Emerging Adults, Emerging Inequality: The Gendered Division of Domestic Labour among Student Households

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II. ABSTRACT

My thesis illustrates the fundamentally unequal division of domestic labour among student households. Until now, emerging adults were an overlooked group in the sociology of housework. While there is a myriad of studies on heterosexual couples' approaches, the critical period between childhood and adulthood had been ignored. Emerging adulthood is particularly critical in the development of housework routines as it is when independence is experienced for the first time and habits from one's upbringing may be disregarded or embedded. With university becoming an increasingly common destination for emerging adults, my study draws upon the experiences of 150 undergraduate students navigating domestic labour in a mixed-gender household to fill the gap in literature. Through the detailed analysis of quantitative and qualitative survey and interview data, my thesis contributes to the creation of a more complete sociology of housework. Participants revealed the deeply gendered nature of their housework arrangements, with female students undertaking a disproportionate physical and cognitive burden. This inequity was acknowledged by participants however few male students viewed it as a problem warranting intervention. Instead, they provided several justifications in an attempt to defend this distribution. On the other hand, female students found housework to be a source of stress and tension. Accordingly, many female students sought solutions, ranging from introducing a rota, to abstaining from housework themselves. For some, their encounters with domestic labour in a mixed-gender setting were so negative that they vowed to live only with other women in future university housing. In highlighting the detriment caused, and strategies pursued, by students confronted with emerging domestic inequality, my thesis introduces a novel perspective to the sociology of housework.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

III. LIST OF TABLES

1. INTRODUCTION

Despite huge legal and cultural strides towards gender equality, there is one domain in which parallel progress is yet to be seen: the household division of domestic labour. The majority of households in contemporary society continue to be marked by inequality in terms of how their domestic labour is distributed. Instigated by Oakley's pioneering work in 1974, numerous studies have been conducted on this issue, shedding light on the essential yet largely unrecognised nature of women's physical and cognitive labour within the home (McClelland and Sliwa, 2022; Daminger, 2019; Patton and Choi, 2014). The 'sociology of housework' demonstrates that women in married and cohabiting relationships primarily shoulder the housework responsibilities at the expense of their leisure time, relationship health and wellbeing (Charbonneau et al., 2021; Oakley, 1974). Accordingly, 'without the realisation that the gendered division of household work is unfair and inequitable', the revolution towards equality 'is unlikely to move forward' (Hu and Yucel, 2018, p.101).

Owing to Oakley's scholarship, housework inequities have received growing attention in sociological research. Concurrently, exponential progress has been made towards gender equality in wider society. During the 20th century in particular, several legislative landmarks were passed, such as the Sex Discrimination Act of 1975 which upheld men and women as equals in the eye of the law. Owing to these policies, and the corresponding attitudinal shifts, women have gradually been afforded economic independence, equal access to education, and reproductive autonomy in Western society (Mandel and Lazarus, 2021; Allen, 1999). As gendered stereotypes have gradually begun to erode, the inclusion of women in previously male-dominated spaces has been growing, and vice versa. Domestic inequality however remains impervious to the societal shift towards equality. The gaping disparity in men and women's housework contributions persists and yet was largely absent from public discourse until Covid-19 made visible what had long been known in sociology.

Covid-19 reaffirmed the extent to which housework inequity pervades society. With households locked down and unable to resume their usual routines, domestic labour was brought to the forefront of people's minds (McClelland and Sliwa, 2022; McConnon et al, 2022). This was reflected in the media as a mainstream conversation which has continued to capture public attention ever since. Most recently, Lenz's book 'This American Ex-Wife: How I Ended My Marriage and Started My Life' outlines how wives are expected to assume a 'position of servitude', disproportionately undertaking the housework and childcare (Marcotte, 2024). Lenz expresses that men's continuous disengagement from domestic labour is more than a 'bone of contention' (Lyonette and Crompton, 2015, p.33). These acts of reneging on domestic responsibilities are 'small violences' which add up to have a deeply negative impact (Marcotte, 2024). She argues that for many women, divorce offers the ultimate liberation from these 'normative conceptions of attitudes and activities appropriate for one's sex category' (West and

Zimmerman, 1987, p.127). Her emphasis on housework has attracted notable attention on social media, speaking to the fact that domestic inequity resonates with the experiences of so many women.

As a site where gendered inequalities are reinforced and perpetuated, the importance of studying the domestic domain, cannot be overstated. For meaningful solutions to be sought, it is 'critical' to explore 'where individuals acquire gender norm information and how this information is potentially used to help shape future gender norm expectations' (Wenhold and Harrison, 2021, p.207). Although a breadth of research points to the deeply inequitable and gendered divisions of domestic labour within a familial setting, there is 'little discussion of how non-familial sharing might relate to such familial arrangements' (Richards, 2013, p.33). It is insufficient to explore the housework approaches of children in their parental homes and of adults in partnerships, without exploring the period in between. This liminal period, typically comprising people aged 18-29, is referred to as 'emerging adulthood' (Charbonneau, et al., 2019, p.291) and is in essence when one learns to be an adult. In addition to 'learning to manage their own time and finances' (Mohamed, 2012, p.11), emerging adults learn how to live independently and manage domestic labour. For an increasing number of emerging adults, these milestones are met at university.

Due to efforts from governing bodies to expand higher education in the United Kingdom, university attendance has notably increased. The vast majority of undergraduate students are in the emerging adulthood phase of life and navigating shared housing for the first time. Part of having 'greater levels of personal freedom' (Mohamed, 2012, p.11) is their ability to negotiate and shape housework practices as they wish. Despite being a critical period in the formation of lifestyle habits, the approaches to housework among university students have been largely omitted from studies in the sociology of housework. Overlooking emerging adulthood has significant adverse consequences for understandings of housework. My study bridges this gap by exploring the domestic approaches of emerging adults and the role of gender in their distributions. Utilising mixed-gender student households facilitates this, by allowing comparison of male and female students.

Situated in this context, my research is driven by the following research questions:

1. How is housework distributed in mixed-gender student households?
2. What is the impact of this distribution on students?
3. What factors shape housework arrangements in mixed-gender student households?
4. How do students negotiate housework arrangements?

Following this introductory chapter, I review the germane literature and outline its limitations in more depth. I underscore the value of the sociology of housework in drawing attention to issues of household inequality but demonstrate that more needs to be done to pinpoint when gendered housework patterns

are cemented. Drawing on various studies, I illustrate how gender continues to be a decisive factor in the types of housework tasks completed, the time spent, and the recognition received (McClelland and Sliwa, 2022). The multifarious consequences of this inequality are discussed, before moving on to an examination of the factors that perpetuate its endurance. Some of these justifications for inequality include the time availability hypothesis, the relative resource hypothesis, and the gender ideology hypothesis (Coltrane, 2000). Other justifications centre around perceptions of fairness and what women and men have grown up observing. I explore socialisation theory as valuable, yet limited in scope (Fulcher et al., 2015).

Informed by the shortcomings of extant literature to explain how habits translate from childhood to adulthood, I offer my rationale for examining student households as incubators for future behaviours. I propose that equity is more likely to be achieved in student households given that nobody is making 'financial contributions that could offset their smaller contributions to the household labour' (Mikula et al., 1997, p.286) and that students have 'more egalitarian gender role orientations than the average population' (Mikula et al., 1997, p.286). This chapter culminates in the theoretical and empirical contribution of my study guided by my four research questions. In the pursuant methodology chapter, I discuss my use of a mixed methods framework to best capture the experiences of students as they navigate domestic labour. Having described the process of recruitment, and the decision to conduct 150 survey and 20 interviews with Durham University students, I subsequently explain the thematic analysis undertaken.

After outlining the minimal risk of harm posed by participation in my study, I present the findings of my research. My central finding is that the division of domestic labour is deeply gendered within mixed-gender student households. Despite their aspirations to the contrary, female students undertake a disproportionately large proportion of the household labour and receive little gratitude for doing so. Students' gender appears to play a significant role in their readiness for university, speaking 'strongly to the powerful impact of cultural expectations associated with gender roles on the division of household labour' (Mikula et al., 1997, p.277). Female students are constructed as the more responsible members of the household and are considered the default contributors to housework. I therefore demonstrate that university, with its gendered division of domestic labour, is a site of emerging inequality.

The ramifications of this inequality are significant. In addition to creating frustration and conflict between housemates, it is having a broader impact on the ability of female students to engage in university life. At university, there is an emphasis not only on educational attainment, but on involvement in extra-curriculars. At Durham University in particular, there are a broad range of opportunities available to students to enhance their personal development, such as through sports or arts. By drawing on rich qualitative and quantitative data, I highlight how female students are missing

out on fully participating in these opportunities as a result of housework inequality. I demonstrate the need for more extensive research to be conducted in this specific field, and for practical interventions to be sought. I conclude by encouraging universities to help address this inequality, especially given the objective of the Athena Swan Charter to eliminate any gendered disadvantage facing students.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter underscores the sociological and political significance of housework. Utilising Oakley's (1974) sociology of housework as a foundation, I outline the ramifications of inequitable domestic arrangements for individuals and society as a whole. I explore housework patterns reported in heterosexual couples – the quantity and types of physical and mental domestic tasks undertaken by men and women – before discussing the consequences and potential causes of inequality. Particular attention is afforded to the impact of one's upbringing on future approaches to housework, and the life stage in which habits are embedded. In doing so, I emphasise socialisation as a critical driver of gendered housework approaches. This chapter concludes by discussing the importance of researching university as a time in which housework routines become established to improve student wellbeing, advance pursuits towards equality and broaden theoretical perspectives of domestic labour.

2.1 Sociology of Housework

Housework has, throughout history, been performed ubiquitously by women. Convention dictates that domestic labour is a woman's duty, while men should concentrate their attention on income-generating activities. This stems from assumptions around women's nature as more nurturing and the related idea that they 'have a comparative advantage in domestic labour deriving from their role as mothers' (Windebank and Martinez-Perez, 2018, p.878; Nyman et al., 2018). Within the UK, this normative view 'remained fundamentally unchallenged until the feminist movement of the 1960s', during which attention was brought to the significant domestic burden confronting women daily (Allen and Hawkins, 1999, p.201).

For a long time, the division of domestic labour was overlooked as a subject of sociological research. Sociologist Oakley is credited with rectifying this with their 1974 study illuminating housework 'as a topic worthy of serious academic study' (Coltrane, 2000, p.1208). Through surveying housewives, Oakley sought to address the 'sociological neglect of housework' by bringing women's experiences into a discipline that had otherwise been notoriously 'male-oriented' (Oakley, 1974, p.2). Housework had previously never been considered 'analogous to any other kind of work in modern society' and was therefore not afforded attention in academia or policy (Oakley, 1974, p.2). Rather, housework was 'invisible, marginalised and devalued' in society (Patton and Choi, 2014, p.10).

Some scholars have attempted to attribute the widespread disregard for housework to its ambiguous parameters, or its 'mundane and familiar' nature (Davis and Greenstein, 2013, p.64). Given that 'manliness is still iconic of power', Oakley contends that it is more likely due to its association with women (Kingston, 2017, p.1). By recognising gender as 'one of the modalities through which power is

exercised', Oakley illustrates why housework has so often been denied the same status as other labour (Meah, 2014, p.15). In doing so, she challenges prevailing perceptions of domestic labour, emphasising the crucial yet arduous nature of home maintenance. Oakley's theoretical framework, which stresses the role of systemic gendered inequalities in shaping housework negotiations, fundamentally underpins my thesis. In particular, I draw upon her argument that the 'social roles and skills that are associated with women' are culturally devalued, while those associated with men are apotheosised (Davis and Greenstein, 2013, p.65).

Irrespective of the fact 'human existence depends on the routine activities that feed, clothe, shelter and care for both children and adults', the association of women with housework prevents it from receiving sufficient acclaim (Coltrane, 2000, p.1209). Domestic labour plays a 'vital and sustaining' role in everyday life and the economy, contributing approximately £1.24 trillion in the UK, and yet is seldom acknowledged let alone valued (Anderson, 2000, p.1; Payne and Vassilev, 2022). Following Oakley, the topic has been widely studied as a 'fruitful line of inquiry for researchers' (Davis and Greenstein, 2013, p.63). By demonstrating the link between housework and gendered authority, Oakley's work affirmed to sociologists that 'studying housework provides insight into the power and equity in intimate relationships' (Davis and Greenstein, 2013, p.63). While there has been notable advancement in the public sphere, with near gender parity in labour market participation, there is yet to be a parallel transformation in the domestic sphere (Thébaud, Kornrich and Ruppaner, 2021). Despite considerable scrutiny over the 'cultural and institutional devaluation' of housework, housework arrangements continue to be defined by gendered patterns, the most significant of which will be detailed in the next section (England, 2010, p.161).

2.2 Gendered Patterns

The organisation of housework in homes across the UK continues to be impacted by gender. This section will elaborate on some of the ways in which gender exerts an influence, from time spent on domestic tasks, to the gratitude received.

2.2.1 Overall Distribution

To this day, 'most household tasks still remain in the hands of women' (Mandel and Lazarus, 2021, p.205). As reported by the European Institute for Gender Equality, employed women spend approximately 2.3 hours on housework compared to 1.6 hours for men (EIGE, 2022, p.1). Over a year, the 47 minutes of additional housework shouldered by women per day is equivalent to seven 40 hour weeks (Carmichael, 2022). These extra weeks' worth of time consist of household tasks such as cleaning, laundry and washing up, but exclude childcare and 'foodwork' (Meah, 2014, p.15; McConnon et al., 2022). Cooking is also found to be distributed unequally, with estimates that 'women still spend at least twice as much time in household cooking as men' (Szabo and Koch, 2017, p.5). Despite more egalitarian views proliferating in recent years, the bulk of housework 'remains stubbornly gendered', with women most disadvantaged by its distribution (Szabo and Koch, 2017, p.7).

Even while men's participation is expanding, 'changes in men's attitudes and contributions' are not necessarily the main driver towards equality (Sullivan, 2010, p.718). Instead, progress towards parity in housework contributions is occurring 'not for the reasons that people want, which is [that] men are doing more, but because women are doing less' (Kingston, 2017, p.2). In actively taking a step back from household responsibilities, women are closing the gap. Men however are 'starting from such a low level' that progress is slow (Coltrane, 2000, p.1212). Men's lower level of contribution is observed across heterosexual couples 'irrespective of their working hours or earnings' (Lyonette and Crompton, 2015, p.37). Even in dual-earner households where women work equal to or longer hours than their partner, women *continue* to contribute more to housework.

For many women, following a traditional trajectory of marriage and children is accompanied by an increase in household inequality. The transition from partner to wife worsens the domestic burden facing heterosexual women. Given that childcare is disproportionately undertaken by women, the transition to parenthood also exacerbates women's workload (Baxter, Hewitt and Haynes, 2008). In contrast, men's contribution to housework 'appears remarkably stable across transitions… in particular upon entering parenthood' (Nitsche and Grunow, 2016, p.82). Some scholars have even suggested that 'men's time on routine housework declines as more children are born', (Baxter, Hewitt and Haynes, 2008, p.269; Wenhold and Harrison, 2021). Regardless, across each stage of life that has been explored, including among retired heterosexual couples, there is a gap between men and women's contributions. There are

certain stages however that have not yet been investigated. Formative stages, such as moving out from one's family home, have not been focussed upon and therefore the extent of this 'extraordinary stability' in men's housework involvement is not fully known (Baxter, Hewitt and Haynes, 2008, p.259). What is known is that the widespread and embedded effect of gender is marked, with women undertaking a greater domestic load at all relationship stages studied (Carmichael, 2022).

The gap in men and women's contributions became particularly pronounced during the Covid-19 pandemic in which lockdown regulations constrained many people to working from home or being furloughed from work entirely. With more time spent at home than before, particularly among men, early predictions claimed that 'the invisible labour of childcare and housework may be newly noticeable' (Collins et al., 2021, p.102; McClelland and Sliwa, 2022). Despite this unprecedented opportunity to 'shake up the status quo in gender relations' (Bianchi et al., 2012, p.61), the Covid-19 pandemic only 'exacerbated existing gender inequalities across domains' (Fisher and Ryan, 2021, p.237). Women were found to 'perform the major share of unpaid work during the first UK lockdown', with 70% considering themselves the primary contributor to housework throughout (Zamberlan et al., 2021, p.3; Miller, 2020).

The hope that men's greater exposure to the everyday running of the domestic domain would lead to greater visibility and sharing of women's contributions, was optimistic but unrealistic (Collins et al., 2021). In fact, the only life event which has been linked to a decrease in women's contribution is upon separation from a male partner (Marcotte, 2024; Baxter, Hewitt and Haynes, 2008). For men, movement from a marital household to living alone leads to an increase in the amount of housework completed, suggesting that 'the absence of a female partner results in men taking on household chores that they otherwise would not do' (Baxter, Hewitt and Haynes, 2008, p.269). Evidently, 'gender remains a key predictor of housework in modern society' (Thébaud, Kornrich and Ruppaner, 2021, p.1186), failing to mirror the significant progress that has been made in other societal domains. A comprehensive picture of this inequality, however, has not been fully gathered.

2.2.2 Task Allocation

In addition to women 'still performing more household duties than men' (McConnon et al., 2022, p.61), research points to qualitative differences in the tasks completed by men and women. Many heterosexual couples are found to divide housework by taking ownership for specific tasks. Gender shapes this allocation: while women often undertake the 'more onerous' (Roberts, 2018, p.278), repetitive tasks, men are found to contribute to housework through involvement in the more 'sporadic and non-routine maintenance tasks' such as gardening and house maintenance (Mikula and Freudenthaler, 2002, p.569; Brenan, 2020). The 'episodic, more recreational' nature of the jobs typically undertaken by men mean that they can often be deprioritised in favour of leisure activities (Kosakowska-Berezecka et al., 2020,

p.2277). On the other hand, everyday jobs such as laundry, house cleaning and meal preparation, primarily conducted by women, are more routine.

Dividing housework in this way has ramifications for individuals' leisure time: while men are more at liberty to delay their jobs, women are expected to complete the tasks often required 'multiple times daily' (Alberts et al., 2011, p.24). To reduce the time burden on women, it is important to ascertain why this process of chore specialisation may be occurring. Research underpinned by Hakim's 'preference theory' points to 'differences in men's and women's preferences' (Bleske-Rechek and Gunseor, 2022, p.201) as instrumental in the division of domestic labour (Crompton and Lyonette, 2005). In a study requiring participants to rank their enjoyment of a series of household duties, women displayed an affinity for indoor tasks geared 'toward people and aesthetics' (Bleske-Rechek and Gunseor, 2022, p.203), whereas men exhibited a preference for outdoor tasks of a physical nature. Tasks rated favourably by men included maintenance, repairs, and renovation, in comparison to the 'food preparation, family scheduling and organising' (Bleske-Rechek and Gunseor, 2022, p.211) responsibilities desired by women. Consequently, proponents of preference theory would argue that 'inside tasks are composed of stereotypically female tasks' (Alberts et al., 2011, p.24) because females prefer this arrangement.

While gendered preferences may play a part in how households organise domestic labour, it is important to question the extent to which 'men and women differ inherently in a variety of traits and values that pertain to choices about work and family' (Bleske-Rechek and Gunseor, 2022, p.203). Claiming that men and women have inherent proclivities for certain tasks disregards the underlying factors that may influence someone's ranking. For example, gendered assumption dictates that men are worse at cleaning than women (Lyonette and Crompton, 2015). Despite this being hailed as the 'myth of male incompetence' (Lyonette and Crompton, 2015, p.34), some women may feel that, rather than compromising on quality, they need to do a task themselves to 'ensure that it is done 'properly' (Meah, 2014, p.681). In this way, societal expectations can alter one's 'perception of how good they are at the task', making women feel that they are better suited to certain tasks (Bleske-Rechek and Gunseor, 2022, p.213).

Furthermore, men are found to use tactics to exaggerate a lack of ability in certain tasks: they may 'outwait their partner, ask many questions about the task, do the task poorly, or plead ineptness' (Allen and Hawkins, 1999, p.203). Labelled as 'weaponised incompetence', this strategy aggrandises men's status as domestic helpers rather than managers. There is evidence of a shift in the attitudes of men towards certain tasks, with men under 30 being 'more likely than ever to report that they enjoy cooking and cleaning' (Coltrane, 2000, p.1212). This further calls into question that preferences are inherent, but rather a product of socialisation and the roles that men and women are expected to conform to.

This is particularly evident with cooking, where there have been notable attitude changes. Contemporary food programmes emphasise cooking as an opportunity for displaying 'culinary artistry' as opposed to serving a solely nutritional function (Szabo and Koch, 2017, p.3; Meah, 2014). The predominance of famous male chefs in the 'professional culinary world' has meant that cooking as a visible display of creativity has been increasingly associated with men (Szabo and Koch, 2017, p.2). Media depictions of men cooking are 'regarded as having played a specific role in invoking a particular 'masculine domesticity'' in which leisure is the priority (Meah, 2014, p.14). While 'men's selective engagement with foodwork' has been normalised, women are expected to pick up the everyday cooking, and to complete the less rewarding, requisite tasks such as buying provisions and washing up (Meah, 2014, p.15). In addition to undertaking the physical tasks involved in food preparation, women are expected to undertake the more managerial tasks such as taking stock of ingredients, scheduling mealtimes, and planning sufficient nutrition while accommodating dietary requirements. These 'mental actions like attending, remembering and deliberating' are not exclusive to cooking, but underpin all physical tasks (McClelland and Sliwa, 2022, p.21). In completing the organisational tasks involved in domestic labour, women become akin to 'household managers' (Meah, 2014, p.15). This is a particularly burdensome and underappreciated component of women's domestic work.

