest in Europe (Lewis et al., 2008). For these reasons, we expect a lack of income homogamy to be the dominant pattern, but this lack will be smaller among the couples where the women are economically successful (H1b).

### **Attitudinal homogamy**

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, Milky, Sayer & Robinson, 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).

Traditional gender role divisions are resilient (Bianchi et al., 2000; Coltrane, 2000; Sullivan, 2006). Even dual-career couples still tend to routinely accomplish gendered arrangements and act in accordance with traditional gender role prescriptions: they are still “doing gender” (West & Zimmerman, 1987). 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).

We expect a lack of homogamy in gender role attitudes – women adopting more egalitarian attitudes than men; however, the discrepancy in attitudes will be smaller among the couples where the woman is economically successful, because for them the stake to achieve gender egalitarianism 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 (Lin, Vaughn, & Ensel, 1981). 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 (Bernardi 1999; Bernasco, De Graaf & Ultee, 1998; Brynin & Francesconi, 2004; Brynin & Schupp, 2000; Verbakel & De Graaf, 2008). We thus expect the male partners' socioeconomic resources to be positively related to their wives' economic success (H2).

Secondly, we use the "companionate theory of marriage" to analyze how attitudinal resources of male partners may relate to their wives' success; Wilcox and Nock (2006) argue that in companionate marriages egalitarianism in practice and belief leads to higher marital quality for wives and higher levels of positive emotion work on the part of husbands. We assume that having a highly gender-traditional man as a partner is an obstacle to a woman's achievement of economic success because both partners' ambitions of combining a career with a family are thwarted by such traditionalism. We therefore expect economically successful women to have partners who are less inclined to prioritize their own work, who work fewer hours per week so that they have time to support their wives, have more egalitarian 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, as we believe that especially the partners of successful mothers with resident children will demonstrate a lifestyle that is attuned to the requirements of their wives' career, we expect that the effect of the male partners' egalitarian gender role attitudes and behavior on women's success will be stronger for mothers with resident children (H3c).

Of course, finding associations between women's economic success and socioeconomic or attitudinal 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.

## **Other influences**

A woman's economic success is obviously determined by 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 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 are expected to have an impact on women's economic success. Married couples often have a more traditional division of labor than unmarried individuals (Brines & Joyner, 1999), which makes it less likely that a woman is economically successful. Having resident children hampers the economic success of women (Cooke & Baxter, 2010). A final control variable is women's age since income is related to age.

## **Data and methods**

### **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 attitudinal characteristics. For our study, we selected dual-earner couples who were living together, either married or unmarried. We focus on women between 25 and 45 of age. 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 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) had (adult) children living outside their household. We therefore did not 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.

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

Variable	Mean (S.D.)		Range	Sign
	Less succesful women	Successful women		
Monthly net income women	918 (484)	2593 (768)	0-6700	***
Monthly net 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 women	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.
Weekly work hours women	24.4 (10.3)	36.7 (9.8)	0-45	***
Weekly 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	***

Variable	Mean (S.D)		Range	Sign
	Less successful women	Successful women		
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.
N women (%)	1276 (90)	142 (10)		

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Source: Netherlands Kinship Panel Study, wave 1.

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

### **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 ten percent of our sample. In order to be labeled as "successful", women in our sample needed to earn at least 1900 euros per month (which at that time was approximately 2500 US dollars). This cut-off point closely resembles the 10 percent cut-off point in the Dutch population of women, when correcting for the age range of the women in our sample (between 25 and 45 years old) (CBS, 2011).

## 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*).

*Egalitarianism 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 egalitarian gender role attitudes ([this scale has been frequently used in previous datasets and has been validated; Kalmijn, Bernasco, & Weesie, 1996; Jong & Liefbroer, 1998](#)). 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 this scale has been developed on behalf of the NKPS; the reliability and validity of this scale have been tested during pilot-studies ([Verweij, 2002](#)). 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 (this scale has been frequently used in previous datasets and has been validated; Kalmijn, de Graaf, & Uunk, 2000). 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*). This scale has been developed on behalf of the NKPS; the reliability and validity of this scale have been tested during pilot-studies (Verweij, 2002). Cronbach's alpha for this scale is 0.85.