2.2.3 Household Management

Housework is more than completion of physical tasks; it requires significant mental and emotional work. This responsibility encompasses '"articulation work": organizing the tasks and relationships to them of those who perform them', remembering the rate and recurrence of tasks and coordinating their delegation (McClelland and Sliwa, 2022, p.11). Weisner and Garnier encapsulate this in their concept of 'accommodation' which involves 'the thoughtful reorganization of plans, resources and constraints, time availability, goals and dreams, to produce the regular routines of everyday life' (1994, p.24). Morgan on the other hand denotes these everyday essential routines as 'family practices' (Morgan, 2011). By his definition, any task that underpins the effective operation of a household is a practice. This applies to the cognitive management of a household and can be extended to fit a non-familial context (Morgan, 2011).

Despite its essential role in the completion of domestic labour, 'comparably little attention has been paid to defining and measuring the cognitive correlate' (Daminger, 2019, p.610) partly because of its 'amorphous nature' (Daminger, 2019, p.621). Cognitive tasks often 'defy such neat delineation' (Daminger, 2019, p.621) that physical tasks possess and therefore have been 'rarely defined explicitly' (Coltrane, 2000, p.1210). The invisibility of certain tasks can 'de-legitimise women's claims that they do more than their partners' (Christopher, 2021, p.12), and worsen conflict as their partner may 'wonder why they complain about being busy or stressed' (Daminger, 2019, p.619).

Only recently has the term ‘cognitive burden’ (McClelland and Sliwa, 2022, p.11) been coined to describe the ‘extended mental effort’ (McClelland and Sliwa, 2022, p.21) involved in household management. Cognitive burden, or mental load, has also been broken down to include four activities: ‘anticipation, identification, decision-making, or monitoring’ (Daminger, 2019, p.619). By examining who was primarily responsible for each of these activities, Daminger concluded that women ‘do more cognitive labour overall and more of the anticipation and monitoring work in particular’ (2019, p.609). Women were also more likely to ‘feel responsible for task outcomes’, ‘set standards’, and ‘remind their partners to complete certain chores’, even amidst households with an equitable split of physical housework tasks (Daminger, 2019, p.612). This is supported by research that found ‘the majority of the men tended to be instructed to clean rather than taking the initiative themselves’ (Chistopher, 2021, p.12).

When constantly prompted to perform a task, men gain ‘a limited understanding of the task as a whole’, i.e., what stages it involves, how frequently it should be completed, and to what standard (Christopher, 2021, p.11). Unlike women who become familiar with the requirements for each job, men may not comprehend the ‘many small tasks done that prevent the huge mess from building up’ (McClelland and Sliwa, 2022, p.10; Christopher, 2021). This leads to women having to either oversee the contribution of men, or ‘rather than ‘nag’, women will do it themselves’ to complete domestic tasks (Anderson, 2000, p.12). Regardless, the cognitive labour of running a household exacerbates ‘women’s time poverty’ (McConnon et al., 2022, p.49) and forms a ‘further dimension of disparity’ (McClelland and Sliwa, 2022, p.20). This pattern of inequality is particularly present when couples get married. Maushart theorises that upon becoming wives, women feel obliged to perform mental labour on behalf of the couple, acting as “relationship managers” (Wilkens, 2002, p.1193; Maushart, 2003). While household management has been explored in the context of established couples, research has not been extended to student household arrangements. I seek to address this gap by exploring the approaches of emerging adults to physical housework tasks, its organisation, and the extent to which this labour is appreciated.

2.2.4 Recognition and Gratitude

The time spent on housework, task types and cognitive labour are not the only gendered differences in heterosexual couples. There are differences in the amount of recognition awarded for the completion of tasks, with women ‘less likely than men to be rewarded for a job well done’ (Thébaud, Kornrich and Ruppaner, 2021, p.1207). One proposed explanation for this is that men simply do not notice when an arrangement is inequitable (McClelland and Sliwa, 2022). This, however, does not consider the wider factors at play in the under-appreciation of women’s domestic work. A more robust understanding is achieved via the application of Hochschild’s ‘economy of gratitude’ (Garey et al., 2011). This theory

postulates that gratitude is awarded upon the receipt of a so called “gift” (Alberts et al., 2011, p.31). These gifts may assume different forms but are defined by being something above and beyond what is usually expected (Alberts et al., 2011). What is considered a gift in the realm of housework therefore depends on the baseline expectations of men and women.

With domesticity ‘associated in many ways with women’s presence and feminine care and duty’, many household tasks are presumed to be women’s responsibilities (Szabo and Koch, 2017, p.1). Consequently, women’s participation in them is not considered an offering (Skeggs, 2014). On the other hand, because men are not presumed to be as involved in housework, ‘men’s participation is a gift’ (Alberts et al., 2011, p.31) to which ‘women often feel they need to reciprocate, by engaging in the emotion work of gratitude’ (Alberts et al., 2011, p.30). Furthermore, ‘care work is not valued as work, for it is seen as work that women provide because ethically, they cannot but care’ (Skeggs, 2014, p.12). When caring is a presumed duty of women, associated activities are denied value or reward. Whether or not gratitude is expressed is therefore closely tethered to ‘what each spouse feels he or she is owed’ (Alberts et al., 2011, p.30).

The theoretical underpinning provided by Hochschild’s ‘economy of gratitude’ is reinforced by studies that indicate men view their own participation in housework as a favour to their partner (Natalier, 2004). A recent study highlights this, finding that, in reference to males’ contributions to housework, participants ‘did not express concerns with the term “helping” which implies that the husband would not hold any primary responsibility’ (McConnon et al., 2022, p.49). By framing housework as an optional activity for men, the reliance on others (mostly women) to pick up the slack is perpetuated. In line with Hochschild’s ‘economy of gratitude’, reducing the expectation on women to assume responsibility for domestic tasks by default would lead to greater recognition and gratitude. Establishing this would benefit women: ‘women reported more justice when they felt their family work was appreciated by their partner’ (Kluwer and Mikula, 2003, p.194). The consequences of inequitable arrangements, and unappreciated labour can be severe, as highlighted in the upcoming section.

2.3 Consequences of Inequality

Inequality in domestic labour has consequences at the individual, relational and societal level. There is therefore value in understanding at what point inequality emerges, in order to minimise it and its adverse effects. The repercussions of inequality are significant and extend beyond the domestic domain, one of the most notable is the opportunity cost incurred. If domestic labour is consuming more of one person's time, it inevitably detracts from their availability to engage in other domains. For women this has historically reduced their participation in the paid labour market, manifesting in 'decreased professional opportunities and work-life stress' (Alberts et al., 2011, p.22). Contemporary studies indicate that 'little progress has been made' in this regard (McConnon et al., 2022, p.61). The pattern of women being 'more likely than are men to adjust their work and home schedules to accommodate others' appears to have endured (Coltrane, 2000, p.1212). Research indicates that, owing to housework and childcare responsibilities, women 'with young children have reduced their work hours four to five times more than fathers' (Collins et al., 2021, p.101).

Alternatively, women that do not adjust their employment are met with working a 'double day' in which they take on both the paid labour of their occupation, and upon returning home, the unpaid labour of housework (Roberts, 2018, p.277). This exerts huge demands on women's time and leads to women sacrificing leisure time to do housework (Humphreys, 2016). It also reduces some women's time sleeping (Weisner and Garnier, 1994, p.27; Nitsche and Grunow, 2016). Men, on the other hand, benefit from the prevailing arrangement as they have a greater capacity to pursue interests freely (Allen and Hawkins, 1999).

Not only do the many additional hours of housework impede women's participation in both paid and recreational activities, but a negative correlation is found between the enjoyment of, and time spent, on housework. Those that dedicate less time to housework, find that 'it is more enjoyable and less tedious' (Ogletree, Worthen, Turner and Vickers, 2006, p.405). Combined with the depletion of their leisure time, the monotony of housework can result in an increased risk of burnout, depression, and stress for women (Carmichael, 2022; Carlson et al., 2020; Bird, 1999).

The negative impacts of inequitable household arrangements extend beyond the individual level, with housework emerging as 'an important predictor of relationship satisfaction' (Carlson et al., 2020, p.1). In fact, housework is found to be 'one of the three leading sources of conflict in couples' (Charbonneau et al., 2019, p.290). This is partially due to the negative emotions felt by both partners in the face of inequality. Those doing more housework are 'likely to experience anger and resentment', by contrast, those who do comparably less are 'likely to experience guilt and shame' (Charbonneau et al., 2021, p.181). The combination of these feelings can 'create tension, conflicts and dissatisfaction between

romantic partners' (Charbonneau et al., 2019, p.290). Evidence suggests that more equitable household arrangements may improve a couple's wellbeing. For example, a 2006 study found that 'as husbands' participation in housework increased, marital discord decreased' (Ogletree, Worthen, Turner and Vickers, 2006, p.400).

Unfavourable housework arrangements are found to be a common factor in marital breakdown, with 47% of women and 33% of men citing 'role conflict/problems, including dividing responsibility for household chores' as one of the reasons for divorce (Ogletree et al., 2006, p.405). A recent paper concluded that 'sharing housework is optimal for couples' relationship quality' (Carlson et al., 2020, p.1). The division of housework is 'inextricably linked to the well-being of families, relationships, and our very selves' and therefore understanding it from its inception can help mitigate harm and increase satisfaction among households (Alberts et al., 2011, p.21; Asare, 2019; Kluwer and Mikula, 2003).

Women report being less satisfied and 'tend to demand more changes than men over the division of housework' (Charbonneau et al., 2021, p.192). Various mechanisms are used by women to progress parity. Effective communication is correlated with the establishment and maintenance of equitable arrangements, however the direction of causality between the two factors is disputed (Nameda, 2013). Proponents of 'gender power theory' suggest that improving communication between partners will promote greater sharing of tasks as it allows couples to 'build close, intimate bonds that are associated with both egalitarian division and greater levels of relationship satisfaction' (Carlson et al., 2020, p.1). Contrary to gender power theory, 'equity theory' proclaims that 'men and women are more satisfied with a romantic relationship in which there is equal give and take' and therefore their communication quality elevates as a result of adopting equitable arrangements (Charbonneau et al., 2021, p.181). Accordingly, equity theorists assert that household arrangements determine 'feelings of fairness' and 'may shape partners' positive and negative communication' as opposed to the other way around (Carlson et al., 2020, p.1).

Exploration into the direction of causality suggests that 'for women, good, high-quality communication appears to shape not only the division of labour in her partnership but also her partner's relationship satisfaction', offering support for gender power theory (Carlson et al., 2020, p.15). By being 'direct' and 'open' rather than 'hostile or passive-aggressive' women are more likely to reach an equitable arrangement (Carlson et al., 2020, p.5). This is the inverse for men, where those who have already established 'more equal sharing of labour' tend to demonstrate 'better communication with partners' (Carlson et al., 2020, p.15). Correspondingly, men with inequitable arrangements are found to have more negative, low quality communication tactics in a bid to resist women's attempts to share the labour more evenly. These may include 'avoidance, ignoring/stonewalling, criticising and hostility' (Carlson et al., 2020, p.5). Consequently, it appears that 'communicative practices both create and can ameliorate

inequities in the division of domestic labour' (Alberts et al., 2011, p.21). If unfavourable household arrangements lead to a change in women's communication strategy, this may affect their partner's future approach to housework, which in turn may lead to a readjustment of women's communication. In heterosexual relationships, these two factors often operate cyclically, but are spearheaded by women. The onus of 'initiating and crafting non-traditional divisions of labour at home' continues then to fall on women (Carlson et al., 2020, p.13).

2.4 Justifications for Inequality

Sociologists have explored why gender inequality in domestic labour endures since Oakley's seminal text (1974). Originally theories attributed the pervasive gendered disparity in housework contribution to one of three factors: time, resources, or gender itself (Thébaud, Kornrich and Ruppaner, 2021). Further hypotheses concerning gendered perceptions of fairness, different standards and the socialisation processes experienced by children, have since developed. I will now explore each of these in turn.

2.4.1 Time

The time availability hypothesis maintains that 'unpaid domestic labour is allocated according to the availability of household members to undertake it' (Windebank and Martinez-Perez, 2018, p.877). Necessarily, whoever has more time at their disposal to spend on housework, does so. Customarily, women participated less in the paid labour market. The logic follows therefore that women are more available to undertake domestic responsibilities. Accordingly, men's perennial exemption from housework is attributed to them having 'less time for family work because of their demanding jobs' (Allen and Hawkins, 1999, p.203). This perspective disregards that often women's time away from the paid labour market is not 'free' but to serve certain purposes such as to bear or raise a child. In doing so, it arguably reinforces the devaluation of women's time, framing it as expendable in comparison to men's.

A parallel but more nuanced strand of this hypothesis is that of the 'demand-response model' which 'argues that men participate more in family work when there is greater need and when they are more available' (Kluwer and Mikula, 2003, p.188). As women's participation in the paid labour market approaches parity with men, the veracity of these claims is called into doubt (Zamberlan et al., 2021). In heterosexual couples, even when women's working hours are equal to or more than men's, women complete more housework, evidencing that domestic inequalities cannot be explained by the gender pay gap alone (Charbonneau et al., 2019; Carriero, 2011; Claffey and Mickelson, 2009; Brenan, 2020; McClelland and Sliwa, 2022). The gendered distribution of housework is observable across couples with various working arrangements, suggesting that it is not as simple as 'who is available to do domestic work' (McClelland and Sliwa, 2022, p.3; Carmichael, 2022).

2.4.2 Resources

The relative resource hypothesis similarly rests upon women's participation in the paid labour market. Alternatively, however, it adopts an 'economistic' explanation, attributing uneven domestic participation to disparities in possession of capital (Lyonette and Crompton, 2015, p.24). Therein, the

‘spouse who holds more power and authority in the marital dyad (traditionally the husband) can minimise his or her participation in housework’ in a commodity-like transaction (Kluwer and Mikula, 2003, p.187). It is thought that, whether explicit or not, women ‘enter into a ‘contract’ wherein they exchange household labour in return for economic support from a male breadwinner’ (Coltrane, 2000, p.1214). Empirically, this hypothesis is supported by findings that ‘the division of labour tends to be more unequal when gender differences in outside employment and income are larger’ (Kluwer and Mikula, 2003, p.188). The ‘exchange bargaining perspective’ theoretically underpins this, asserting that those with power can renege on their responsibilities or reassign them depending on their needs (Baxter, Hewitt and Haynes, 2008, p.261). Similarly, the ‘autonomy hypothesis’ (Lyonette and Crompton, 2015, p.26) asserts that as a woman’s monetary earnings increase, they gain freedom to choose how they spend their time and ‘have the power to negotiate more collaborative arrangements’ (Allen and Hawkins, 1999, p.201). In line with this, one would expect to see more equitable arrangements adopted in couples where the woman earns more; however, inequity persists even in these households (Carmichael, 2022).

Contrary to theories that ‘husbands of employed spouses will feel indebted to their wives’ for contributing financially and will, therefore, “help out” by doing more housework, research reveals the opposite to hold true (Garey et al., 2011). In certain households where men earn less, they contribute less to housework to combat their non-traditional earning arrangement (Lyonette and Crompton, 2015). This attempt to restore some traditional adherence to notions of gender is theorised as ‘gender deviance neutralisation’ (Thébaud, Kornrich and Ruppaner, 2021). This is not exclusive to men, but women too are found to try and mediate their nonconformity to stereotypes by ‘doing gender’ in a more conventional way. Some women were found to express feeling ‘guilty for not being home more’ and in response would undertake ‘virtually all of the housework as a “gift” to compensate for their absence’ (Alberts et al., 2011, p.31). These behaviours, combined with the lack of equity in dual-earner households suggest that the relative resource hypothesis cannot wholly explain the organisation of domestic labour (McClelland and Sliwa, 2022).

2.4.3 Gender

Evidence suggesting both men and women enact routines in line with gendered stereotypes lends support to a third justification, the gender role ideology hypothesis. This asserts that women’s greater contribution to housework stems from perceptions that they belong in the domestic domain while men’s role is to earn money. It is suggested that the ‘normative climate prescribing sex-typed allocations of men’s and women’s responsibilities’ is a powerful driver behind couples’ approaches to distributing household tasks (Mikula et al., 1997, p.277). Support is found for this hypothesis in the finding that ‘housework hours are 1.731 times greater for men with very liberal attitudes compared to men with

traditional attitudes' (Baxter, Hewitt and Haynes, 2008, p.269). Additionally, studies have demonstrated women 'consider household work a part of their (gendered) identity' (Thébaud, Kornrich and Ruppaner, 2021, p.1188). This recalls 'West and Zimmerman's seminal concept of "doing gender"' in which housework can be considered a performance of womanhood (McClelland and Sliwa, 2022, p.3). With a strong 'relationship between gender, power and space', women may feel that adhering to traditional notions of femininity is the only way to gain control in the domestic setting (Meah, 2014, p.2). Toward this end, it can be said that 'women are, in part, the way they are because of the way they are thought to be' (Oakley, 2018, p.1).

One recent study unearths 'signs of a backlash against advances in gender equality, with men performing overtly misogynistic masculinities and covertly misogynistic masculinities' (Pope et al., 2022, p.730). Rather than openly promoting 'hostile, sexist, and misogynistic attitudes', men may display these views in private (Pope et al., 2022, p.735). Opinions on women's domestic duties may therefore not always surface publicly but can still be at play within households. The disparity between someone who outwardly shows support for equality but behaves to the contrary, versus someone who enacts equal practices, has been conceptualised as 'spoken egalitarianism' vs 'lived egalitarianism' (Lyonette and Crompton, 2015).

Although 'gendered roles and subjectivities' (Meah, 2014, p.6) may be less explicit today, they remain influential as adherence to them is 'linked to perceptions of moral worth and social consequences' (Thébaud, Kornrich and Ruppaner, 2021, p.1193). Accordingly, men and women 'anticipate different social ramifications and rewards for their behaviour' and so perform their gender in traditionally acceptable ways (Thébaud, Kornrich and Ruppaner, 2021, p.1186). Women are made to feel as though their worth hinges upon the cleanliness of their home, and that to 'reaffirm their femininity' they must partake in housework and childcare (Humphreys, 2016, p.14; Windebank and Martinez-Perez, 2018; Christopher, 2021). Power and value have been continually denied to these tasks, providing men 'little incentive to move into badly rewarded, traditionally female activities' (England, 2010, p.161). Instead, men can 'reinforce their structural and cultural power, by limiting the time spent in household tasks' (Baxter, Hewitt and Haynes, 2008, p.261). Disengaging from housework in this way reinforces the notion that it is a women's responsibility by default and plays into archetypical ideas of hegemonic masculinity (Natalier, 2003).

Coined by Connell, hegemonic masculinity theory sees the oppression of women as central to the construction of desirable masculinity (Connell, 2005; Pope et al., 2022, p.733). An ideal gender performance is 'marked by long hours of work and both dependence on, and marginalization of, a domestic world run by wives' (Connell, 2005, p.xxiv). Incorporated within this is the expectation that men are entitled to 'receive benefits from the unpaid labour of women' (Connell, 2005, p.246). Some

scholars argue that this 'configuration of gender practice' which promotes 'the legitimacy of patriarchy', no longer has a place in society (Connell, 2005, p.77). Contemporary research, however, indicates that 'Connell's (1995) hegemonic masculinity is very much alive and kicking among today's young men', influencing their everyday engagement with housework (Pope et al., 2022, p.739).

Despite claims that women are no longer 'both structurally and ideologically' (Meah, 2014, p.5) bound by housework, 'normative and cultural expectations of appropriate masculine and feminine behaviour' continue to dictate that women belong in the home (Baxter, Hewitt and Haynes, 2008, p.261). On the other hand, circumventing housework responsibilities is 'one of the ways in which men compensate for threats to their masculinity' and 'do gender' in a way deemed to be societally appropriate (Kosakowska-Berezecka et al., 2020, p.2277; Thébaud, Kornrich and Ruppaner, 2021). On balance, it seems likely that underlying perceptions of femininity and masculinity contribute to the persistence of unequal domestic arrangements, as 'domesticity and femininity are intimately tethered' (Thébaud, Kornrich and Ruppaner, 2021, p.1194).

Some have argued that in addition to structural factors, women's actions can further isolate men from the domestic sphere. One influential study purports that some mothers are 'repelled by the notion of sharing their domain' (Allen and Hawkins, 1999, p.202). In a bid to protect their ownership of tasks, it has been suggested that over 20% of mothers engage in behaviours that inhibit their spouse's involvement in domestic tasks (Hauser, 2012). These sets of behaviours are encapsulated in the concept "maternal gatekeeping", coined by Allen and Hawkins (1999). Maternal gatekeeping can be understood as a 'collection of beliefs and behaviours that ultimately inhibit a collaborative effort between men and women in family work by limiting men's opportunities for learning and growing through caring for home and children' (Allen and Hawkins, 1999, p.200). Women engaging in this are said to retain control of the domestic domain through certain practices such as 'selectively sharing information' (Hauser, 2012, p.44) and setting 'their standards too high' (Alberts et al., 2011, p.33). The result of this action is that men continue to 'occupy 'supporting' roles', leaving women to spearhead decisions concerning childcare and housework (Meah, 2014, p.12). While 'maternal gatekeeping' was initially created with mothers in mind, there have been subsequent studies of women without children that exhibit their reluctance 'to relinquish control of what is perceived to be their domain' which encompasses housework (Meah, 2014, p.12).

The idea of maternal gatekeeping arguably does not acknowledge the behaviours that men exhibit to mediate their lower contribution to housework. The finding that men are generally less 'enthusiastic about housework or proactive in household management' cannot be ignored as a potential factor in women's behaviours (Meah, 2014, p.12). Building upon this, Miller (2018) explored the behaviours that men use to renege on their own responsibility for housework, finding that men use various 'forms

of resistance' (Miller, 2018, p.27). This was developed into the idea of "paternal gatekeeping", which challenges Allen and Hawkins' proposal that it is predominantly women's actions excluding men from the domestic domain, but rather men are contributing to this too by 'self-blocking' (Miller, 2018, p.27). Women may therefore not be intentionally limiting men's opportunities for learning and growing' but rather do not wish to expend time negotiating with men (Allen and Hawkins, 1999, p.200). Instead of framing this behaviour as an *inhibitor* of inequity, a more nuanced framing suggests gatekeeping to be a *consequence* of inequity (Miller, 2018). Furthermore, women 'derive a greater level of utility than men from avoiding conflict in a relationship' and therefore may undertake 'gatekeeping' activities in order to prevent potential discord (Auspurg, Iacovou and Nicoletti, 2017, p.135).

Furthermore, as previously highlighted, stringent notions of femininity dictate that women should be tidy, organised, and adept at housework and childcare. Internalisation of these stereotypes means that 'failure to make a good impression in these areas…has a large impact on their sense of self-worth as women' (Hauser, 2012, p.43). They may therefore resist sharing control of associated tasks out of fear that they will be viewed as a less valuable woman. Additionally, women are denied power elsewhere, for example in the paid labour market, and therefore may seek to 'gatekeep' and retain authority in the one domain that is considered their own. Particularly among working class women, being a good wife and mother forms a key part of their identity considering the lack of avenues to gain power elsewhere (Álvarez-López, 2019). In this way, compared to the wider backdrop of inequality, some 'see kitchens and associated domestic spaces as sites of potential empowerment for women' (Meah, 2014, p.2). For others however the kitchen is still 'considered one of the main sites of women's oppression' (McConnon et al., 2022, p.50). Gender undoubtedly exerts influence in a multifaceted and complex way. In addition to informing the conduct of men and women, gender affects their perception of this conduct and whether or not it is fair. Objectively imbalanced housework arrangements can be considered fair based on gendered expectations. This is a potentially important obstacle to achieving equality, which will be unpacked in the following section.

2.4.4 Perceived Fairness

While domestic inequality has ramifications for all involved, the direct impacts are felt predominantly by women. It is understandable therefore that 'women generally perceive the division of family labour as less fair than men' and are less satisfied overall (Kluwer and Mikula, 2003, p.191). However, the perspectives of women who 'consider an objectively unequal division of housework to be fair' need to be considered (Charbonneau et al., 2019, p.291). One study found that 'women find the division of labour to be fair when they contribute 66%' of 'the time devoted to household tasks', whereas men deem a contribution of 36% fair (Coltrane, 2000, p.1223). Some have credited the lowering of women's expectations to the 'entrenched normalisation of gender inequity' (Hu and Yucel, 2018, p.93) and the

assessment of housework as ‘women’s work’ (Meah, 2014, p.3). Young heterosexual women ‘report expecting an unequal and gendered division in their future households’ (McConnon et al., 2022, p.49). As such, some women have internalised the idea of housework as their responsibility and accordingly anticipate undertaking a greater share of domestic labour upon entering relationships. Rather than seeking 50% as an ‘equity point’ (Coltrane, 2000, p.1223) ‘feelings of equity depend on what people think they deserve’ (Carlson et al., 2020, p.3), with women feeling as though they deserve to contribute more than men. Accordingly, ‘women may not express more dissatisfaction and feelings of injustice because the division of household labour matches prevalent normative standards’ (Mikula et al., 1997, p.287).

Individuals’ perceptions of fairness can be influenced both by normative standards, and through relational and referential comparisons (Mikula and Freudenthaler, 2002). The former involves an individual directly comparing their contribution to that of their partner, for example, in a heterosexual marriage, a woman’s perception of fairness would be determined by the difference between her and her husband’s contribution. The latter, a referential comparison, is made between people occupying similar positions outside of the relationship, for example women comparing their housework contributions with each other (Mikula and Freudenthaler, 2002). For heterosexual women, comparing their housework contribution to their partner may make them perceive their distribution as less fair than when they compare themselves to their female peers who are likely to be experiencing a similar issue (Hu and Yucel, 2018).

The monotonous and often undesirable nature of housework further complicates people’s perceptions of fairness (Mikula et al., 1997). Generally speaking, individuals are happy with inequitable arrangements if it involves completing less housework. In spite of the fact ‘most young adults state their desire to share domestic and paid work more equally’ (Charbonneau et al., 2019, p.292), those who contribute less to housework, typically men, may pursue ‘self-oriented motives’ (Mikula et al., 1997, p.277). Cumulatively, these factors may help to explain the ‘widespread absence of the perception of gendered division of housework as unfair’ especially among men (Hu and Yucel, 2018, p.93). There is however a need for further research ‘to explore the variables that impact men’s judgments of fairness’ within non-romantic household arrangements (Nameda, 2013, p.43).

2.4.5 Thresholds of Acceptability

Another factor in the distribution of domestic labour is an individuals’ tolerance of mess. With no fixed definition, there is scope for disagreement on what constitutes mess, and therefore at what point intervention is warranted. This point is denoted as a ‘threshold for dirt and disorder’ and determines how frequently someone feels the need to clean and to what standard. When inhabitants of a household have differing ‘threshold levels’, it can ‘not only influence the allocation of housework, but also increase

relational conflicts' (Charbonneau et al., 2021, p.181; Clark et al., 2018). Those who strive for higher levels of cleanliness are more likely to notice when something is in an unacceptable state first, are more likely to intervene. The individual, therefore, 'with the lower threshold level is the one who generally performs more housework' (Charbonneau et al., 2021, p.179). For cohabiting couples, a precedent is set in which 'one partner automatically assumes the other "more bothered" partner should perform the task' (Alberts et al., 2011, p.32). A self-perpetuating cycle can ensue in which 'individual(s) with the lowest threshold will perform a given task even at low stimulus levels, until he/she becomes a specialist for that task', exacerbating the inequity (Alberts et al., 2011, p.27). This in turn can have a myriad of negative consequences including impairing relationship health. To prevent this, it is therefore a salient line of inquiry for researchers to explore individuals' 'differing expectations of cleanliness and tidiness' (Clark et al., 2018, p.7).

Having a low threshold is not just a matter of preference but is 'vital for protecting the public's health' (RSPH, 2019, p.3). In 'preventing the spread of harmful microbes and hence reducing the risks of contracting infectious diseases', everyday cleaning of the home is crucial for the maintenance of a healthy living environment (RSPH, 2019, p.3; Çelik and Yüce, 2019). Observed 'gender difference in risk perception and hygiene practice' can significantly impact infection rates and wider public health concerns. Prevailing stereotypes dictate that 'women are generally more sensitive to household cleanliness than men' (Charbonneau et al., 2021, p.179). This has gathered a 'remarkable degree of consensus in the public media' and has been used to justify women's greater contribution to household tasks, particularly those involving cleaning (Charbonneau et al., 2021, p.179). Research into thresholds is therefore pertinent both for upholding high levels of hygiene, and for 'building a more complete theoretical model of gender inequalities' (Charbonneau et al., 2021, p.193).

As well as levels of dirt and grime, research has also examined gendered patterns in the perceived *urgency* of housework. One longitudinal study of 176 cohabiting couples concluded that women did in fact have a comparably 'lower tolerance for dirt and disorder' than men and as the disparity widened between partners' thresholds, inequity in their contributions increased (Charbonneau et al., 2021, p.179). Even in egalitarian households, mismatched tolerance levels correlate to greater gender inequity. While this study makes a valuable contribution in describing the effect of differing tolerances, it does not offer an explanation as to why. It also does not elucidate if partners who strive for equality can reconcile their different tolerances of mess.

However, recent research by McClelland and Sliwa (2022) clarifies this issue, helping to explain why thresholds can impact the distribution of housework even among equality-seeking couples. This study utilises an alternative conceptual framework to comprehend individuals' responses to mess, applying principles from Gibson's 'affordance theory' to housework. They demonstrate how people can view the

same environment but interpret it differently due to the psychological perception of something's 'affordance' or 'possibility for action' (McClelland and Sliwa, 2022, p.5). This study establishes that 'the domestic task affordance tends to more strongly solicit action for women than for men´ (McClelland and Sliwa, 2022, p.9). Embodied through two characters, 'Jack' and 'Jill', McClelland and Sliwa (2022) illustrate how observations of the same environment may translate into different lines of thought from men and women. While they may both observe the same things in their environment, Jack and Jill interpret them differently. This is exemplified when it comes to dealing with the bins; while 'Jill perceives the recycling to be taken out when the bin approaches fullness… Jack will perceive the same strength affordance when it is about to overflow´ (McClelland and Sliwa, 2022, p.10). Jill sees a mess that warrants cleaning, whereas to Jack 'these perceptions do not "tug" at him – they do not present the corresponding task as to be done' (McClelland and Sliwa, 2022, p.10).

This 'tugging' effect is found to disproportionately weigh on women's minds, distracting or preventing them from engaging in other activities. With women 'either expending effort on doing the task or expending effort on consciously ignoring it', this study highlights how 'affordances pull on your attention' even when not acted upon (McClelland and Sliwa, 2022, p.11). The research supports previous findings that women intervened in household mess before their male partners had observed a need to.

Some claim there to be intrinsic gendered disparities, such as 'differences in the utility that men and women derive from housework', their attention to detail and their standards of cleanliness (Auspurg, Iacovou and Nicoletti, 2017, p.118; Alberts, Tracy and Tretheway, 2011; Thébaud, Kornrich and Ruppaner, 2021). These biosocial arguments stem from an evolutionary basis wherein women are supposedly naturally better suited to performing housework than men. A recent study of 646 individuals in the United States disputes these claims, concluding that 'men and women respondents do not differ in their perceptions of how messy a room is or how urgent it is to clean it up' (Thébaud, Kornrich and Ruppaner, 2021, p.1186). In finding that 'men and women do not have systematically different perceptions of household mess' ((Thébaud, Kornrich and Ruppaner, 2021, p.1199), the ideas of the 'Gendered Affordance Perception' (McClelland and Sliwa, 2022, p.5) and women's inherent aversion to mess, are called into question. Similarly, a study of secondary school pupils in Turkey found no significant gendered differences in students' levels of cleanliness (Çelik and Yüce, 2019).

Ultimately, this raises questions about the generalisability of the claim that women have lower threshold levels than men. Perhaps women only have a lower threshold for dirt in certain spaces, such as those in which their womanhood is scrutinised, or where they can gain power. The kitchen is a 'space in which gendered relations are both lived out and relentlessly reinforced' (Meah, 2014, p.5), with strong associations between women and tasks that take place there. Accordingly, women may have lower

thresholds for tolerance in the kitchen, a space that is 'their own', as opposed to in so-called 'male places' like the garage (Vestbro and Horelli, 2012, p.317). Recognition that 'space and gender are inseparable and intersected, influencing each other in profound and multifarious ways', may help to explain discordant findings on women's thresholds, however research into these spatial factors has not been conducted to date (Hu, 2021, p.1318).

In underlining the mental toll involved in ignoring an 'affordance' for action, this study makes a novel contribution to our understanding of thresholds and provides deeper insight into why different thresholds can have a negative impact. McClelland and Sliwa suggest that despite 'being enculturated into gender norms' (2022, p.14), progress can be made 'by consciously paying attention to cues whether the task needs to be done' and by 'cultivating habits of doing the task' (2022, p.18). This, however, is at odds to claims that 'gender roles, divisions and habits start early' during adolescence and are therefore deeply rooted by the time it comes to cohabitation with a partner (EIGE, 2022, p.1). It remains that more research is needed into the mechanisms used by couples to moderate their differing threshold levels, and their efficacy.

2.4.6 Socialisation: Learning Gender-Appropriate Roles in the Home

A potential cause of inequality that has received notable attention is the process of gendered socialisation that children are subject to growing up. This perspective 'centres on notions that macro-level gender expectations are internalized' and can help explain future approaches to domestic labour and its distribution (Thébaud, Kornrich and Ruppaner, 2021, p.1190). In exploring one's upbringing as a reason for inequality, housework practices are conceptualised as labile and learnable over the course of a lifetime. Unlike other explanations, which focus on housework negotiations occurring *in the present*, this approach emphasises the temporal aspect of inequality by showing that it can be ingrained over different stages of life. This embedding of gendered inequality can occur in two key ways. First, in line with the 'modelling hypothesis', children set their expectations for future based on roles they have witnessed their parents assuming (Cunningham, 2001, p.185; Fulcher, Dinella and Weisgram, 2015). Should 'children observe sex-based division of tasks in their homes', they are likely to make gendered associations and consider them the norm to strive toward (Alberts et al., 2011, p.28). Girls mirror their mothers, as boys do with their fathers, gravitating towards tasks that they have observed them complete (Blair, 1992; Cunningham, 2001). Correspondingly, as exhibited in Cunningham's 31-year longitudinal study (2001), if parents promote and embody egalitarian views, their children are more likely to replicate equitable arrangements. Evidently, role modelling can enact a strong influence on children's future conception of roles and responsibilities (Schirichian et al., 2022).

A second way in which children may be socialised to accept inequality is through the tasks they are assigned growing up. Girls are more likely to be allocated indoor household chores while boys are

expected to undertake more 'outside chores' (Blair, 1992, p.170). By distributing tasks based on gender, children are taught from an early age 'which ones are appropriate for girls and boys to do' (Alberts et al., 2011, p.28). This 'sex-typing' also leads to children developing skills in certain tasks while lacking proficiency in others (Blair, 1992, p.170). Alongside the 'substantial evidence that parents assign different tasks to their male and female children' (Cunningham, 2001, p.185), there is research indicating that parents offer 'selective compensation' (Blair, 1992, p.183) dictated by gender. Daughters receive less recognition for completing a job and are 'held to higher standards of cleanliness', facing harsher repercussions for mess than sons (Thébaud, Kornrich and Ruppaner, 2021, p.1186; Cunningham, 2001). This differential recognition reinforces the notion that it is a women's default duty to perform housework, whereas men's participation is worthy of reward.

To exacerbate matters, gendered patterns pervade within the quantity of housework expected from children. At the age of 15-17, girls already spend over one and a half times the amount of time on housework as boys (Livingston, 2019). Whilst a greater proportion of girls' days are consumed by participation in housework, boys are found to spend more time engaging in leisure activities, with more time spent on screens or playing sports than their female counterparts (Livingston, 2019). As boys progress through adolescence, they are held even less accountable for tasks associated with the running of the household and 'are more likely to leave the domestic domain' altogether (Weisner and Garnier, 1994, p.26). This finding 'suggests that women do more housework than men because the individuals with whom they interact are more likely to hold them accountable for housework' (Thébaud, Kornrich and Ruppaner, 2021, p.1190). By showing that this phenomenon is present in childhood, the social interactionist perspective is reinforced.

As highlighted, the 'gender training that children receive from a young age', can exert great influence on future domestic arrangements (McClelland and Sliwa, 2022, p.20)[1]. In backdating imbalanced domestic arrangements to childhood, socialisation theory acknowledges the complex temporal scope involved in establishing housework arrangements. While participation in housework growing up is likely to play a part in shaping their future approach, there is a breadth of experiences prior to cohabiting with a partner that could potentially nullify, or reaffirm, parental influences. This period between childhood and maturity has been conceptualised as 'emerging adulthood' (Charbonneau, et al., 2019, p.291) and will be explored in the following section.

1 Several factors such as boarding school attendance and employing paid cleaners likely complicate the process of socialisation but have not yet been explored in the literature.

2.5 Emerging Adulthood

While childhood socialisation is pivotal in shaping the future household arrangements of heterosexual couples, there is a substantial interval in between. Coined 'emerging adulthood', this is a transitional period of life with scope for particularly rapid social development (McConnon et al., 2022; Zimmerman and Iwanski, 2014). Typically encompassing those aged 18-29, emerging adulthood is a time when patterns of behaviour are solidified and decisions for the future are made (Charbonneau et al., 2021; Fulcher, Dinella and Weisgram, 2015; Cui, Hong and Jiao, 2022). Often, this period involves living independently from parents and their 'constant monitoring' for the first time, offering an opportunity to establish new habits and practices (Fincham and Cui, 2010, p.3; Arnett, 2014). Emerging adults are free to exercise 'personal responsibility and independent decision making' over their living space in a way that they have not yet experienced (Conley et al., 2014, p.195). This period 'bridging the gap between adolescence and adulthood' is therefore potentially pivotal in the entrenchment of housework habits (Wenhold and Harrison, 2021, p.207). As 'gender differences in attitudes about social roles and plans may become more distinct during this stage', it is important to explore this stage of life (Fulcher, Dinella and Weisgram, 2015, p.178). Doing so can help determine the extent to which the lessons learnt during childhood are carried through to adulthood, or whether 'expectations change or develop as one matures' (Wenhold and Harrison, 2021, p.217).

Being among the most progressive generation, contemporary emerging adults are one of the least likely groups 'to endorse traditional gender role attitudes' (McConnon et al., 2022, p.51). Nevertheless, a recent study observed that, amidst the backdrop of patriarchy, 'emerging adult women expect to take on most of the childcare and housework' (McConnon et al., 2022, p.51). Emerging adult men, however, adopted a different outlook for the future, anticipating an arrangement 'in which they share responsibilities for both paid and unpaid work' (Charbonneau et al., 2019, p.291). This calls into question previous research which found that emerging adult men 'expected to be breadwinners for their families while expecting their wives to be caregivers and responsible for the family′ (Fulcher, Dinella and Weisgram, 2015, p.182). Emerging adult men promoted their desire for equality over domestic responsibilities, but when asked to imagine this in reality, 'were resistant to verbally claim these tasks as things they would primarily do in a future home' (Wenhold and Harrison, 2021, p.215). Further investigation is required to reconcile these contrasting findings and to gauge what factors are at play to cause emerging adults to 'anticipate and reproduce gender unequal practices in their future households' (McConnon et al., 2022, p.50).

Gaining a rich insight into emerging adults' approaches would help remedy the lack of clarity about 'exactly when housework patterns are established' (Charbonneau et al., 2019, p.291). As one's approach 'often becomes routine over time', disentangling the root of housework habits is an essential step in

addressing inequality (Charbonneau et al., 2019, p.291). It is therefore surprising that there is not greater research conducted into the everyday experiences of emerging adults' approaches to housework. I seek to rectify this gap, thus helping to pinpoint the origins of inequality and increase our understanding of how interactions in early adulthood help or hinder equality. Although there is a paucity of research on the domestic attitudes of emerging adults, research on shared housing arrangements has been conducted. Insights from this research on domestic negotiations between cohoused emerging adults are presented below.

2.5.1 Cohabitation and Shared Housing

Previously, 'the relevance of shared housing has been overlooked' (Clark et al., 2017, p.1192), with minimal research concentrating 'on how this living arrangement operates in practice' (Clark et al., 2019, p.233; Natalier, 2004). With growing economic pressures, young adults increasingly cohabit with friends or strangers for a number of years (Smith et al., 2011). As a result, the average age of people cohousing has increased significantly: from 23.9 in 2017 to 28.2 in 2020 (Harvey, 2020). In the current economic climate, cohousing cannot be 'assumed to be a short term transition between leaving the parental home and setting up of an independent home' but may be a longer term arrangement (Clark et al., 2017, p.1192). Greater attention has subsequently been paid to this household setup. Unlike the marital homes typically researched, in shared housing, 'there are no clear blueprints or institutionalised ideological guiding principles to shape behaviour' (Clark et al., 2019, p.233). Those cohabiting in non-romantic households are therefore theoretically freer from the gendered expectations that characterise heterosexual relationships and able to organise housework in the way they see most fit. One would anticipate equitable arrangements to be in place in these households given that those cohabiting most often belong to the younger generation and therefore hold more progressive views on gender equality. Findings however indicate that 'gender continues to be an important organising principle of domestic labour outside marital homes' (Natalier, 2003, p.253).

In Natalier's (2004) study, men were found to undertake less housework, positioning it as a somewhat optional activity. By 'opting in, rejecting responsibility and deprioritizing housework', men detached themselves from the completion of domestic labour, effectively excusing their lower contribution (Natalier, 2003, p.265). Moreover, men would not consider picking up the slack should someone else not complete their housework (Natalier, 2003). The question of whether the housework eventually does get completed in shared housing, and if so, by whom, was not answered in Natalier's study.