Women were asked to indicate their level of agreement with 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). This scale has been developed on behalf of the NKPS; the reliability and validity of this scale have been tested during pilot-studies (Verweij, 2002). 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 egalitarianism 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, and for the egalitarianism of their gender role attitudes it is 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. Because of multicollinearity issues, we could not control for both women's and men's age ( $r = 0.80$ ). Furthermore, as preliminary analyses (not shown) using dummy variables for each educational level showed a linear association between women's and men's educational attainment and women's economic success, we included level of education as a linear variable in our model.

## Analyses

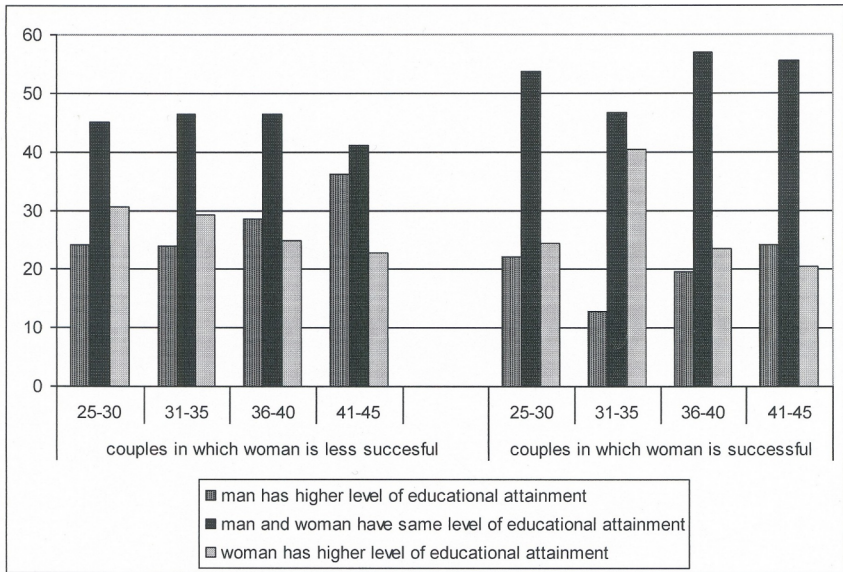
Our first analysis focuses on socioeconomic and attitudinal homogamy. We present the findings graphically for four age groups (25-30, 31-35, 36-40, 41-45) to approximate possible cohort and/or life course differences. The couples were categorized on the basis of the female partner's age. With respect to educational attainment, a couple is considered as homogamous when both partners fall into the same educational attainment category (five categories; see the description above). With respect to income, a couple is seen as homogamous when both partners fall into the same income category. We made six categories: 1 (0 -500 euro), 2 (501-1000 euro), 3 (1001-1500 euro), 4 (1501-2000 euro), 5 (2011-2500 euro and 6 (more than 2500 euro). With respect to hourly wage, a couple is seen as homogamous when both partners have the same hourly wage (with a 1 euro margin). Finally, with respect to gender role attitudes, we identify a couple as homogamous when both partners have the same score on gender role attitudes (with a 1.0 score margin).

Homogamy 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. We use logistic regression analyses because 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). To investigate the role of gender role attitudes and behavior of the partners of mothers with resident children, 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 couples in which the woman is less economically successful and the couples in which the woman is economically successful, which lends support to hypothesis 1a.



*Figure 1. Relative Educational Attainment, by Age group, in Percentages*

The left panel of Figure 2 shows that a lack of income homogeneity characterizes Dutch couples in which the woman is less successful. 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 82 percent for men in the age group 40-45, and about 59 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. The majority of economically successful women have partners who fall in the same income category; this confirms hypothesis 1b which predicted income homogeneity among couples in which the woman is successful. Interestingly, 32 percent of these women earn even more than their partners.