Some people in shared housing adopted rotas, deeming them 'the safest means of coping with household chores'(Clark et al., 2019, p.233). Emerging research however demonstrates them to be ineffective. Little conformation to rotas was found in shared housing, with people disregarding them

due to ‘more pressing or attractive claims on time’ (Clark et al., 2018, p.7; Natalier, 2004). Instead of incentivising those who do less housework to contribute, it was found that ‘that those who ignore chores are as likely to ignore rosters’ (Clark et al., 2019, p.235). This could be explained by the fact shared houses are not based on ‘confluent love – open communication, trust, cooperation, and a presumed “equality in emotional give and take”, unlike marital or romantic homes (Carlson et al., 2020, p.3). It is also explainable in part because, ‘the imposition of rosters was a reaction to parental structures: rotas too closely resembled the setup of a parental home, and therefore were not met well by those who ‘having left these confines… were keen to be free of them’ (Clark et al., 2019, p.237). There is currently insufficient research ‘into the way household chores are managed and responsibilities allocated and shared’ among occupants in shared housing (Clark et al., 2019, p.239). Exploring the first incidents of independent living is particularly pivotal to understanding how housework habits are formed and shaped over time. For a rising number of young people, this period of learning coincides with their further education.

University is an increasingly common stage of emerging adulthood, with an 11.1% increase from 2006 to 2023 of 18 year old students admitted (Bolton, 2023). As ‘students are separated from their parents and friends and have to orient themselves to new environments’, university provides a unique avenue through which to explore emerging adults’ experience of living independently for the first time (Liu et al., 2019, p.10). While some patterns of behaviour in shared housing may be applicable, student-hood is a unique chapter in an adult’s life and therefore research on cohousing only partially applies (Smith et al., 2011).

2.5.2 Students as Emerging Adults

With 80% of undergraduate students commencing university at age 24 or younger, the majority are in the emerging adulthood stage of life and thus undergoing a ‘period of considerable social development’ (Foulkes et al., 2021, p.1470). University is a time when many will ‘experience ontological shifts and identity transformations’ (Rutherford and Pickup, 2015, p.708). This is in part because of the education they receive, but largely because of the novel social experiences such as ‘new friends, sharing college accommodations, new responsibilities due to life at campus’ (Schirichian et al., 2022, p.278). For a large proportion of students, ‘it is often the first place that they have lived as adults, away from their childhood home’, exposing them to domestic responsibilities that they may not have encountered previously (Mogenet and Rioux, 2014, p.304). Without ‘established housework patterns of dyadic behaviours’, university students are at an impressionable juncture of life in which their approaches to housework are especially changeable (Charbonneau et al., 2019, p.293). As such, university is instructive in habit development and warrants independent exploration for its role in shaping housework approaches.

Patterns in shared housing cannot be generalised to university accommodation due to the unique characteristics of student living. Firstly, for most, university is the first experience of living away from home and precedes shared housing. As such it acts as a potential trial period for housework routines. It is crucial that equitable practices are embedded from conception, as 'once these unequal patterns are in place, it may be difficult to renegotiate them' (Baxter, Hewitt and Haynes, 2008, p.270). Being the first incidence of independent living, university is also the opportunity for expectations to be set and definitions of housework to be constructed.

Secondly, students possess a set of unique characteristics distinct from cohousing arrangements. Whereas in shared housing, inhabitants are likely to have differing working hours and incomes, students 'typically have the same amount of workload outside the home … and are independently provided for financially' (Mikula et al., 1997, p.277). Moreover, 'the normative climate among students seems to encourage gender equality' (Mikula et al., 1997, p.277). Students express adherence to 'less traditional gender role orientations than do the average population', and therefore are less likely to endorse a stereotypical gendered distribution of housework (Mikula et al., 1997, p.277). Theoretically, it follows that the three key justifications for inequality, centred around time, resources and gender, do not apply to students (Mikula et al., 1997, p.277). In university households, students should therefore model equality in their daily practices and 'encourage more equal participation of men and women in domestic labour' (Mikula et al.,1997, p.275).

Thirdly, university is distinct from shared housing in that it has explicit temporal boundaries. Upon enrolling to university, an individual is aware of the finite nature of their degree, whereas those in cohousing arrangements have more flexibility. University can be linked to the idea of liminality, which is 'taken to mean a position of ambiguity and uncertainty: being betwixt and between' (Beech, 2011, p.286). The liminal nature of student-hood has been interpreted in two main ways. Most have conjectured university to be a transitional phase of adulthood in which maturing is facilitated. Conceptualised as a 'temporary safe haven where emerging adults can explore identity possibilities', university becomes their home, and a place to experiment with routines and prepare for later life (Arnett, 2014, p.167). Conversely, some claim that university is rather an opportunity to 'avoid responsibilities that are thought to be typical of adulthood' (Padilla-Walker and Nelson, 2022, p.3).

Male students, compared to females, 'personalize their space less, suggesting a less dominant territorial behaviour' and a lesser consideration of university accommodation as home (Mogenet and Rioux, 2014, p.304). This suggests a potential gendered element in terms of how a student house is viewed. Whether students see university as a preparatory stage, or as a place in which 'many of the responsibilities of adult life' can be 'minimized, postponed, kept at bay' has received minimal attention (Arnett, 2014, p.167). Through my research on mixed-gender households, I explore male and female students'

perceptions of university housing, and how its fixed temporal boundaries may influence their approaches to housework.

2.5.3 Students and Housework

Housework is certainly no longer ‘a topic entirely missing from sociology’, however there are key demographic groups whose arrangements have not received sufficient coverage (Oakley, 1974, p.2). As sociologists, ‘we need to do a better job of assessing contributions to routine chores in a wider range of households’, including those inhabited by university students (Coltrane, 2000, p.1227). Despite being a valuable resource in understanding how behaviours are shaped, ‘to date, social relationships within university accommodation have not been examined in detail’ (Foulkes et al., 2021, p.1469). There has been ‘a general neglect of research on the ordinary domestic lives of young adults’ (Clark et al., 2018, p.4). In particular, ‘research on student behaviour for cleaning and hygiene applications has been limited in the literature’ (Çelik and Yüce, 2019, p.173). One thing that is known about students is that they individually undertake the least amount of housework compared to other groups. The Office for National Statistics suggests that full time students complete 12 hours a week of unpaid work, less than a half of that of a 36-45 year old (Payne and Vassilev, 2018). Of these 12 hours, two are dedicated to housework (Payne and Vassilev, 2018).

A potential explanation for this low average contribution is that by living in communal housing, students can spread the domestic load between more people. There is, however, a handful of studies that refute this hypothesis, suggesting instead that little time is spent on housework because of lower standards of cleanliness in student households. Observational studies uncovered that student ‘kitchens are consistently dirty – with trash, dishes, and food messes visible’ (Bose, 2008, p.45). Despite stereotypes that students are happy leaving mess to ‘sit for days’ (Bose, 2008, p.45), research shows that ‘issues with cleanliness, particularly in the kitchen’ are one of their ‘most frequent sources of conflict’ in student accommodation (Foulkes et al., 2021, p.1476). It has been found that ‘students are not likely to use the space if there is a mess that was previously left’ (Bose, 2008, p.57) and may sometimes ‘escalate to the point where individuals do not want to be at home’ (Foulkes et al., 2021, p.1477). With approximately a third of students experiencing ‘guilt, conflict, and/or resentment related to housework’ (Ogletree et al., 2005, p.732), domestic labour is understood to be a ‘major source of discord in shared housing’ (Clark et al., 2019, p.232).

In highlighting this, extant research provides some indication of the volatile and often tense atmosphere surrounding housework in student accommodation. While a valuable start, minimal consideration is given to the potential role of gender in shaping these interactions. Literature suggests that men’s contribution is stable across transitions, remaining reliably lower than women’s at the stages of life studied. Moving from dependence to independence upon entry to university, is one major transition that

is not fully understood. One study has been conducted on this topic, providing a useful foundation for my own research. A questionnaire of 98 students revealed that, 'the impact of societally based gender roles' was present amongst students (Mikula et al., 1997, p.286). Despite having identical time and resources available to them, female students 'spent more time and made larger contribution[s] to the majority of tasks' than male students (Mikula et al., 19971997b, p.275). Female students were reportedly less satisfied, and yet 'both women and men regarded the division as highly just' (Mikula et al., 1997, p.286).

Further exploration into this found that 'the justice ratings of flat-sharing students were at least partly biased by self-interest', meaning that students were driven towards minimising their own contribution rather than achieving equality (Mikula et al., 1997a, p.197). Prior to establishing long term relationships, most students 'are responsible for no one but themselves' and act accordingly (Arnett, 2014, p.155). This egocentric approach manifested in certain arrangements to housework being adopted more often, for instance 'individual responsibility' or 'threshold of necessity' in which 'those who have the strongest 'need' for the task being accomplished should do it' (Mikula et al., 1997a, p.203). Individualised arrangements such as these were far more commonly adopted by students than in familial households, primarily because 'students are less trusting and more sensitive to exploitation by loafing cohabitants' (Mikula et al., 1997a, p.204). When ranked by participants, however, these arrangements were considered most unjust as they did not 'ensure that all members contribute to the household tasks', something which most student households aimed for (Mikula et al., 1997a, p.204).

Another approach utilised by students was 'turn taking' (Mikula et al., 1997, p.194), which, although theoretically more equitable, was in reality the opposite, as it facilitated 'people with low contributions to continue making low contributions' (Mikula et al., 1997a, p.197). Albeit useful in demonstrating the largely gendered and inequitable setup of student households, questions remain regarding the high justice ratings of women despite their greater contributions. It fails to unpack whether gratitude plays a role in student households, or whether other mechanisms may be used by students to negotiate and justify their imbalanced participation in housework. Evidence suggests that a 'common source of conflict was the kitchen, typically with respect of cleaning and tidying', but there has been no exploration into the gendered nature of these interactions, and the potential resolutions (Foulkes et al., 2021, p.1477). Mikula et al. offer a valuable starting point, although 'further studies are clearly needed before any firm conclusions can be drawn' (Mikula et al., 1997, p.204). Furthermore, being conducted in 1997, the societal context in which this study took place is distant from the present day.

Conclusions founded on data from over 25 years ago are unlikely to be representative of trends in contemporary student households for several reasons. For one, there has been a notable erosion of the gender binary and stereotyping that characterised the 20th century. Egalitarianism has 'taken hold

ideologically and institutionally', with people and policies striving to level the playing field between men and women and actively discourage explicit sexism (England, 2010, p.158). Women participate more in the paid labour market and men in the unpaid labour market than ever before. These transformations should theoretically translate into student households becoming more equitable, particularly as university students are a 'powerful force and symbol of change in society' (Clark et al., 2018, p.3). However, without sufficient investigation, this cannot be presumed. I seek to investigate these predictions, updating the work of Mikula et al. using current data. In addition to evolving attitudes on gender, the constraints on how people use their time have changed. Certain tasks deemed necessary in 1997, such as 'calculating the phone bill' are no longer required (Mikula et al., 1997a, p.194). Owing both to technological advancements, and to changing ideals for how a house should appear, 'the meaning of housework varies between generations' (Coltrane, 2000, p.1221).

In light of the Dearing Report the year prior, 1998 saw the introduction of tuition fees in England. Unlike when Mikula et al.'s study was conducted, students are now accruing potentially life-long debt to attend university. University outcomes arguably carry heightened pressure and significance, potentially creating a more tense atmosphere within student households. Another sizable change in the last few decades concerns the shifting role of 'the university' in society. Whereas it used to be a more exclusive opportunity, the 'massification of higher education globally' has seen participation widen greatly (Rutherford and Pickup, 2015, p.703). This drastic growth in attendance 'especially among young women', makes university an increasingly common feature of emerging adulthood and an especially suitable site for exploring domestic habit formation (Tanner and Arnett, 2011, p.14). Collectively, these changes reaffirm the need for updated research into student housework arrangements. Beyond providing an up to date insight into the setup of university households, my research makes a novel contribution to theoretical understandings of domestic labour and gender. The significance of this research will be outlined in the following section.

2.6 Thesis Impact

While the arrangements of heterosexual couples, at various stages of their relationships, have been studied, this literature review has shown that the approaches to housework in young adults' first houses have received comparatively negligible attention. The forms of gendered socialisation that children are subject to, alongside the established routines of cohabiting and marital couples, are understood however the interim period is not. 'Wifework' has been explored in the households of established couples however earlier forms of managerial work are not researched (Maushart, 2003). Additionally, the distribution of the mental load has received increasing attention but not in the types of households that prelude living with a partner. In overlooking this impressionable phase of life, in which habits are trialled and established, key insights into the formation of housework routines are missed. I seek to bridge this gap and broaden the sociology of housework through researching the division and completion of domestic labour amongst university students. By investigating potential gendered patterns among young adults navigating housework negotiations for the first time, I strive to grasp the impact of this life stage on later distributions of labour. In doing so, a better understanding can be gained of the point at which women are 'deemed more responsible for housework' than men, and the factors at play in this role allocation (Thébaud, Kornrich and Ruppaner, 2021, p.1186). Underpinned by literature on the formative emerging adulthood phase and its overlap with university, I outline the importance of researching students' experiences navigating housework.

2.6.1 Theoretical Contribution

Akin to previous research in this domain, my thesis is fundamentally underpinned by the sociology of housework. Grounded in this feminist scholarship, my research positions the customary, gendered division of domestic labour to be an injustice. Unlike others, however, I build upon existing understandings of domestic labour by integrating two key perspectives: 'emerging adulthood' and 'doing gender'. In blending these approaches, I make an original theoretical contribution to studies of housework.

The emergence of 'adults' has been conceptualised through three stages: the 'launching position', the 'emerging adulthood proper' and finally 'young adulthood' (Tanner and Arnett, 2011, p.15). The first stage is characterised by the initial attainment of independence, followed by a temporary attachment to the 'identities and roles of childhood', and finally the establishment of a stable identity as an adult (Tanner and Arnett, 2011, p.15). During this time, individuals are exposed to the new challenge of trialling and establishing 'adult roles and responsibilities', decisions which ultimately influence their future life stages (Mohamed, 2012, p.11; Fulcher, Dinella and Weisgram, 2015; Charbonneau et al., 2019, p.291). By emphasising the variable nature of routines and practices, this perspective frames

housework, not as something ahistorical, but something learned over time. Application of this discourse illuminates student households as key sites for testing and modelling domestic practices. As such, my research focusses on how university, as a liminal life stage, influences the formation of future gendered patterns. This not only augments our understanding of an alternative household type but provides an insight into the blueprints for people's future arrangements.

While reframing housework in relation to emerging adulthood adds significant depth to existing conceptions, it does not address the gendered nature of housework. 'Doing gender' is complementary in this respect, providing a theoretical justification for the persistence of gendered behaviours in a supposedly egalitarian environment. West and Zimmerman have reconceptualised gender, not as an inherent set of characteristics, but 'the product of social doings of some sort' (West and Zimmerman, 1987, p.129). To this end, doing gender encompasses the 'socially guided perceptual, interactional, and micropolitical activities that cast particular pursuits as expressions of masculine and feminine "natures"' (West and Zimmerman, 1987, p.126). As such, individuals behave in such a way as 'to reflect or express gender' to others who they assume subscribe to the same norms as themselves (West and Zimmerman, 1987, p.127). As opposed to sex-based socialisation theories which imply consensus, this perspective emphasises the evolving construction of gender, formulating it 'as dynamic, situational and relational' (Nyman et al., 2018, p.44). Gender is therefore constituted through interaction and is dependent on the context in which someone is acting (West and Zimmerman, 1987). Berk postulates that housework is a 'production process' through which gender is structured (West and Zimmerman, 1987, p.143).

At university, where students are mostly living independently in a new environment for the first time, this process of constructing gender is especially marked, with young men and women 'trained in what the 'right' ways and 'wrong' ways to act are' (McClelland and Sliwa, 2022, p.16). By highlighting gender as 'a situated doing, carried out in the virtual or real presence of others', light is shed on the tension between desires for equality and desires for social acceptance (West and Zimmerman, 1987, p.126). While 'the idea of alikeness is at the heart of gender neutral policy', normative expectations emphasise difference between men and women and their suitability for certain activities (Nyman et al., 2018, p.38; McClelland and Sliwa, 2022). Individuals may choose to act in a certain way around peers in the awareness 'that their actions are assessed according to their gender' (Nyman et al., 2018, p.38). This enriches our understanding of student approaches to housework, where there is suggestion of a conflict between performances of gender, and aspirations for equality.

Through innovatively uniting concepts of doing gender with emerging adulthood, I make a novel theoretical contribution to sociological considerations of housework. I demonstrate how, as emerging adults, students can experiment and trial ways of doing gender during university. In doing so, they are themselves both reenacting, and co-constructing gender. As university overlaps with a 'unique and

important developmental stage' in which routines are cemented, students' experience of doing gender is particularly critical to forming future arrangements (Fincham and Cui, 2010, p.3). By combining these perspectives, my research provides a nuanced theoretical understanding of housework in a refined context. Beyond the theoretical advancement offered, my research has empirical value. As outlined in the following section, my study helps to expound 'the slow movement towards greater gender equality' and provide guidance for its eventual accomplishment (Nyman et al., 2018, p.45).

2.6.2 Empirical Contribution

Inequality enacts consequences on multiple levels: influencing the individual, relational and societal. Through examining the approaches and attitudes of students to housework, my research has the potential to positively impact each of these three spheres.

On an individual level, imbalanced housework arrangements can 'produce distress and negative feelings', particularly for whomever is the primary contributor (Carlson et al., 2020, p.3). For students, shouldering a greater domestic burden is likely to increase their stress and potentially impair their ability to fully engage with their academic or leisure commitments. Unpacking the roots of inequitable arrangements boosts the likelihood of addressing them and leading to students' improved 'satisfaction with and retention at a college or university' (Ogletree, Turner, Vieira and Brunotte, 2005, p.729).

On a relational level, the extent to which housework impacts the dynamics in student households is unknown, however previous research indicates 'issues of cleanliness' are a considerable source of conflict (Foulkes et al., 2021, p.1476). In some cohousing arrangements, 'kitchens became intimidating spaces that participants were afraid to enter' (Foulkes et al., 2021, p.1477). As a potential hindrance to students' academic engagement, housework is an important gendered issue for practitioners to be aware of. Should this be highlighted as an issue in student households, my research may act as a catalyst for the establishment of university interventions and support. The revision of the UK Athena Swan Charter in 2021 establishes a renewed impetus for eradicating gender inequalities in higher education (O'Mullane, 2021). Its agenda to promote equity and inclusion within universities may be facilitated by addressing issues in the domestic sphere. Sustained research would not only benefit individuals and the relationships between housemates but enhance structural support.

Finally, researching 'young people's everyday living arrangements provides a unique view of wide social and economic forces of change' (Clark et al., 2018, p.4). By identifying the role of university in shaping gendered practices, pursuits to achieve gender equality would be better informed (Foulkes et al., 2021). Individuals, institutions and 'society as a whole' would consequently benefit from this advancement (Liu et al., 2019, p.1). Informed by this empirical and theoretical drive, my research

explores the housework arrangements of students and their rationales, their impact, and the potential for future change.

2.6.3 Research Questions

To obtain a comprehensive picture of housework in mixed-gender households, this research explores various themes. The following questions encapsulate and provide structure to the key findings of my research:

1. How is housework distributed in mixed-gender student households?
2. What is the impact of this distribution on students?
3. What factors shape housework arrangements in mixed-gender student households?
4. How do students negotiate housework arrangements?

3. METHODOLOGY

Key to answering the above research questions is the adoption of a robust and thorough methodological framework. To gain an in depth understanding of students' approaches to domestic labour, I recruited undergraduate students living in mixed gender student households. These 150 students, recruited primarily through Facebook, completed a survey on their experience navigating housework while at university. Following this, participants were stratified into four groups based on their sentiment towards domestic labour and asked to partake in follow-up interviews. Subsequently, ten female students and ten male students were interviewed in a semi-structured format. Each interview was recorded, transcribed, coded and thematic analysis was conducted. Analysis was iterative, 'moving between empirical findings and conceptual frameworks' (Kuper, Reeves and Levinson, 2008, p.406).

I elaborate upon the methodological framework underpinning my research further in the rest of this chapter. I first provide an outline and rationale for utilising a mixed methods approach before moving on to discussing the specific methodological choices made. Tracing the journey from case recruitment to data analysis, I present a justification for each aspect of my approach, comparing alternatives and evaluating their strengths.

3.1 Mixed Methods Approach

Qualitative research, being oriented around individuals' 'unique viewpoints' (Castleberry and Nolen, 2018, p.808), allows for the 'subtleties and complexities about the research subjects and/or topic' to be unveiled (Anderson, 2010, p.2; Kuper, Reeves and Levinson, 2008). Qualitative research produces insights that are exploratory yet 'in depth, valid, reliable, credible, and rigorous' (Anderson, 2010, p.2). This is particularly important 'when the motivation, incentives, triggers etc. of the persons involved in a situation are unknown' (Jain, 2021, p.543). The novelty of research on student housework arrangements therefore makes qualitative methods particularly suitable to my thesis. Qualitative methods facilitate exploration into the 'beliefs, values, and motives that explain why the behaviours occur', shedding light on the factors determining students' domestic arrangements (Castleberry and Nolen, 2018). Accordingly, sociological understandings of housework are advanced through this deeper understanding. Moreover, with 'results that enrich our understanding of the meanings that people attach to social phenomena', pursuits towards gender equality are likely to benefit (Collingridge and Gantt, 2008, p.390).

Quantitative methods on the other hand, remain popular among positivist researchers seeking to '"prove" an outcome and/or provide validity and reliability' (Castleberry and Nolen, 2018, p.807). While this encourages 'statistical generalisability or representativeness', quantitative methods can overlook the idiosyncrasies of a phenomenon (Barbour, 2001, p.1115). A mixed methods approach harnesses the benefits of both qualitative and quantitative approaches and ameliorates their respective weaknesses. By using surveys and follow-up interviews, my research incorporates a large sample size and the granularity of deep reflections. With the ability 'to synergise the richness of qualitative data collected through open-ended questions alongside numerical data on responses to closed questions', a deeper understanding is gained (Pope, Williams and Cleland, 2022, p.734). It is especially important, as a feminist piece of research, to allow 'participants to speak about their own experiences' in an honest and open way (McHugh, 2014, p.145).

In light of these advantages, my thesis adopts a mixed methods approach, specifically leveraging online surveys and semi-structured interviews to enable 'research participants to speak for themselves' (Kuper, Reeves and Levinson, 2008, p.405). A number of other methods were considered but ultimately a mixed-methods approach was deemed the most appropriate.

For example, I considered using an observational study as they provide a helpful, comprehensive understanding into how individuals interact in a certain environment. They are however largely inaccurate due to reporting bias in which people represent themselves in a certain way when monitored

(Meah, 2014). For instance, researchers studying housework have found that houses were 'uncharacteristically clean when the observation' was carried out (Meah, 2014, p.16).

A popular method for studying the distribution of domestic labour is the time diary, where participants are asked to record their daily housework participation in a diary format. The data gathered then provides insights into the specific contributions of individuals in a household (Azevedo, Parkes and Rost, 2020). Rather than other methods which retrospectively enquire about housework routines, time diaries capture live contributions. People are found to inflate their housework contributions when asked about them afterwards, therefore 'questionnaires generate somewhat larger estimates for housework-time than diaries' (Kitterod and Lyngstad, 2005, p.13). In part this is because housework is 'usually carried out at irregular intervals and in spells of varying duration' and so is hard to keep track of (Kitterod and Lyngstad, 2005, p.15). Additionally, housework tasks can often feel like they take longer than they do in reality. Being contemporaneous in nature, 'time diaries generally are considered to generate the most accurate (and lower) estimates of time spent on specific activities' (Coltrane, 2000, p.1217).

However, this method is not without flaws; it does not capture a complete picture of housework distribution. While a solid understanding of some physical tasks may be gained, 'simultaneous activities are sometimes ignored or underestimated' (Coltrane, 2000, p.1217). Certain tasks, particularly those that involve a cognitive component, are disregarded altogether. To exacerbate this issue, 'varying conceptions of which activities are to be counted as housework' mean that two time diaries may encompass entirely different contents (Kitterod and Lyngstad, 2005, p.15). They also require significant effort from participants and need to be repeated to avoid biases 'if the day selected is not representative' (Coltrane, 2000, p.1217). In addition to failing to efficiently produce a precise snapshot of time spent on domestic labour, time diaries obtain minimal insight into the feelings of participants compared to interviews or surveys (Kitterod and Lyngstad, 2005). In relation to the objective of my study, to obtain an in-depth understanding of student's perceptions on housework, they were therefore not the most suitable tool.

3.2 Participant Recruitment

In order to gain a broad understanding of housework among undergraduate students in mixed-gender households, 150 participants were recruited to complete a survey with a combination of closed and open-ended questions. Participants were gathered from Durham University, a prestigious Russell Group University based in the North of England. Durham University operates via a collegiate system wherein most students live in communal, catered accommodation in their first year before moving out to privately rented housing for the remainder of their education. With a large proportion living in mixed-gender households in their second and third years of university, it offers a significant pool of potential participants. A limitation, however, is the lack of diversity in the sample presented. As of 2021, 38.4% of Durham University's cohort attended a fee-paying school, a figure which is hugely unrepresentative of the general British population (Bermingham, 2022). Both in terms of socioeconomic status, and ethnicity, Durham University is not diverse. I bear this limitation in mind throughout my study, acknowledging that my results are not representative of the population at large. However, as generalisability is not the objective of my research, this is not a critical issue. Gaining a strong empirical and theoretical insight into students' experiences is the priority.

As of 2022, Durham University had a total of 17,640 undergraduate students enrolled, making it relatively small in comparison to other UK institutions (Fleet and Doughty, 2023). Due to its size, there is a strong network among students. This is particularly evident through the existence of the university-wide Facebook page called 'Overheard at Durham University'. 22,645 students and alumni belong to this page where members frequently promote events, research opportunities, and share resources. Despite Facebook becoming a less popular social media channel among Generation Z, in comparison to Instagram or TikTok, Facebook remains the primary site for communication between students. The vast number of students and high engagement on this page made it a good place to recruit study participants. In light of this, and my proximity to the group as an existing member, an advertisement was published on 'Overheard at Durham University'.

Using social media in this way enables an 'increased sample size, greater sample diversity, easier access and convenience' and 'lower costs and time investment' (Benfield and Szlemko, 2006, p.2). Students were invited to participate through a link which first took them to a detailed information sheet on the involvement and potential risks of the study. They were asked to confirm their understanding of all the information provided and to consent to partake in this voluntary study. Only upon confirmation of this were students able to complete the survey, allowing them to 'self-select whether to take part in the study or not' (Pope, Williams and Cleland, 2022, p.733).

Alongside on-going recruitment through social media, I also employed quasi-snowballing methods to increase the reach of recruitment. Peers were asked to act as 'seeds', disseminating information to their network in order to amass further participants. Capitalising on people who were 'most accessible' allowed a suitable sample size to be reached more efficiently, something crucial given the limited time frame of the study (Anderson, 2010, p.4). The efficiency of this method does come at potential expense as constructing a sample from 'pre-established contacts' invites homogeneity and potential bias (Biernacki and Waldorf, 1981, p.148). This was largely avoided by asking peers to spread the word, rather than partake themselves.

As opposed to a random sampling technique where all strata are equally likely to be selected, a convenience snowball sample 'substantially increases the likelihood that the sample will not be representative of the population' (Fricker, 2008, p.200). This was somewhat mitigated by the use of a sizeable and accessible Facebook page. Furthermore, the intention of this study, as the first of its kind, is to gain 'in-depth analysis of social phenomena' in a bid to understand 'the how and the why of the issue at hand' (Jain, 2021, p.543; Fricker, 2008). The objective is not to affirm findings for the entirety of the population, but rather to generate 'rich data' in a specific milieu (Kuper, Reeves and Levinson, 2008, p.405).

The sampling methods employed are 'equally rigorous in their application', generating a fruitful yield through which to unpack housework routines (Collingridge and Gantt, 2008, p.391; Benfield and Szlemko, 2006). Ultimately, as a pioneering study on student approaches to housework, this combination of sampling methods was most suitable (Matteucci, 2013). Strengthening the study further, was the decision to combine an online qualitative survey with semi-structured interviews. The advantages of these methods are outlined later in this chapter.

3.3 Summary Data

Table 1 outlines the demographic composition of my sample and Table 2 details the individual characteristics of each of the 150 participants. Just over half of the sample (59.3%) are female. A small number (3.3%) identify as non-binary and one participant as a 'trans man'. Most are in their 2nd or 3rd year of university which makes sense given Durham University's collegiate system. The bulk of participants are white and there is a high proportion of students from independent schools. While high compared to the general population, this reflects the landscape of students at Durham University.

Table 1: Demographic Summary

Characteristic	Number	Percentage
Gender		
Female	89	59.3%
Male	56	37.3%
Non-Binary	5	3.3%
Year of Study		
1st Year	9	6.0%
2nd Year	66	44.0%
3rd Year	75	50.0%
Ethnicity		
White/ White British	115	76.7%
Asian	12	8.0%
White Other	9	6.0%
Mixed Race	7	4.7%
Latino/a	2	1.3%
European	1	0.7%
Black	1	0.7%
Greek Cypriot	1	0.7%
Middle Eastern	1	0.7%
Undisclosed	1	0.7%
Student Status		
Home Student	130	86.7%
International Student	12	8.0%
EU Student	8	5.3%
School Status		
Comprehensive School	57	38.0%
Selective School	20	13.3%
Independent School (day)	50	33.3%
Independent School (boarding)	17	11.3%
International School	5	3.3%
Home School	1	0.7%

Table 2: Participant Information

Participant	Gender	Year of Study	Ethnicity	Student Status	Secondary Education
1	Female	3rd year	White	Home student	State School
2	Female	3rd year	White British	Home student	Independent School (day only)
3	Male	3rd year	White	Home student	State School
4	Male	3rd year	White British	Home student	Independent School (day only)
5	Non-binary	3rd year	White British	Home student	State Selective School
6	Male	3rd year	White British	Home student	State Selective School
7	Male	3rd year	White British	Home student	Independent School (day only)
8	Female	3rd year	White British	Home student	State School
9	Male	2nd year	Nordic and Irish-emigrated White	EU student	State School
10	Male	3rd year	British Indian	Home student	Independent School (day only)
11	Male	3rd year	White	Home student	State Selective School
12	Female	3rd year	White British	Home student	State Selective School
13	Male	3rd year	Brown	Home student	Independent School (day only)
14	Female	2nd year	Hong Kong Chinese	International student	Independent School (day only)
15	Male	3rd year	White British	Home student	State School
16	Male	3rd year	White British	Home student	State School
17	Male	2nd year	Mixed	International student	International
18	Female	3rd year	Middle Eastern	Home student	State Selective School
19	Female	2nd year	White British	Home student	State Selective School
20	Male	2nd year	White British	Home student	State School
21	Female	3rd year	White British	Home student	Independent School (day only)
22	Female	3rd year	White British	Home student	State School
23	Female	2nd year	White British	Home student	State Selective School
24	Female	3rd year	Chinese/Asian	Home student	State Selective School
25	Male	3rd year	White British	Home student	Independent School (boarding)

26	Female	3rd year	British	Home student	Independent School (boarding)
27	Female	3rd year	British	Home student	Independent School (day only)
28	Female	3rd year	White British	Home student	Independent School (day only)
29	Female	2nd year	White British	Home student	State Selective School
30	Female	3rd year	White British	Home student	Independent School (day only)
31	Female	3rd year	White British	Home student	State School
32	Male	2nd year	White British	Home student	Independent School (boarding)
33	Male	2nd year	White British	Home student	International school abroad
34	Female	3rd year	White	Home student	State School
35	Female	3rd year	White British	Home student	Independent School (day only)
36	Female	2nd year	Mixed Race British	Home student	State Selective School
37	Female	2nd year	White British	Home student	State School
38	Male	3rd year	Chinese	International student	Independent School (boarding)
39	Female	2nd year	White British	Home student	Independent School (day only)
40	Female	2nd year	White British	Home student	Independent School (day only)
41	Male	3rd year	White British	Home student	State School
42	Female	2nd year	White	Home student	Independent School (day only)
43	Female	2nd year	White British	Home student	State School
44	Male	3rd year	White British	Home student	Independent School (day only)
45	Male	2nd year	Latino	Home student	State School
46	Female	3rd year	White British	Home student	Independent School (boarding)
47	Female	2nd year	White British (Celtic)	Home student	Independent School (boarding)
48	Male	2nd year	White British	Home student	State School
49	Female	2nd year	Indian	International student	Independent School (day only)
50	Male	2nd year	White British	Home student	State School
51	Female	2nd year	White British	Home student	Independent School (day only)
52	Male	3rd year	British	Home student	Independent School (day only)
53	Male	3rd year	British	Home student	State School

54	Female	3rd year	Chinese	Home student	State School
55	Non-binary	2nd year	White	International student	Independent School (day only)
56	Male	3rd year	White British	Home student	State School
57	Male	2nd year	White	Home student	Independent School (boarding)
58	Female	2nd year	White British	Home student	State School
59	Male	2nd year	White British	Home student	Independent School (day only)
60	Female	3rd year	White British	Home student	Independent School (day only)
61	Male	2nd year	Black	Home student	Independent School (boarding)
62	Female	2nd year	White British	Home student	State Selective School
63	Female	2nd year	White	International student	State School
64	Female	3rd year	White British	Home student	Independent School (boarding)
65	Female	2nd year	Indian	Home student	Independent School (day only)
66	Female	3rd year	White	Home student	Independent School (day only)
67	Female	1st year	White British	Home student	State School
68	Female	3rd year	White British	Home student	State School
69	Female	3rd year	White British	Home student	Independent School (day only)
70	Non-binary	1st year	British	Home student	State School
71	Female	3rd year	White British	Home student	State School
72	Female	2nd year	White British	Home student	State School
73	Male	1st year	White	Home student	State School
74	Female	2nd year	White	Home student	Independent School (day only)
75	Female	2nd year	European	EU student	Independent School (day only)
76	Female	3rd year	White British	Home student	Independent School (day only)
77	Male	2nd year	White British	Home student	State School
78	Female	3rd year	White British	Home student	State School
79	Female	3rd year	White British	Home student	State School
80	Female	2nd year	White	Home student	State School
81	Female	3rd year	White British	Home student	State Selective School

82	Female	2nd year	White British	Home student	State School
83	Female	2nd year	White	Home student	Independent School (day only)
84	Female	2nd year	Mixed race	Home student	Independent School (day only)
85	Female	3rd year	White British	Home student	State Selective School
86	Non-binary	3rd year	White British	Home student	Independent School (day only)
87	Male	3rd year	White Welsh	Home student	Independent School (day only)
88	Female	2nd year	White	International student	Canadian publicly funded school (like a state school)
89	Male	2nd year	n/a	International student	Independent School (day only)
90	Female	3rd year	White	EU student	International school
91	Female	2nd year	Chinese	International student	Independent School (day only)
92	Male	2nd year	Hong Kong Chinese	International student	State School
93	Female	2nd year	White British	Home student	State School
94	Male	3rd year	White	EU student	Independent School (boarding)
95	Female	2nd year	White British	Home student	State School
96	Male	2nd year	Greek Cypriot	EU student	Independent School (day only)
97	Female	2nd year	British	Home student	State School
98	Female	1st year	White	International student	Homeschooled
99	Female	2nd year	Irish	Home student	Catholic Grammar School
100	Female	3rd year	White British	Home student	State School
101	Male	2nd year	White British	Home student	State School
102	Female	3rd year	White British	Home student	State School
103	Female	2nd year	White	Home student	Independent School (boarding)
104	Non-binary	1st year	White British	Home student	State Selective School
105	Male	3rd year	White British/ French	Home student	Independent School (boarding)
106	Female	2nd year	White British	Home student	Independent School (day only)
107	Female	3rd year	White	Home student	Independent School (day only)
108	Female	1st year	White British	Home student	State School
109	Female	2nd year	Black African and White	EU student	Independent School (day only)

110	Female	2nd year	White British	Home student	Independent School (day only)
111	Female	3rd year	Mixed Race British	Home student	State School
112	Female	3rd year	White	Home student	State School
113	Female	3rd year	White European	Home student	Independent School (day only)
114	Female	3rd year	White British	Home student	State School
115	Male	2nd year	Latina	Home student	Independent School (day only)
116	Male	3rd year	White other	Home student	State Selective School
117	Male	2nd year	White British-Slavic	Home student	Independent School (day only)
118	Male	3rd year	White	Home student	Independent School (day only)
119	Female	2nd year	White	Home student	State School
120	Female	2nd year	White	Home student	State Selective School
121	Male	3rd year	White British	Home student	State Selective School
122	Female	3rd year	White British	Home student	State School
123	Female	2nd year	White	International student	Independent School (boarding)
124	Female	2nd year	White British	Home student	Independent School (boarding)
125	Female	3rd year	White	Home student	State School
126	Female	1st year	White	Home student	State School
127	Female	2nd year	Half Chinese, half English	Home student	Independent School (day only)
128	Female	3rd year	White British.	Home student	State School
129	Male	2nd year	White British	Home student	State School
130	Male	2nd year	White other	EU student	School abroad
131	Female	1st year	White British	Home student	Independent School (day only)
132	Female	2nd year	White	Home student	Independent School (day only)
133	Female	2nd year	White British	Home student	State School
134	Male	3rd year	White British	Home student	Independent School (boarding)
135	Male	3rd year	British Pakistani	Home student	State School
136	Female	3rd year	British Indian	Home student	State Selective School
137	Male	2nd year	Mixed English/ Indian	Home student	Independent School (boarding)

138	Male	2nd year	White British	Home student	Independent School (day only)
139	Female	3rd year	White	Home student	Independent School (day only)
140	Female	3rd year	White UK	Home student	Independent School (day only)
141	Male	2nd year	White	Home student	Independent School (day only)
142	Male	3rd year	White British	Home student	State School
143	Male	2nd year	White British	Home student	Independent School (boarding)
144	Male	3rd year	White British	Home student	State School
145	Male	1st year	White	Home student	State School
146	Male	3rd year	White	EU student	State Selective School
147	Female	3rd year	White British	Home student	State School
148	Male	3rd year	White British	Home student	State School
149	Trans man	3rd year	White British	Home student	State School
150	Female	3rd year	White	Home student	Independent School (day only)

3.4 Data Collection: Preliminary Investigation Through Surveys

Upon their informed consent, a ten minute online survey was administered to 150 participants. This method is an 'important means of obtaining direct responses from participants about their understandings, conceptions, beliefs, and attitudes' and was therefore deemed an appropriate starting point for gathering data (Harris and Brown, 2010, p.2). Used in 'descriptive, explanatory as well as exploratory research', qualitative surveys are an accessible and fructuous tool (Jain, 2021, p.543). Digital surveys in particular facilitate the collation of 'in-depth qualitative responses from a significantly larger number of respondents than would normally be possible using other approaches' (Pope, Williams, and Cleland, 2022, p.734).

Four Likert scale questions were incorporated, in which participants responded 'to prompts by selecting from predetermined answers' (Harris and Brown, 2010, p.1). These questions mirrored those asked by Mikula et al. in their 1997 study to facilitate comparison and were accompanied by five answers ranging across a spectrum from negative to positive (Mikula et al., 1997; Ogletree, Worthen, Turner and Vickers, 2006). Supplying a 'response continuum' of answers in this way allows for participant opinions to be efficiently gathered (Malhotra, 2008, p.917). To consolidate the findings of Likert scale questions, and acquire a more thorough understanding of participants' attitudes, seven open-ended questions were interspersed throughout. One of these was accompanied by a photograph of a poster with the message 'Men and Boys! Revolution begins in the sink!'. This image can be viewed on question 11 of the survey found in Appendix 1: Digitally Administered Survey. Participants were asked their response to this image, providing an insight into their gender ideology and the significance they attribute to housework inequality. Utilising an image in this way conjures an emotional response that cannot be replicated with other non-visual methods (Galvez Espinoza et al., 2022). As 'images evoke deeper elements of human consciousness than do words', certain 'information, feelings, and memories, that are due to the photograph's particular form of representation', are allowed to surface (Harper, 2002, p.13). The inclusion of a poster thus enabled the 'verbal material to be steered and also enriched' (Reyah-Levy, 2012, p.1100) and ultimately added 'validity and reliability to a word-based survey' (Harper, 2002, p.22). The use of visual methods in this way helped to anchor the research and provide prompts to participants.

At the end of the survey, there were five demographic questions, positioned accordingly as to not influence participants' responses: the year of study, student status, ethnicity, gender and secondary school status. The latter of these measures is recommended as a means of indicating someone's socioeconomic status (Cabinet Office, 2018). Other measures can be used, such as parent qualification or postcode however school status allows for a simpler categorisation of students (Cabinet Office, 2018). Cumulatively, these questions convey the sample composition.

Each question in the survey was mandatory however the very final question, asking participants to provide a contact email address for a follow-up interview, was voluntary, allowing participants to opt-in to further communication if they wished. Being online and with contact details being optional, the survey was anonymous to the researcher by default.

Using Google Forms, 'a free online service with a user-friendly visual layout', data could easily be gathered and exported for analysis (Jain, 2021, p.545). Collecting data via the internet 'is convenient and can greatly extend sample representativeness' by reaching a wider range of participants with little incremental effort (Benfield and Szlemko, 2006, p.10). Some scholars have raised questions over whether digital methods would 'constitute an undue burden on a specific population, for example, computer illiterate individuals' (Benfield and Szlemko, 2006, p.8). This may be a consideration for certain studies, however for my thesis, wherein all participants are enrolled on university courses in which digital competence is required, this is not an issue.

Despite these advantages, 'the use of [the] Internet is not without some risk.' (Benfield and Szlemko, 2006, p.10). There is the potential for both measurement error and nonresponse error in the employment of digital surveys. The former researching bias concerns the potential for questions to inaccurately reflect the interests of the study and therefore generate irrelevant data (Ponto, 2015; Fricker, 2008). The latter relates to the likelihood of people not responding, or partially responding to the questions of an online survey (Ponto, 2015). While this is avoided by the compulsory nature of questions in my survey, it is true that there is 'no information on those who chose not to opt in' (Fricker, 2008, p.199). While this is a potential avenue for future projects to explore, it does not fall under the scope of this research (Ponto, 2015).

The use of surveys proved a hugely valuable and efficient means of gathering preliminary data on students. As a self-administered method, they are however vulnerable to 'respondent unreliability, ignorance, misunderstanding, reticence, or bias', and alone provide a less personal insight (Harris and Brown, 2010, p.2). To overcome this, semi-structured interviews were conducted with a subsample of 20 students. The process by which these participants were gathered is described in the following section.

3.5 Preliminary Analysis

By utilising the Azure Machine Learning add-on in Microsoft Excel, I conducted sentiment analysis on the survey data. Informed by an existing glossary of positive and negative affiliated phrases, I generated a score from 0 to 1 reflecting the sentiment of answers. This allowed for those with a negative, neutral or positive experience to be categorised. A typology was then cultivated and developed. This consisted of four categories based on participants' emotion towards housework. By reviewing the open-ended questions on students' experiences while at university, I was able to group participants.