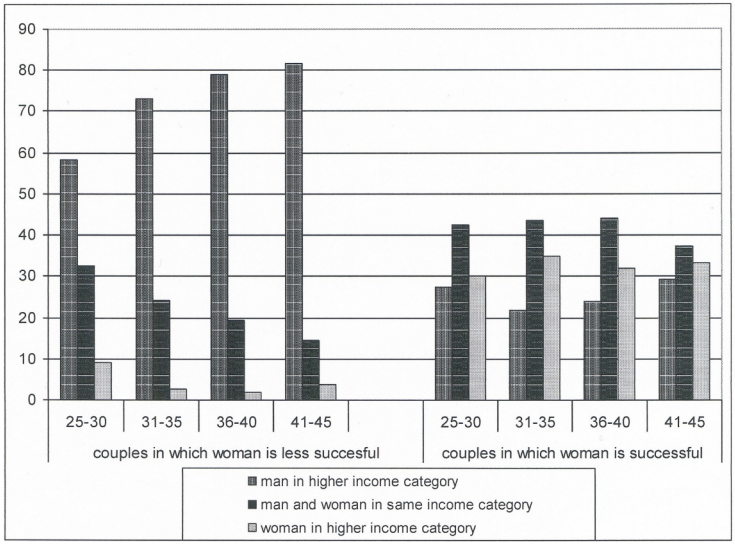


Figure 2. Relative Monthly Earnings by Age Group, in Percentages

Figure 3 aims 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, among the couples in which the woman is less successful, men have higher hourly wages compared with their partners. The gender difference is largest in the oldest age groups. Nevertheless, large variations exist between couples as in on average 36 percent of all couples the woman has a higher hourly wage compared with her partner. 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. Combining the insights from Figure 2 and 3 suggests that among couples in which the woman is successful, women have higher hourly wages but this difference is not reflected in monthly income, as men have larger workweeks on average.



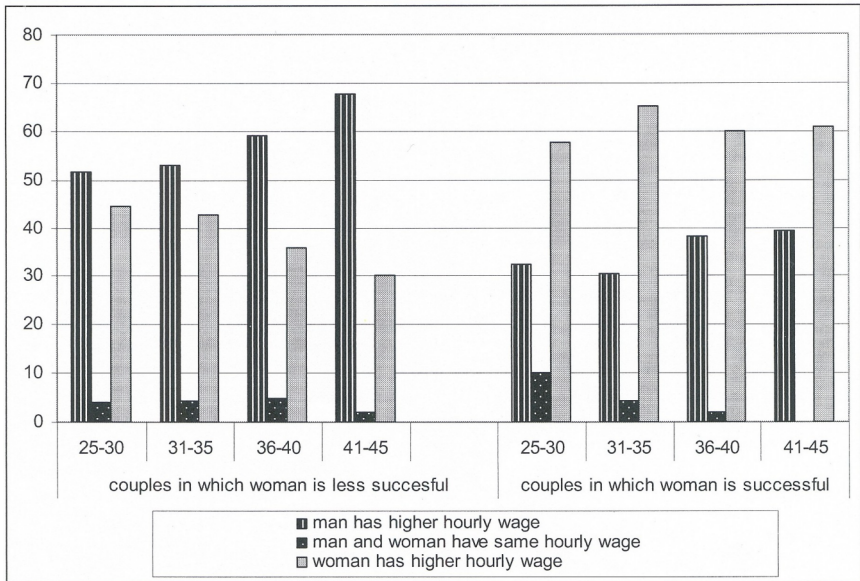


Figure 3. Relative Hourly Wages by Age Group, in Percentages

Finally, Figure 4 reveals the relative egalitarianism of gender roles in couples. The woman has more egalitarian gender role attitudes than her male counterpart in the majority of 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 egalitarian 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,

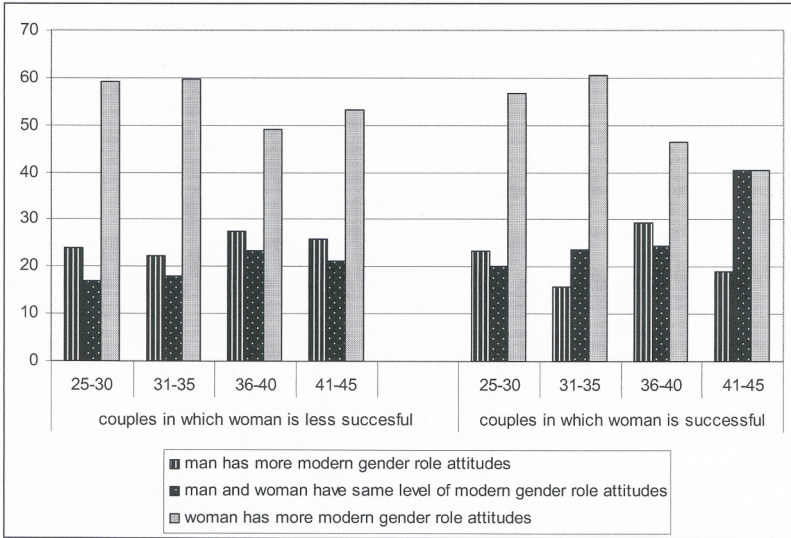


Figure 4. Relative Egalitarianism of Gender Role Attitudes, by Age group, in Percentages

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.