From closer, manual analysis of responses, I refined these categories to four mutually exclusive strata: 'Enraged', 'Inconvenienced', 'Happy' or 'Uninterested', based on adjectives or synonymous phrases participants mentioned. Various iterations of this typology were considered, however re-examination of the data confirmed that one of these four characteristics applied to all participants. I was able to use this typology to select participants for interview. I adopted a stratified sampling approach, recruiting participants from each of the four categories to represent varied student experiences and perspectives.

An additional consideration for the interview sample was the gender of participants. Most existing research on housework focuses on the female perspective, however this 'focus on women tells only half of the story' (Hu and Yucel, 2018, p.104). As advised by Hu and Yucel, it was 'crucial to collect and analyse reliable data from men to provide comprehensive recommendations for advancing the gender revolution' and to develop accurate theorisations of housework (Hu and Yucel, 2018, p.104). With this in mind, I sought an even proportion of male and female interviewees. I was able to source ten female and ten male participants for interviews, whilst also maintaining an even representation of each of the four categories. The resulting data facilitated comparison and circumvented the issues of previous research on housework wherein the female voice is prioritised (Cerrato and Cifre, 2018; Lyonette and Crompton, 2015). Sampling for interviews in this way allowed for a range of voices to be heard. Unpacking their various experiences was made easier by the use of semi-structured interviews.

3.6 Data Collection: Follow-up Interviews

Following the collection of data via online surveys, semi-structured interviews were conducted with 20 students, ten female and ten male. Whereas surveys typically generate more succinct responses, interviews 'expose the variabilities and inconsistencies within human thinking', providing a more detailed insight into the experiences and feelings of participants (Harris and Brown, 2010, p.9; Ponto, 2015). A survey alone offers a 'partial and incomplete understanding of a participant's point of view', whereas an interview can draw out a more personal insight (Harris and Brown, 2010, p.2). Interviews in general are 'useful in getting a broader understanding of how and why certain things happen and what are the opinions, motivations, interests, feelings of the people involved' (Jain, 2021, p.541). Despite the 'time consuming and resource intensive' nature of interviews, they are a highly productive form of data generation (Jain, 2021, p.542).

In the context of domestic labour, interviews are especially useful as the complexities of everyday life are hard to convey within a written response. The incorporation of interview data has been explicitly urged by scholars in the field: 'future research should include longer in-depth interviews to gain greater understanding of how emerging adults are making sense of their future work-life balance and household dynamics' (McConnon, Midgette, Conry-Murray, 2022, p.63). The 'descriptive accountings' harnessed from interviews were evidently ideal for understanding the performance of gender and therefore this study (West and Zimmerman, 2009, p.116).

Semi-structured interviews were selected as the most appropriate method compared to other interview styles, due to their resemblance to conversational exchanges. Accordingly, participants are 'freer to speak to or ignore topics as they chose' in semi-structured interviews, which is beneficial for allaying any potential emotional distress or anxiety (Harris and Brown, 2010, p.10). In addition to facilitating empathy, 'investigating gender ideologies in the form of open-ended questions can provide much needed insight into how emerging adults make sense of gender roles, the gendering of labour, and balancing work and life demands' (McConnon, Midgette, Conry-Murray, 2022, p.50). Semi-structured interviews subsequently 'provide much needed insight', especially with regards to housework arrangements among students, and were therefore selected as most fitting for my research (McConnon, Midgette, Conry-Murray, 2022, p.50). Due to their flexible nature, the lengths of interviews varied from 45 to 75 minutes in length.

Each of the 20 interviews were conducted over an audio call to reduce the burden on participants' time, and to facilitate free conversation. Individuals are also 'more willing to reveal sensitive information in a telephone interview than in a face-to-face interview' as it feels more anonymous (Breunig and

McKibbin, 2011, p.1004). Additionally, the researcher is less likely to influence participants' responses through any subliminal reactions they may have (Breunig and McKibbin, 2011).

Conducting semi-structured interviews in the months following the survey allowed for 'clarification and deeper insights' into students' domestic routines (Matteucci, 2021, p.193; Harris and Brown, 2010). Every interview, with the verbal and written permission of the participant, was recorded and then transcribed. After 20 interviews, both data saturation was reached and an equal number from each category represented. Therefore, no further interviews were conducted, and the secondary process of analysis began.

3.7 Thematic Analysis

In order to capture the complexity of the survey and interview data, and develop a 'systematic and thorough' understanding, I chose to conduct thematic analysis (Castleberry and Nolen, 2018, p.807). This approach 'represents a foundational, conceptually demanding method for qualitative analysis', centred around the development of themes central to the data (Bree and Gallagher, 2016, p.2813). As a 'flexible and useful research tool', thematic analysis 'provides a rich and detailed, yet complex, account' (Vaismoradi, Turunen and Bondas, 2013, p.400).

Some thematic analysis is performed deductively by sifting data according 'to a pre-determined coding frame' (Bree and Gallagher, 2016, p.2813). This approach however relies upon 'analytic preconceptions' which may influence the validity of findings (Bree and Gallagher, 2016, p.2813). The 'more deductive, hypothesis centred approach favoured by quantitative researchers' does not suitably capture the complexity of qualitative data, particularly in pioneering research where hypotheses are not yet developed (Castleberry and Nolen, 2018, p.809). In 'cases where there are no previous studies dealing with the phenomenon' it is more suitable to derive themes directly from the data itself as opposed to testing extant theories (Vaismoradi, Turunen and Bondas, 2013, p.401). In a bid to achieve a richer, more 'data-driven' analysis, I therefore implemented an inductive approach (Wenhold and Harrison, 2021, p.210; Vaismoradi, Turunen and Bondas, 2013). By using an 'open or emergent meaning' coding scheme, in which 'the scheme is created as coding ensues', I was able to provide a meaningful insight into a topic that had received insufficient attention prior (Castleberry and Nolen, 2018, p.809).

In order to expand on the theoretical contributions already made to the sociology of housework, I used an abductive approach, drawing from existing theories to generate new understandings. By including a poster in my survey, participants were prompted to reflect on existing ideas while being given the space to develop their own view. With the sociology of housework fundamentally underpinning my work, a more thorough and informed framework on domestic labour in student households could be formed. This approach lends itself to thematic analysis which involves 'breaking the text into relatively small units of content and submitting them to descriptive treatment' (Vaismoradi, Turunen and Bondas, 2013, p.400). Through this process, perceptive conclusions were drawn from the data.

Thematic analysis of large sets of data such as mine requires coding, which is the 'pivotal operation for moving toward the discovery of a core category or categories' (Strauss, 1987, p.55). Coding consists of three stages – identifying the codes, arranging them into clusters, then creating broader conceptual categories (Jain, 2021). A code can be understood as a 'descriptive label' which 'serves as a tag used to retrieve and categorise similar data (Castleberry and Nolen, 2018, p.809). The creation of codes allows

for researchers to ‘pull out and examine all of the data across the dataset associated with that code’ (Castleberry and Nolen, 2018, p.809). In the analogy of a house used by Braun and Clarke, ‘codes are the bricks that comprise the walls or themes’ (Castleberry and Nolen, 2018, p.809).

The survey responses, while already written out, were exported into Microsoft Excel to facilitate filtering more easily. I did an initial analysis of this data to develop the typology which was used to recruit interviewees. This data was then recombined with the interview data for an abductive analysis of all qualitative data. Therefore, both transcripts and open-ended survey questions were subject to the process of coding. Although subject to thematic analysis together, the responses from interviews are denoted in the results section with underlining as to distinguish them from survey responses.

In line with typical coding practices, I first identified potential codes, marking out ‘interesting features of the data systematically across the entire data set’ (Vaismoradi, Turunen and Bondas, 2013, p.402). I then began collapsing codes into larger categories based on their common ground, for example whether they pertained to physical housework, cognitive tasks etc. (Galvez Espinoza et al., 2022). In this way, I was gradually ‘collating codes into potential themes’ while re-consolidating the empirical findings in an iterative fashion (Vaismoradi, Turunen and Bondas, 2013, p.402; Kuper, Reeves and Levinson, 2008). I repeated this process until I could not distinguish any new patterns or themes emerging (Castleberry and Nolen, 2018). Over time, ‘themes were created based on code frequency, shared meaning, and the co-occurrence of codes’ (McConnon, Midgette, Conry-Murray, 2022, p.53).

By refining these themes and ‘generating clear definitions and names for each’, thorough insights from both the survey and interview were acquired (Vaismoradi, Turunen and Bondas, 2013, p.402). Upon organising these into ‘a comprehensive whole’ I was able to produce ‘substantive theory grounded in the experiences of those familiar with the phenomenon of interest’ – i.e. students in mixed-gender households (Collingridge and Gantt, 2008, p.393).

3.8 Ethical Considerations

Upholding rigorous ethical standards was a priority throughout this study. While it involved minimal risk of significant harm, there were some ethical considerations to be aware of. First and foremost, the disclosure of participants' data and any identifying factors, was a risk. Although unlikely, numerous steps were taken to protect the 'physical security of data' and ensure the utmost confidentiality (Benfield and Szlemko, 2006, p.6). All survey and interview data were saved on a password protected device accessible to the researcher only. Personal information such as phone numbers, addresses, dates of birth, were not collected. Any identifying factors have been omitted from the research, and numbers have been assigned to demarcate participants.

To mitigate the aforementioned risks, it was crucial to gain the written informed consent of participants and maintain effective communication. Full transparency was offered regarding the use of participants' data and how it would be stored, allowing them to make an informed decision on whether to partake (Anderson, 2010). Prior to completing the survey, students were provided with a thorough outline of the research, its involvement, intentions, and potential risks (Benfield and Szlemko, 2006).

Other potential risks refer to the nature of the research topic and the deeply political nature of the domestic space. Problematic dynamics can manifest on a daily basis, the most extreme being violence. As highlighted by Oakley in her 1974 'Sociology of Housework', violence is not the only form of oppression in the home. It is often a highly gendered space where power is contested in everyday interactions. The home may therefore evoke issues for some participants.

A more likely risk pertains to the widespread nature of housework-related conflict (Charbonneau, Lachance-Grzela and Bouchard, 2021). With domestic labour a 'frequent source' of disagreements, students may have experienced frustration and recounting this may revive these feelings (Daminger, 2019, p.609). For women who are typically burdened with the majority of housework, and contend with stringent expectations on their femininity, discussing domestic life may be particularly frustrating. Going forward, discussing their housework routines and any potential inequity, may raise participants' consciousness on the issue and increase the likeliness of future conflict.

To alleviate these risks, participants were granted full autonomy in both the survey and interview, to withdraw at any time from the study without question. As the interviews were semi-structured, any topics that were received negatively could be avoided or steered away from. In equipping participants with all the information necessary to make an informed decision, and by emphasising the voluntary nature of the study, any risks were greatly minimised.

Participants are more likely to speak openly when given the opportunity to remain anonymous. It has been theorised that 'the anonymity of the internet could avoid the effects of social desirability', as participants are more likely to be candid if unidentifiable (Pope, Williams and Cleland, 2022, p.733; Harris and Brown, 2010). Conforming to socially desirable views can exert influence on domestic labour research as people who feel 'pressures to do much housework overreport their contributions' (Kitterod and Lyngstad, 2005, p.13). Allowing participants to remain completely anonymous may therefore result in more truthful data gathered.

A final concern during my research relates to my positionality, first and foremost as a woman, but also as a student with experience in housework negotiations. On the one hand, as a feminist piece of research, it is important to be attuned to women's voices and perspectives which are so often devalued. It is also useful to understand how student households operate. However, having experienced gendered expectations in the home, there is the potential for data to be interpreted in line with my own experiences. Furthermore, my position as a female student may impact the way in which participants communicate. While some female students may feel more at ease, some male students may respond less favourably. My research design has accounted for this, with surveys to minimise impartiality. During interviews, I actively avoided asking leading questions or sharing my experience and adopted the same structure regardless of the individual's gender. With these measures in place, I enhanced the rigour of my research and uncovered a number of crucial patterns within mixed-gender student households. In doing so, I have successfully built upon existing sociological theory and expanded the understandings of housework arrangements to include a distinct phase of life.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This chapter presents an amalgamation of results alongside discussion of their significance. I begin by exploring the attitudes towards, and organisation of, housework in mixed-gender student households. This is followed by an analysis of the impact these prevailing arrangements have, the reasons for their persistence, and the strategies used by participants in response. I conclude with an evaluation of possible university-wide interventions.

Throughout, I illustrate how, despite the widespread promotion of egalitarian views in wider society, gender is a central factor in the organisation of housework among students. Excerpts from students' survey and interview responses demonstrate this. Each excerpt is displayed alongside the participant's assigned number and gender. F is used to denote a female participant, M for male and N for non-binary. If a number is underlined, it is to indicate that it is a response from an interview rather than the survey.

In demonstrating the disparity between male and female students' approaches to housework, I show how gendered inequalities are established prior to couples cohabitating. This is of paramount importance; both for informing practical solutions, and for building a more extensive understanding of housework.

4.1 Attitudes towards housework: (Dis)satisfaction

This section offers an insight into the attitudes of students towards domestic labour and its distribution within their household. In doing so, I shed light on the factors that determine students' satisfaction, and more often, dissatisfaction, with housework. This satisfaction in the home is important as it is a powerful determinant of one's overall happiness and wellbeing (Nameda, 2013). Moreover, in addition to impacting their overall happiness, unfavourable housework arrangements can put a strain on people's relationships (Charbonneau et al., 2021; Ogletree, Worthen, Turner and Vickers, 2006). Domestic labour is known to cause 'tension, conflicts and dissatisfaction between romantic partners', however the attitudes of emerging adults towards domestic labour, and their criteria for success, are not fully understood (Charbonneau, Lachance-Grzela and Bouchard, 2019, p.290; Nameda, 2013).

Throughout, the data demonstrates dissatisfaction among participants with regards to their housework arrangements. The largely negative outlook conveyed by participants suggests that housework is a problem prior to individuals forming partnerships. University households are arenas where frustration and conflict already emerge. Despite most participants conveying negative emotions regarding their housework setup, a small proportion of students did not articulate a desire for change, instead expressing contentment with their arrangements. Although a minority, understanding the justifications of these students helps advance our understanding of successful domestic arrangements.

4.1.1 Satisfaction

31% of female students and 42% of male students reported being satisfied with their distribution of domestic labour. To gain a balanced perspective, it was necessary to speak to students with a positive experience of their housework arrangement. Satisfied students cited three common grounds for their disposition: equity, amity, and overall household cleanliness.

Firstly, several participants attributed their satisfaction to the equitable division of household tasks. An equitable division was loosely quantified as one in which people contributed 'more or less' the same as one another (82F). Students' flexible approach to what is considered equitable suggests an awareness that it is unrealistic to aim for an entirely even distribution. Aiming instead for a 'more or less' equal spread of tasks may be a way of reducing expectations. 84.7% of participants in my survey stated that it is 'important' (83/150) or 'extremely important' (44/150) to share domestic responsibilities equally, corroborating the desire for a roughly equal distribution as important for participants' satisfaction. This echoes existing claims that young adults strive to 'share domestic and paid work more' than in previous generations (Charbonneau, Lachance-Grzela and Bouchard, 2019, p.292; England, 2010). Splitting housework evenly was therefore identified as one of three primary factors influencing students' satisfaction:

‘Nothing [to change], equally distributed and done well.’ (53M)

‘I wouldn’t change it as it is more or less equal.’ (82F)

‘We’ve split it evenly more or less throughout, so I think we’re doing okay.’ (100F)

100F regarded sharing tasks equally as an indicator of ‘doing okay’. In this way, equity is considered an achievement and a standard for success. It also suggests that satisfaction with housework is something which has to be worked on in order to maintain it.

Adopting egalitarian arrangements was not the only important consideration for participants. Another factor deemed significant in shaping student satisfaction was that of balance:

‘We're very balanced - more than happy with the current arrangement.’ (21F)

‘In our household, it’s pretty balanced - if anything, it’s slightly leaning towards the men doing more work. But I cannot complain, as it’s a pretty harmonious situation, and I wouldn’t want it to change at all.’ (142M)

For these participants, balance pertains to the atmosphere within a household, and the amity felt by its collective inhabitants. As 142M described, his satisfaction is determined more by how ‘harmonious’ and peaceful the environment is, than the distribution itself.

In addition to striving for equity, these participants posited household balance, or harmony, as a measure of success. This idea of ‘balance’ provides an insightful glimpse into the numerous ways satisfaction may be achieved among emerging adults. Contrary to previous assumptions, students are not solely concerned with minimising their own contribution but may be invested in the collective satisfaction of their household (Mikula et al., 1997).

In addition to equity and amity, a third factor is cited by students as contributing to their satisfaction with housework: the cleanliness of their household. Being ‘tidy’ and ‘clean’ to a reasonable standard is evidently important for participants, and informs their perception of the success of their household:

‘I wouldn’t [want change] - everyone’s very relaxed and we’re all somewhat tidy.’ (11M)

‘In terms of the house, its clean so I’m content.’ (145M)

As showcased above, maintaining tidiness to a sufficient degree, in the eyes of participants, was key to their satisfaction. Reinforcing this, 87.3% of students in my survey regarded a clean kitchen as ‘important’ (77/150) or ‘extremely important’ (54/150). This finding challenges the notion that students are willing to live in ‘dirty’, unsanitary conditions (Bose, 2008, p.45). While participants evidently

valued being ‘tidy’ and ‘clean’, it is hard to determine what exactly these definitions entail. How students measure cleanliness is unpacked in a later section: mess affordance. Regardless of how it is quantified, ‘clean’ remains a standard which students aim for, and by extension, a goalpost for satisfaction.

Satisfaction results from more than one factor, with equity, amity and cleanliness being the three most cited. Upon accomplishing one or more of the listed criteria, a handful of participants expressed their contentment. They reported being satisfied in terms of housework and sought not to change to their current situation. While at first this appears positive, participants who expressed satisfaction, presented their experiences as ‘quite different to other student households’ (18F). By framing their position as abnormal or atypical, there was a strong suggestion that it is uncharacteristic of students to be satisfied with their housework arrangements:

> ‘My household doesn’t depict a typical heteronormative household. My experiences might be quite different to other student households, but overall, I’m content with the division of housework in my current household.’ (18F)

> ‘I’m lucky to live with generally tidy boys and tidy girls in third year.’ (31F)

> ‘Could always be more balanced, but I find that I am luckier than a lot of my friends and we are lucky to not have tensions on this topic.’ (150F)

In considering themselves ‘lucky’ to be satisfied with their housework arrangement, the above participants allude to dissatisfaction as the standard sentiment among university students. They suggested that their contentment does not resemble the average student household, but rather that they are an exception to the rule. Some even used this to reinforce their own satisfaction. By drawing referential comparisons with households in less favourable circumstances, participants justified being satisfied with their own arrangements:

> ‘There's definitely things we could do to make it fairer but it's not, definitely not, the worst it could be.’ (20M)

> ‘It really could be worse. Our house is nice in comparison to a lot (not in terms of the actual house but in terms of the cleaning).’ (29F)

In the knowledge that their houses are not the ‘worst’ they could be, whether in terms of inequity or uncleanliness, the above participants expressed satisfaction (20M). It is clear that ‘perceived equity surrounding the gendered division of labour is conditional to some degree’, with people’s benchmarks for success being lowered by the standards of others (Carlson, Miller and Rudd, 2020, p.3). In this way,

social comparisons are found to 'boost perceived equity' and perpetuate unfavourable conditions (Charbonneau, Lachance-Grzela and Bouchard, 2019, p.292; Hu and Yucel, 2018).

It is therefore unclear whether these participants were truly satisfied, or whether they were merely settling and learning to deal with their situation as comparably better than most others'. Should the typical university household be free from housework-related issues, then perhaps they would not consider themselves as 'lucky' (31F). Despite feeling that there are things they 'could do to make it more fair' (20M), participants are actively working at their satisfaction, trying to maintain and justify it.

It is pertinent to now explore the other, more common experience of participants: dissatisfaction.

4.1.2 Dissatisfaction

Participants frequently spoke of being dissatisfied with their housework arrangements. 36.7% of participants reported being dissatisfied (43/150) or very dissatisfied (12/150) with their current share of household tasks, however a far greater proportion of participants aired grievances about housework in their answers. In parallel to Oakley's findings on housework in heterosexual couples, 'the predominant feeling is one of dissatisfaction' among students (Oakley, 2018, p.58). Speaking to participants about their dissatisfaction revealed that failure to achieve equity was the main factor mentioned. Despite egalitarianism being an agreed-upon goal in their households, participants had a negative experience sharing housework. Equity may have been their 'ideal', but inequity was their 'reality':

> 'In an ideal world, everyone would be doing the same amount, but that is not the case currently.' (8F)
>
> 'In theory, I'd probably like to split it evenly.' (20M)
>
> 'Ideally, we said that by the end of the day everything be washed up or put in the dishwasher. Nonetheless, what often happens is that certain people end up doing lots of the cleaning because other people don't do it as they might have suggested they would.' (33M)
>
> 'I would like [the] distribution to be more even, as we treat everything as if it is, but in reality, I either do the majority of the work or have to delegate it and explain how to do things like cleaning.' (45M)
>
> 'I think it should be shared like fairly. It should be shared equally obviously.' (145M)

Equity is not only an 'ideal' for students, but a moral standard which remains unobtainable for many households. Although students 'espouse egalitarian gender ideals at particularly high rates', their

households do not adopt equitable arrangements (Daminger, 2019, p.613; Christopher, 2021). This misalignment is reminiscent of 'spoken' vs 'lived' egalitarianism and is a common source of frustration for students (Lyonette and Crompton, 2015). Participants not only acknowledged this stark dichotomy between their goal in 'theory' (20M) and their 'reality' (45M) but accepted it as inevitable. Overall student households are constructed as sites of conflict and compromise, whereby student satisfaction with housework is anomalous.

The main obstacle to households achieving what was felt to be their ideal arrangement, was the lack of cooperation from certain members. A pattern emerged among participants wherein dissatisfaction resulted from people not doing tasks within the time frames that others expected of them. When tasks were neglected, others became 'fed up' (7M) and decided to intervene:

> 'I asked him five times to do it and he was reluctant to, he left it to the point where someone else stepped in.' (7M)

> 'We tried assigning different jobs to different people at the start of the year. This quickly didn't work and just ended up with people cleaning when they felt it had got so bad it had to be done!' (39F)

> 'It gets absolutely filthy, and it doesn't get cleaned until someone gets fed up and does it themselves.' (88F)

With certain housemates showing a reluctance to partake in housework, others ended up 'stepping in' (7M). As another participant described, proactivity is not commonplace in student housing, with 'a general feel of 'someone else will clean it'' (127F). Completing housework is portrayed as reactive, with some individuals driven to cleaning by necessity and not proactively. This method resembles the 'threshold of necessity', in which students procrastinate over their responsibilities until whomever is most bothered by it intervenes (Mikula et al., 1997, p.197). This approach appeared consistently across student households. It contradicts the idea that student households embody equity, showcasing instead the imbalanced participation of housemates (Mikula et al, 1997).

The expectations around university students participating in housework vary in nature to those of marital and cohabiting households. In contrast to the collective duty within a couple, participants described individual responsibility as the priority (Carlson, Miller and Rudd, 2020):

> 'The general expectation is that people clean up after themselves when cooking fairly promptly, however this is not always the case. Some people leave their dishes on the side for an extended period of time, and other housemates will become frustrated and clean them up to get the kitchen tidy.' (12F)

> ‘Not organised at all. People are meant to clean up their own stuff. But often it's gets left for one person to do it all as someone will get annoyed that the utensils they need are not cleaned.’ (71F)

Participants described the expectation that housemates are responsible for ‘themselves’ (12F) and ‘their own stuff’ (71F). Equity in a student household therefore looks very different to equity in an established couple, where responsibilities are more likely enmeshed and overlapping. Despite this expectation, many still failed to fulfil their more individual obligations to achieve equity. Certain students also explained readjusting and lowering their hopes for their household to act communally, acknowledging the constraints of their relationships as students. One participant explicitly outlined this:

> ‘It is not a perfect system but everyone being accountable for their own stuff is the best way you can do it in a shared house with people that aren’t family.’ (7M)

This participant normalises settling for an imperfect arrangement, claiming that individual responsibility is the ‘best way you can do it’ in a university household (7M). He accepts that students face greater constraints when it comes to shaping housework practices than families would. The testimonies of other participants reinforced this recognition of the fact that their hopes for equity, amity and cleanliness are unrealistic.

Typical student households are characterised by inequity, with some people taking on a greater burden of housework than others. Despite it being a source of dissatisfaction, unequal housework practices prevail. The rest of this chapter unpacks this inequity, its manifestations, consequences, and reasons. I investigate the strategies used to craft egalitarian arrangements and the obstacles to its accomplishment. By exploring patterns in who is (dis)satisfied, and the tactics used to try and mediate this, a deeper understanding of housework negotiations is gained.

4.2 Gendered Patterns

While many households theoretically aspired to equity, in practice things turned out otherwise. This inequity is markedly gendered. Despite the shared desire for equity, amity and cleanliness, female students were more likely to invest time and effort to achieve this. In this section, I first explore gendered patterns in housework contributions, followed by a look at disparities in the types of tasks completed, and the mental load incurred.

4.2.1 Gendered Contributions

Gender emerged as a key factor in the distribution of domestic labour, with the responsibility to clean up after others falling disproportionately to female students:

> 'The boys in our house create the most mess and clean up the least.' (17M)

> 'The girls definitely clean more often than the boys! They have a lower threshold of tolerance when it comes to a dirty house and when it should be cleaned.' (39F)

> 'The boys rarely clean and will leave their mess whilst us two girls clean up after ourselves and them.' (43F)

> 'Definitely the girls in the household will clean, make less mess and contribute to buying shared household items.' (54F)

> 'Women probably do slightly more than the men in our household in terms of keeping things tidy day to day.' (77M)

A clear trend emerges from the data: even at university where 'women and men have comparable statuses as students', women perform more housework (Leaper, Gutierrez and Farkas, 2022, p.783). Not only do female students do more cleaning, but they reportedly make less mess compared to their male peers. Despite reported aspirations for equality from both men and women, female students still 'continue to shoulder the burden of domestic work' (Meah, 2014, p.12). Reinforcing this, 40% of female participants reported doing 'substantially more' housework than their housemates, compared to 20% of male participants. This is a familiar phenomenon in literature on couples, whereby male partners outlined 'expectations for a 50/50 split' but upon 'divvying up the household… were less willing to adhere to an equal divide' (Wenhold and Harrison, 2021, p.215). The data therefore echoes existing work which suggests that gendered inequality in the domestic sphere persists 'regardless of the kind of union' (Baxter, Hewitt and Haynes, 2008, p.260; Mandel and Lazarus, 2021). In addition to taking on more of the housework tasks, female students took on different types of tasks.

4.2.2 Pervasive Pattern

Participants acknowledged that the gendered distribution of housework extends beyond their own households. Drawing on their own experiences and those of friends, they painted a picture in which it is standard for female students to contribute more to housework:

> 'Men probably do less on average than women.' (20M)

> 'I did notice when like talking to my friends, and like being around friends' houses, that it was very much a gender split' (34F)

> 'In general, it does seem like it's often women that are doing more.' (46F)

> '[I] have had far fewer issues with women when it comes to doing their part in keeping the house clean.' (85F)

> 'Generally, men do less housework than women (from what I've observed at Uni etc)' (88F)

> 'Every man I've ever lived with has done less around the house than the women.' (114F)

> 'I think I notice it's like, usually, the men are the ones that do the least.' (130M)

> 'The women definitely do a lot more work in every aspect.' (132F)

The gendered division of domestic labour appears to be widespread within mixed-gender university households, with male students widely acknowledged as contributing less to housework. While the observations are made based on what participants have seen at Durham University, they suggest that these patterns apply more 'generally' across other universities (88F).

This pattern is acknowledged by both male and female students, perhaps indicating a growing awareness of housework as an area of unfairness and calling into question the idea that an 'inequitable distribution often goes unnoticed by the male' (McClelland and Sliwa, 2022, p.1). However, beyond acknowledging that female students tend to perform more housework, the predominant voices explaining how this inequality manifests on a daily basis, were those of women. With 20.1% more women expressing dissatisfaction than men in my study, it is clear that gender remains a key influence in housework arrangements. Gender influences the time spent, as well as the types and extent to which tasks are completed.

4.2.3 Task Completion

Female students reported a notable gendered difference in the intensity of housework completed. In contrast to the comprehensive contributions of female students, male students often only did a task partially or selected easier tasks to avoid the more laborious work:

> ‘I have never seen the boys do a sporadic burst of cleaning like giving the floor a quick hoover, or wiping up the sides, even like a ten minute thing.’ (8F)

> ‘In our house boys use easier tasks like washing up to avoid doing tasks like cleaning the bathrooms.’ (30F)

> ‘They need telling a few times to do it and will probably do a half-hearted job (e.g. we take turns to buy toilet rolls and sponges for the house - us 3 girls each bought pack of 12 toilet rolls and pack of 12 sponges and when it was the boys’ turn one bought a pack of 4 toilet rolls and the other produced one sponge).’ (37F)

> ‘I just don't think they realise like, it's like every day we are doing little bits. We're not, it's not just once a month, we've taken something out or like cleaned everything.’ (67F)

> ‘Us girls often do big clean ups that the boys never do. My housemate said he had done his chore for the week by emptying one bin - us girls had hoovered the entire house and dusted everything that week.’ (97F)

> ‘The boy we live with cleans but doesn’t deep clean.’ (122F)

Whereas female students were more thorough in their household tasks, male students are depicted as being less detail-oriented, instead doing the minimum work required in order for that task to be considered finished. In addition to spearheading the major clean-ups, female students undertook the ongoing everyday tasks required to maintain a reasonable level of cleanliness. This parallels findings that women are responsible for doing the ‘many small tasks done that prevent the huge mess from building up’ (McClelland and Sliwa, 2022, p.10; Meah, 2014). Equally, male students followed in the pattern of taking on ‘sporadic and non-routine maintenance tasks’ (Mikula and Freudenthaler, 2002, p.569; Kosakowska-Berezecka et al., 2020). The idea that women tend to undertake the often unnoticed and ‘more onerous’ routine tasks is reflected here (Roberts, 2018, p.278). These typically female tasks are taxing and thankless, yet fundamental to the everyday functioning of households. Morgan’s conceptualisation of family practices also applies here; wherein ordinary actions provide a communal benefit. In this context, female participants contributed more to the household ‘practices’ and therefore contributed more to the collective wellbeing of the household.

Men in the sample tended to eschew communal tasks such as hoovering, wiping the surfaces, and taking out the bins. On the other hand, cooking was a task which male students *did* take responsibility for, as highlighted by the following participants:

> 'The boys would cook and leave the washing up for days so that we would get fined by college.' (31F)

> 'I would say that overall, the girls do most of the housework in terms of cleaning but we all do our own cooking.' (35F)

Literature suggests that 'foodwork', as a more creative and rewarding practice, is less gendered than other household tasks, (Szabo and Koch, 2017). However, my data suggests that the main driver of male participation in cooking was their knowledge that it was unlikely to be picked up by others. As 35F describes, cooking is an individuals' own responsibility, as opposed to a shared task. By prioritising engagement in individualised tasks, male students sought to circumvent those with a collective element:

> 'Boys use easier tasks like washing up to avoid doing tasks like cleaning the bathrooms or cooking for all of us.' (30F)

30F emphasises that when cooking is for a communal benefit, it is no longer desirable and deprioritised in favour of 'easier', individualised tasks. Male students may therefore 'opt in' to complete tasks depending on the likelihood that someone else may do them on their behalf (Natalier, 2003). This speaks to the tension between individual and collective tasks and the tendency of male students to engage more in the former. By framing housework as something which they can elect to partake in, male students shifted the onus onto their female counterparts. Subsequently, female students felt as though they are the default responsible person for completing tasks, especially those of a collective nature.

4.2.3 Sexist Attitudes: Cleaning as Women's Work

Given this perception that male students make more mess and engage in less domestic work, several female participants felt they were expected to pick up the slack. Regardless of whether they caused the mess, female students felt as though others relied upon them to clean up:

> 'There is an expectation that girls will just clean up after boys even if it is not explicitly stated. This has been the experience of many of my female friends and it is appalling.' (27F)

> 'Housework is far from equal in student houses. It often feels they [male housemates] just expect us (me and the other girl) to clean up after them.' (43F)

> ‘Oftentimes men, especially young men, have no experience with cooking or cleaning and expect the people (or often specifically the women) around them to do it for them.’ (45M)

> ‘[My] male housemate doesn’t take the initiative to clean – thinks that things will get done eventually by someone else.’ (66F)

> ‘Women in my university living experience are shouldered with more of the tasks, without it even being a problem. It is apparently normal to expect your female counterparts to do more.’ (67F)

Female students felt an expectation to ‘step in’ to complete domestic tasks left by others. They highlighted how male housemates contributed minimally to communal housework, outwaiting their female counterparts in the knowledge that they will eventually intervene. In this way, women are positioned as the default group responsible for completing tasks (Thébaud, Kornrich and Ruppaner, 2021, p.1186). Male participants reinforced the notion that they are less duty-bound to complete housework, asserting that it is not something they feel greatly responsible for. Instead, many male students treated housework as a low priority, expendable task:

> ‘I think that perhaps the girls feel a bit more of like a, if things are dirty than I should clean it… whereas I think a lot of guys look at it as you know, this is my stuff. I might be responsible for this.’ (10M)

> ‘If I'm tired or busy, or I've not got a lot of time, I'll just kind of do what I need to do in there and get out and I guess leave it for the next person.’ (20M)

> ‘But often, people will do a clean of the whole kitchen to get rid of all the mess. But if I see a lot of mess that isn't mine, I'm often like, okay, well, I'll leave that to someone else.’ (117M)

> ‘It's not a priority every day.’ (130M)

While female students experienced an obligation to keep a clean environment regardless of whether it was their mess or not, male students viewed housework as a discretionary activity. These male students did not feel compelled to clean mess left by others, and sometimes even their own. They explicitly stated their propensity to leave housework for others to do, something that female students complained of. Accordingly, men constructed themselves as secondary contributors to housework, able to ‘opt-in’ as and when they choose (Natalier, 2003). Traditional ‘beliefs and values maintained about what is right for men and women’ therefore apply to a university context, influencing students’ distribution of domestic labour (Cerrato and Cifre, 2018, p.2). This is particularly evident in 11M’s response:

> ‘I wouldn’t make it my first priority to go straight to the sink…I understand other members of my household may do more work than me however I believe that is due to a contact hour issue. I take my dad’s perspective and help where I can when I’m around.’ (11M)

Inspired by his father’s outlook on housework, 11M adopted a traditional approach wherein he participates only when he feels he has the time. This participant invoked the breadwinner model, where housework is exchanged for work outside the home, despite not being a breadwinner himself. Instead of utilising paid work as capital to trade housework for, he uses ‘contact hours’ to justify doing less domestic labour. There is an insinuation that those subjects with more contact hours, i.e. typically male-dominated STEM courses are inherently more demanding on one’s time than those such as humanities which require more independent study.

The prevailing belief that housework is optional for men, but expected of women is evident here. Concealed behind the façade of egalitarianism, covertly misogynistic attitudes are presented. Instead of displaying ‘openly exhibit hostile, sexist and misogynistic attitudes’, they ‘manoeuvre, impressionistically, between progressive and overtly misogynistic masculinities’ (Pope et al., 2022, p.6). Depending on their gender, housemates are therefore ‘differentially held accountable for housework’, with collective tasks by and large being completed by female students (Thébaud, Kornrich and Ruppaner, 2021, p.1206). In addition to this, a further gendered pattern emerges in terms of the recognition awarded to students for their participation in housework.

4.2.4 The Denial of Inequality in Housework

Despite consistent reports highlighting female students’ disproportionate contribution to housework, several male participants outrightly denied the existence of inequalities in housework. They argued that the division of domestic labour is insignificant, and therefore does not warrant any intervention:

> ‘The idea that a new world would be built if men did washing up and cleaning, is interesting. I think if we sorted out world hunger the world would be a better place too, but that is not to trivialise the issue.’ (7M)

> ‘But then with housework it’s never detrimental. Leaving plates and food out until it goes mouldy, although it’s not very nice, it’s not going to, it’s not something that is the end of the world.’ (38M)

> ‘It's not, it's not the end of the world? I mean, I don't really think it's worth, worth falling out over.’ (44M)

> ‘I've never really, I don't understand what's going on to make it really unfair. Like, is there just kind of one slave person doing everyone's washing up.’ (117M)

> ‘What revolution is needed? Why does it matter who does the washing up?’ (121M)

The above participants, notably all male, did not consider housework an issue worthy of much consideration. In their eyes, housework is not something which has tangible impact. It is not the ‘end of the world’, and there are plenty of other, more important things to be concerned about (38M and 44M). One participant, the same person who admitted to often being ‘caught doing something or leaving something that I shouldn't leave’, was particularly perplexed by the purpose of my study, questioning how housework could ever be a matter of injustice (117M). This feeds into the idea that men do not recognise the significance of inequitable housework arrangements and the strain it can exert. Despite significant movement towards egalitarianism in the past two decades, the observation of Coltrane that housework is ‘trivialised in the popular imagination’ appears to remain true (2000, p.1209).

4.2.5 Recognition of Housework

Gratitude is a key mechanism of making labour visible and appreciating the value of contributions. Gender informs gratitude among participants, both in terms of who expresses it and who receives it. While female students expressed gratitude to fellow housemates, they often did not receive gratitude for their own contributions:

> ‘When I make an effort to do like a larger job of cleaning, I tend to only receive gratitude from those who also do the cleaning, but that does, and looking at my previous house has tended to be more from the girls.’ (6M)

> ‘I'm not sure how good I am at kind of doing it every time or remembering something, remembering to thank them stuff like that. I’m not sure I manage that every time.’ (20M)

> ‘I don’t know who he thinks opens the curtains every time someone showers, it’s not a magical fairy, it’s me.’ (34F)

> ‘I'm quite thankful and I'll tell them… I do find that sometimes when I clean up, it's less noticed.’ (46F)

> ‘The girls do loads of work that the boys do not realise.’ (97F)

According to these participants, the contributions of female students often go unrecognised. 34F’s notion of a ‘magical fairy’ reinforces this lack of recognition, and the mismatch between equity as fantasy, and inequity as reality. Due to an underlying assumption that women will engage in domestic

labour, there is decreased visibility and praise. Despite attempts by Oakley and numerous others to draw greater attention to housework as 'analogous to any other kind of work', the invisibility of women's work in the home prevails even at university (Oakley, 1974, p.2; McClelland and Sliwa, 2022).

University students mimic the setup of established couples, with women's housework being unappreciated and 'taken-for-granted' (Meah, 2014, p.3; Natalier, 2003; Asare, 2019). Because of women's domestic labour being normalised and expected, female students 'are less likely than men to be rewarded for a job well done' (Thébaud, Kornrich and Ruppaner, 2021, p.1207; Anderson, 2000).

However, unlike in previous generations, there was some introspection among male participants who recognised that they should be acting differently:

> 'It can be awkward I feel because you're feeling guilty. Like you don't want to say oh, thanks for doing my work for me because like you think okay, why couldn't I have done it?' (117M)

117M expressed a reluctance to say thank you due to the guilt of not having done it himself. His reflection demonstrates a growing awareness among younger men that they should be pulling their weight. While this may represent progress from previous generations in which guilt would likely not have been felt by men, there is a lack of action to recognise female contributions. More often, male participants drew attention to housework they completed and demanded recognition for their participation. They appeared to seek praise for having done the 'women's work' (Meah, 2014, p.3):

> 'If I were to do [housework] myself, I think I'd certainly want to make that known to them and that it's not something that I'm happy to do again.' (6M)

> 'They feel whenever they do anything small, they feel like they should be thanked, and, you know, acknowledged for it. Whereas everyone else will just do it quietly and probably not tell anyone else that they've done it.' (8F)

> 'I would say the boys make a fuss about it when they do it. It's like, look at me! I'm taking out the bins…I think boys feel they deserve gratitude for doing shared tasks, whereas the girls don't, because they know it's part of the contract of living community that you share those jobs.' (12F)

> 'If we don't notice it, they'll bring it up themselves. They'll be like, oh, do you see I took the bin out earlier, like, what do you want, a gold star?' (67F)

> 'The men in my house see housework as kind of a favour they're doing for the women. I feel like they do the housework begrudgingly because they know that they should.' (111N)

Regardless of their magnitude, male students regularly drew attention to their housework contributions. 6M describes this process, making his contribution 'known' to his housemates. He actively sought recognition for tasks alongside expressing his displeasure for doing housework. He appears to be testing and figuring out his role within the house, while minimising his contribution.

Behaviours such as these evidently frustrated female students who felt as though their male housemates consider themselves 'worthy of special recognition and praise' despite doing the tasks that women do on a daily basis (Christopher, 2021, p.14). Linked to this is the idea that men's contribution is supplementary, and, in line with the economy of gratitude, perceived as a favour (Alberts et al., 2011). Accordingly, the finding 'that women are expected to do such work, while men's participation is a gift' is not only reaffirmed, but its application is extended to a new stage of life: emerging adulthood (Alberts et al., 2011, p.31). A greater insight is provided into how emerging adult men use certain strategies to determine their position within the household. They attempt to maintain a lower contribution to housework relative to women, despite knowing that they *should* contribute more.

The result of this is that, as in romantic relationships, the labour of women in university households is more routine, more expected and less rewarded than that of men. This not only incorporates the physical labour involved in maintaining a house, but the prerequisite tasks such as scheduling housework and reminding others.

4.2.6 Cognitive Burden of Housework

Beyond 'instrumental task accomplishment', there are further gendered patterns regarding domestic labour in mixed-gender student households (Alberts et al., 2011, p.30). Female students disproportionately oversaw the involvement of others, initiating housework prompts as and when someone was under-contributing:

> 'I would say it's the girls asking the boys to clean up after themselves.' (12F)

> 'There have been several times living in this house that I've literally had to like, say, you need to do this, you need to do that. Like, please take out the bin, please wipe down after you've used the hob like, yeah, you know, please put your laundry away. It's been three weeks. I think it's dry.' (34F)

> 'Even when men partake in housework they are often directed by women in the house.' (59M)

> 'I kind of pester my other housemates, like my mom used to pester me.' (76F)

> 'Last term I was constantly reminding people to do their jobs on the rota as a lot of the time people didn't do them.' (112F)

‘I tell them what to do and when and they do it.’ (120F)

76F’s comment regarding the transfer of responsibility from her mother to her suggests she is replicating the gendered division of labour that characterised her childhood. As an emerging adult in a stage of life when habits become embedded, this potentially marks the start of role formation, where duties are passed from mother to daughter.