Table 2

*Determinants of Women's Economic Success; Binary Logistic Regression Analysis (n=1418)*

	Base Model			Full Model		
	B	e <sup>b</sup>	p	B	e <sup>b</sup>	p
<i>Social Capital theory</i>						
Monthly net 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.	-0.32	0.968	n.s.
Work attitudes partner	.018	1.018	n.s.	-0.37	0.964	n.s.
Weekly work hours partner	-0.11	0.989	n.s.	-0.15	0.986	n.s.
Division household tasks	.128	1.602	**	-.002	0.998	n.s.
Support partner	.044	1.045	n.s.	-.003	0.997	n.s.
<i>Controls</i>						
Educational level woman	.884	2.421	***	0.926	2.525	***
Weekly work hours women	.124	1.133	***	.124	1.132	***
Work attitudes women	-.025	0.976	n.s.	-0.25	0.976	n.s.
Gender Role attitudes women	0.20	1.021	n.s.	.033	1.033	n.s.
Marital status	.185	1.204	n.s.	.139	1.149	n.s.
Resident children	-.022	0.979	n.s.	-7.419	0.010	**
Age women	.063	1.065	**	.062	1.064	**
<i>Interactions</i>						
Gender roles attitudes partner* Resident children				.060	1.062	n.s.
Work attitudes partner* Resident children				.091	1.095	n.s.
Weekly 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	***

	Base Model			Full Model		
	B	e <sup>b</sup>	p	B	e <sup>b</sup>	p
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.

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

On the basis of social capital theory, we expected that economically successful women would have partners with a similar level of income. The odds of being a successful woman indeed 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 partners' 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 being successful. A more supportive partner and higher relationship satisfaction as perceived by the woman are not related to her odds of being economically successful. Hypothesis 3a is only partially supported, while no support is found 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.

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 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 only 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. Our hypothesis 3c is therefore only partly confirmed.

### **Conclusions and discussion**

In this paper, we aimed to contribute to the literature by (a) qualifying the suggestion found in much recent literature that homogamous mating is uniformly on the rise, by distinguishing between socioeconomic and attitudinal homogamy, and by differentiating between economically successful women and those who are less successful; (b) focusing on the role of male partners in women's economic success; (c) studying gender roles and other attitudes in addition to the socioeconomic resources that are commonly emphasized in the literature on homogamy.

We assumed that the pattern in which 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. Homogamous mating is evident as regards educational levels: in the majority of Dutch dual-earner couples, partners have similar levels of educational attainment. However, gendered income asymmetry rather than homogamy 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. 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, in which case the woman contributes most to household income (McLanahan, 2004; Verbakel et al., 2008).

We derived hypotheses from social capital theory and companionate theory about possible associations between the partners' socioeconomic and attitudinal 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' success. Contrary to expectations, if men had egalitarian gender roles, weaker work attitudes, and short work weeks, the odds that their female partners were economically successful were not significantly higher. 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 his perceived supportiveness (as reported by her). Women who perceive their partners as supportive have higher odds of being economically successful, particularly when children are living at home. As companionate theory suggests, 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. Men's contributions to household tasks and the assessments their wives make of their supportiveness rather than the men's egalitarianism, appear to be associated with women's economic success.

It is important to consider the Dutch context when viewing our results. In the Netherlands 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). 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.

Secondly, 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, large shifts, such as those where women shift into or out of the "successful" category, were too rare to warrant longitudinal analyses.

More than 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, work and activities associated with women.

Our results lead us to be less optimistic than [Esping-Andersen \(2009\)](#) who expects that men's increased gender equality will eventually bring about a better match with women's "new roles". 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. As long as men tend to "stay the same" in their behavior at home, inequality between genders in the larger society will not be reduced substantially, and women's achievement of economic success will remain problematic.



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