Collectively these accounts demonstrate that female students are largely responsible for holding others to account for housework. Some described having to continually prompt male housemates to engage, even writing lists or setting reminders in their absence. Akin to the principle of ‘wifework’, female students are performing a supervisory role on behalf of their house (Bigelow, 2002; Daminger, 2019). Findings that suggest women are more likely to play ‘a ‘policing’ role vis-à-vis gendered responsibilities’ are upheld, with male students ostensibly not contributing to this effort (Meah, 2014, p.13; McClelland and Sliwa, 2022). Tasked with instructing male housemates on how and when to do housework adds to female students’ mental labour and is something female students did not wish to do. They identified this type of domestic labour as a mental burden and recognised that it has implications for how they are perceived by housemates:

‘I wish the boys would do more/take more initiative. When you ask them to do something they’ll do it, but I don’t want to seem like a nag.’ (2F)

‘I'm dissatisfied because I have to ask people to do things in the first place.’ (8F)

‘I'm not his mum, I'm not here to nag him to do things.’ (34F)

‘I wish I didn’t have to remind people to do their housework.’ (76F)

‘I would like that people recognised responsibility for cleaning up their own mess… I don’t feel that I can say anything as I don’t want to be seen as a nag.’ (79F)

‘I would have to like ‘at’ [i.e., tag] people on the group chat and then people would think I was pissy and it was just like, so annoying.’ (150F)

Participants described the labelling that occurs when holding others to account for housework, and the resentment towards being a so-called ‘nag’. They sought to avoid any association with being a so-called ‘nag’ and its negative connotations. In doing so, ‘doing gender’ in a socially acceptable way remained central to their beliefs on housework (West and Zimmerman, 1987). This suggests there is a limit to the willingness of female students to transgress expectations and challenge sexist stereotypes, perhaps because this is a mental labour in and of itself. 120F specifically acknowledges that this ‘mental load’ is something which female students bear the brunt of:

> ‘Women carry much more of a mental load.’ (120F)

Female students found that, in line with McClelland and Sliwa, even the delegation of tasks ‘requires effort’ as housemates have to be continually prompted (McClelland and Sliwa, 2022, p.11). Contrary to research that suggests household management is a ‘a source of power in its own right’, the opposite is true for students, particularly female students (Daminger, 2019, p.621). This is reflected in the satisfaction ratings of female participants, with 34.8% reportedly dissatisfied (31/89) and 9% very dissatisfied (8/89), compared to 18.2% (10/55) and 5.5% (3/55) of males. Rather than obtaining fulfilment from domestic responsibilities, female participants see it as a burden they seek to be relieved of. Contrary to the theory of maternal gatekeeping, these women do not have ‘a desire to retain control over the domestic sphere’ but perceive this supervisory position negatively (Alberts et al., 2011, p.33). Enforcing accountability among their housemates is not something which they ‘wish’ to do, especially given the conditions of their accommodation (76F).

As temporary rented accommodation, there is no lasting benefit to be gained from investing time in careful housework management, unlike in familial households. Instead, short-term considerations such as hygiene and comfort take priority. This lack of long-term ownership is a key point of departure between the households typically explored in literature, and student households. Research shows however, that if equitable habits are not established early on in adulthood, they will be increasingly hard to embed. An unfortunate situation arises in which, if female students do not take on men’s labour at university, the issue gets deferred to men’s long-term partners down the line.

Furthermore, within student households there is a unique ambiguity about who should be in charge. Whereas in most familial households, there is an assumed power dynamic between parents and children, there is no set hierarchy within a student household. Instead, students rely on gender norms to prescribe who should be responsible. Interestingly, and potentially reflecting a generational mindset shift, despite rejecting the sexist stereotypes that associate women with housework, some female participants buy into the stereotype that it is a women’s, or mum’s role to ‘nag’ (34F). Male participants on the other hand, believed they were not qualified to enforce accountability among others:

> ‘I think given it's not bad enough or certainly, I don't feel particularly hard done by enough for me to make the move.’ (6M)

> ‘It’s not got to the point where I feel strongly enough to have that conversation.’ (20M)

> ‘I'm not one to go after them and be like, hey, you know, I shouldn't have to be cleaning up all your stuff.’ (38M)

> ‘If I'm going to be the one, like nagging everyone then I have to be doing exactly what I've been like, as I've been saying to them to do… I currently don't do that… so in my mind, if I'm not doing it perfectly, I also can't critique others.’ (57M)

> ‘I'm not the dominant figure in the house. It's not on me to tell other people to what to do.’ (117M)

The above students suggested that it would be unsuitable for them to hold others accountable for housework. They presented nagging as something which only those in a ‘dominant position’ can do (117M). Two primary explanations are provided for this – firstly they feel that they are at risk of hypocrisy by reminding others. By citing their behaviour as less than ‘perfect’, they explained that it would be insincere for them to hold others to higher standards (57M). Rather than change their own behaviour to set an example, they are happy to maintain a secondary position in the house, regardless of whether this disadvantages others. Secondly, they claimed to not feel ‘strongly enough’ to warrant intervention (20M). Acting in this way reinforces the idea that male students, more so than female students, pursue ‘self-oriented motives’ at the expense of equity (Mikula et al., 1997, p.277). As a result of this avoidance of management by males, females then assume a supervisory role and hold the house to account, an account which is not regarded favourably by everyone involved. For female students, enforcing accountability on male students is burdensome and unrewarding. Being on the receiving end, male students feel aggrieved by these interactions and frame it as a form of unnecessary reprimand:

> ‘I would appreciate more people just leaving me to my own devices and not washing up my things before I get the opportunity and then having a go at me.’ (3M)

> ‘I’d left a tray on the side for a couple of days which really irritated one of my female housemates. I didn’t see it as a huge deal, but she was very insistent that it be cleaned immediately. Less of a disagreement and more of a telling off!’ (4M)

> ‘I received a passive aggressive comment or glare from one of my female housemates in a bid to get me to do my washing up. This however made me more reluctant to do so.’ (7M)

> ‘Most of the time, it was the girls who were complaining, like, “Oh, you haven't cleaned this? Oh, you haven't cleaned that, etc, etc.”’ (41M)

> ‘I got bollocked because I don't contribute as much as she does to the housework.’ (118M)

> ‘Sometimes I forget, like I get told off.... a few times I left the stuff in the dryer for like a day because I forgot it was there.’ (130M)

Male students expressed a desire for their households to be more 'laidback' (145M). Although several participants acknowledged that their female housemates were justified to intervene, the interventions are construed in a negative light, portraying them as 'angry' and 'aggressive' (117M). Referring to these sexist tropes reinforces the presence of covert misogyny among students (Pope et al., 2022). Additionally, in describing this type of interaction as a telling off, the male students liken the relationship between them and their female housemates to a parental one (Fincham and Cui, 2010, p.3). Reflecting the parental structures that emerging adults are so 'keen to be free of' suggests that these attempts to delegate household management are counterproductive (Clark et al., 2019, p.237; Cui, Hong and Jiao, 2022; Fincham and Cui, 2010). For some, being asked to contribute only makes them more resentful and less likely to do the task at hand. It is therefore not accurate to conclude that all emerging adults 'assume spousal or parental responsibilities' upon independence, but rather that this transition is disproportionately made by women during university (Fincham and Cui, 2010, p.3). Domestic labour appears to play a far more significant part in women's emergence into adulthood than it does for men. For many, the outcome of this is household tension and conflict, an important issue which will be explored in the following section. With such negative implications of nagging, many female students would rather not try.

4.2.7 Avoiding Nagging

Unanimously, female students position 'nagging' as a form of domestic work in and of itself. Asking housemates to participate more in housework is not only laborious, but has the potential to incite conflict, and upset the balance which they have worked to maintain. With the negative implications of nagging, female students employed a number of tactics to avoid it. This section will unpack the various strategies used to sidestep confrontation, beginning with the use of virtual communication:

> 'If I find something that has annoyed me… I shall put a message in the house group chat to say. I deal with it like that because I don't like conflict, but I don't think it is very effective.' (8F)

8F avoided direct, in-person confrontation by utilising a group chat to communicate. The possibility of confrontation is intimidating and uncomfortable and outweighs any potential benefit that it may yield in terms of encouraging housework participation. This student acknowledged that it is not 'very effective' and yet would rather pursue this avenue above face-to-face interactions. This is perhaps related to a desire to perform femininity in a socially acceptable way (West and Zimmerman, 1987). Conventionally, 'stasis, passivity and stability have been regarded as feminine characteristics' which likely informs the approaches used by female students to address housework inequalities (Hu, 2021, p.1319). This is especially relevant given the responses of some male respondents to their female peers. As highlighted earlier, female students are deemed 'angry' and 'aggressive' upon reminding others to

complete housework (117M). Anticipating a negative reception such as this, means many female students feel that it is not worth even starting a conversation about housework:

> 'I just leave the situation because I don't, I don't want to like have to have those conversations, sometimes I just have to be like, it's just, it's not my battle to pick today.' (37F)

> 'I feel uncomfortable raising it with them so would like them to just take the initiative instead of having to be asked.' (81F)

Some went beyond this, stepping in to complete the tasks themselves. In doing so, claims that women 'derive a greater level of utility than men from avoiding conflict in a relationship with the net result that they end up doing more housework' are reinforced (Auspurg, Iacovou and Nicoletti, 2017, p.135):

> 'The boys we live with are very bad at tidying up after themselves but to avoid confrontation I'll just end up doing it myself.' (2F)

Albeit for different durations, evidently the pattern in which women complete labour over engaging in confrontation occurs not only in couples, but in mixed-gender student households too (Anderson, 2004). Although overall, very few male students expressed a desire to intervene in their household's division of domestic labour, likely because they benefit from the prevailing arrangements in which they do less, those that did were not afraid to confront others. One male student explained that he is 'not afraid to bring any of these grievances up or start a fight about it' (50M), suggesting that male students may have a different propensity and approach to engaging in conversation on the topic of housework.

Many of Oakley's findings are echoed within my study and remain pertinent to understanding the approaches of students to housework today. In accordance with gendered expectations, female students contribute more time and effort to physical tasks, undertake more of the mental labour of managing households, and are less recognised and appreciated for doing so. The consequences of this inequity, including negative impacts to wellbeing, enjoyment, and optimism for the future, are explored in more detail in the following section.

4.3 Consequences of Gender Inequality

Inequality in domestic work in student households has several negative repercussions. With female housemates disadvantaged by a larger physical and mental domestic burden, tension often arises. Beyond affecting the sociability of a household, this has ramifications for the wellbeing of individuals, their everyday routines, and their outlook for the future. Each of these issues will be explored, starting with conflict and its prevalence in student households.

4.3.1 Housework and Conflict

Conflict is a recurrent issue in student households. Investigation reveals that housework is frequently cited as the cause of disagreement:

> 'House meeting, most awkward thing ever considering we all used to be close. Argued about jobs, the heating, everything. It was terrible.' (48M)

> 'Big arguments about the state of the place.' (96M)

> 'I feel like housework can be that opportunity for those conflicts, those kind of dislikes of people to come out.' (117M)

> 'There's a lot of conflict over housework in my house.' (123F)

> 'Often have disagreements about who has left their dirty dishes.' (128F)

The division of domestic labour is a leading source of conflict in students. While the exact cause varies between households, the general root of disagreements, which are 'common in student accommodation' relates to the conditions of the living environment (Foulkes et al., 2021, p.1477). It is well known that 'the ongoing challenges of housework allocation often create tension, conflicts and dissatisfaction between romantic partners' however this can now clearly be observed in students too (Charbonneau, Lachance-Grzela and Bouchard, 2019, p.290). These problems do not occur from the outset of living together but appear to develop over time. As 48M illustrates, there has been a shift in the household from close-knit to hostile. Conflict over housework gradually mounts to tangibly impact household cohesion, and even makes housemates dislike one another (117M).

For most students, university is the first instance of independently handling household chores. They have likely come from a familial household in which arrangements, albeit likely inequitable, are established. Moving from households with settled routines, students may not foresee housework as a source of debate and instability. It makes sense then that upon arrival, with no prior experience of

struggling with inequality, conflict may not immediately ensue. It is perhaps after repeated issues, when patience runs out, that conflict arises. Participants acknowledged that this problem is particularly pronounced in mixed-gender households compared to same gender households:

> ‘It seems to cause problems for a lot of people, especially the girls living in like mixed households, cause, that seems to be where the tension, like arises from having to then deal with like boys or men, or whatever.’ (12F)

> ‘Most of my friends that are in like, single sex households are pretty okay. They still have their issues. They're still messy. But there's no animosity, and it does get solved, where it's like all of the people I know, in mixed gender households, there's like, almost like a communication barrier.’ (34F)

> ‘The ones that have the most issues with like housework and stuff are the ones that are in mixed gender households.’ (67F)

The nature of conflict within mixed-gender households is considered more severe and acrimonious than in other households. As alluded to by 34F, poor communication between female and male students is identified as problematic. This remark builds upon the debate between ‘gender power’ theorists and ‘equity’ theorists in which the causal direction of housework arrangements is disputed (Carlson, Miller and Rudd, 2020; Nameda, 2013). In agreement with ‘gender power theory’, 34F highlights how ineffective communication is a cause of dissatisfaction, as opposed to an outcome (Charbonneau, Lachance-Grzela and Bouchard, 2021).

Furthermore, my findings indicate that the quality of communication varies depending on who is communicating. Female students reported finding it easier to communicate with each other than with male students (Nameda, 2013). The exact reasons for this are not made explicit. Nevertheless, the conclusion follows that gender is not only a crucial determinant in the organisation of domestic labour in student households but impacts the nature of interactions and possible conflicts experienced too.

As hinted at in earlier testimonies, discord regarding housework can create a hostile dynamic and fracture friendships between housemates. Numerous participants described the adverse impact that housework has had on their relationships, in some cases damaging existing friendships:

> ‘There's people in the house that annoy me because of their lack of doing housework and therefore I'm more likely to snap at those people about other things unrelated.’ (8F)

> ‘With certain members it definitely does like influence how I see them as a person… it makes it clear what their values are and how they treat other people.’ (12F)

‘I think our friendship would be a lot better if we didn't live together. Yeah. Because like, like, I love him. Like, he's so lovely. But sometimes I just get so annoyed at him.’ (37F)

‘Moving in with him and realising that his like living habits are not very similar to mine. It has made me not particularly want to like be super friendly with him.’ (34F)

‘When you come down, and the same thing has happened, it's sort of like, “Oh, they've done this again.” And I guess that sort of maybe feeds into friendships.’ (46F)

‘If it were my friends who are this messy and this unable to clean and sort of showed no interest in learning how to clean…I would 100% no longer be friends with them.’ (123F)

Housework evidently impacts the ability of students to maintain positive relationships with their housemates (Carlson, Miller and Rudd, 2020). For female students, in particular, issues around housework affected their perceptions of housemates with some feeling strongly enough to deprioritise or forego existing friendships. Not only are friendships strained, but some students, exclusively female, reached a point where they avoid spending time in their own homes. I term this ‘domestic alienation’.

4.3.2 Domestic Alienation

With mixed-gender households particularly vulnerable to fallouts, relationships between students can become strained. For some, the effects are worse, impacting their sense of belonging in their own home. As a result of other people not cleaning up after themselves, some students felt uncomfortable spending time in their kitchen and resented returning home:

‘If the kitchen is in a state, then I'm not able to enjoy my time there. I would just go up to my room and have a nice time having my tea. It means that I don't want to be in the kitchen.’ (8F)

‘When you're sat in the living room and it's a bit of a state and there's stuff everywhere, and it's like, it's not as easy to relax, I guess.’ (20M)

‘There have been times where I've been like, “Oh, brilliant. I've got to go home now.” And like, my house is gonna be really messy.’ (37F)

‘If the kitchen's a mess, I'm not relaxing like, if the kitchens a mess, I'll clean the kitchen first before I'm doing anything.’ (67F)

‘Like it actually sends me into such anxiety if we've got a dirty kitchen like I literally like, it was really bad last term I was actually like I can't eat in here.’ (74F)

> ‘I mean, generally, I just try not to be home that much. Because being around these people bothers me so much.’ (123F)

> ‘I also have some friends like, who don't even want to, like be in their kitchen, because it's so gross… I think it's sad when like, you feel uncomfortable, like cooking your own kitchen.’ (150F)

The above students described dreading returning to and actively avoiding domestic spaces. This reaffirms findings that ‘poorly managed conflict can escalate to the point where individuals do not want to be at home’ (Foulkes et al., 2021, p.1477). However, unlike research suggests, this is not because they are ‘intimidating spaces that participants were afraid to enter’, but rather because they are uncomfortable and often unsanitary (Foulkes et al., 2021, p.1477). Instead of being spaces for relaxation, shared areas in student households can become a source of stress and alienation. Whilst a small number of men experienced domestic anxieties, domestic alienation was far greater in women.

Unlike in the context of romantic couples where the kitchen has been described as a site of empowerment for women, in student houses, many opt to avoid it altogether (Meah, 2014). As suggested by Bose, the kitchen is an ‘area of fluidity’ where many ‘students do not spend extended periods of time’ (Bose, 2008, p.55). One reason proposed for this is the busyness of students, but it seems housework is a more significant, largely unexplored, factor. Literature on the impact of domestic labour has typically focussed on ‘paid employment, sleep, and leisure activities’, with little attention given to how one’s use of certain spaces may be affected (Nitsche and Grunow, 2016, p.80). As the testimonies of participants indicate, a households’ approach to housework can influence how its inhabitants feel in shared spaces and even in themselves. For students who face isolating circumstances already, such as mental health issues, domestic alienation risks compounding their marginality and worsen their university experience.

4.3.3 Housework and Student Wellbeing

Cumulatively, living in an unclean and antagonistic environment has negative impacts on the wellbeing of students. When asked how housework impacts their daily life and mood, participants frequently described strong negative emotions. Feelings of frustration were commonplace especially among female students who carry the majority of the physical and mental load. The following excerpts demonstrate the emotional impact that inequitable housework divisions can have:

> ‘That makes me angry and puts me in a bad mood, so I just try to avoid, I just don't want any of this to be affecting how I'm feeling.’ (8F)

> ‘Actually, this can impact your degree. If you're having to spend all your time cleaning up other people's dishes like it's a waste.’ (12F)

> ‘If you yourself are quite stressed, and you've had a busy day, and you come back and suddenly you have to clean everything up just to make some space so you can actually have your dinner. It can be an issue.’ (44M)

> ‘When I have essay deadlines and work, coming downstairs to a messy kitchen or walking into a messy house that I know I will have to clean is pretty exhausting and irritating.’ (46F)

It holds true among students that ‘compared to men, women report higher rates of stress, anxiety, and feelings of time scarcity’ (Daminger, 2019, p. 628). Female students also reported heightened fatigue due to dealing with housework, something which influenced their ability to be productive and engage fully in their degrees and extra-curricular activities. Female students acknowledged that ‘their academic and professional success’ may suffer due to domestic arrangements and express exasperation at their situations (Liu, Ping and Gao, 2019, p.1). The impact of this is heightened for those with additional needs. For one participant in particular, their disability meant that they were disproportionately burdened by the unequal housework contributions of others:

> ‘I am physically disabled and so struggle both to navigate an environment with lots of mess…and get exhausted or hurt easily when I have to do excessive cleaning. A more equal system would help me a lot.’ (45M)

45M describes the exertion he faced trying to deal with the mess of others while being physically disabled. The participant tried to explain to his male housemate that his behaviour was causing him difficulty, and his conduct ‘impacts the rest of us in our time, energy and wellbeing’ (45M). This confrontation was met with a negative reception and did not result in any change in their housemate’s behaviour. 45M highlights that female students are not the only ones to be negatively impacted by inequitable housework arrangements, however the volume of female complaints indicates that female students are disproportionately affected. This example is also typical of a wider trend in the data set that it is male students who perpetuate inequity.

Clearly ‘the distribution, negotiation and management of unpaid domestic labour are issues’ that concern both students and established adults in relationships (Alberts et al., 2011, p.21). The implications for women’s reduced relaxation and leisure time, even while at university, are two-fold: for some, it sets a precedent that women become accustomed to; for others, it sparks a determination to change their setup.

4.4 Justifications for Inequality

Participants referenced several gendered patterns within their mixed-gender student households. Female students reported contributing more to the completion of housework, undertaking the more regular and less visible tasks. With limited exploration of this stage of life in the literature, little is known about why these patterns occur in this environment. Being at a unique life stage where inhabitants are undergoing short-term trials of housework arrangements, the reasons are unlikely to exactly match those of heterosexual couples looking to establish long-term routines.

Thorough examination reveals a number of explanations used to explain and justify inequality. The reasons provided range from short term considerations to the routines embedded during childhood. Each justification will be explored in this section followed by a comprehensive analysis of socialisation as a cause of inequality.

4.4.1 Mess Affordance

One of the most common reasons given for the disparity in female and male contributions, was the standards of cleanliness deemed acceptable by each. 38% of female students regarded cleanliness as extremely important, compared to 29% of male students, however participants indicated that the definition of clean is highly disputed. Differences in what is considered clean, and the acceptable duration to leave mess perpetuate the gendered housework divide:

> ‘Deciding on the frequency of getting things done, that was where the biggest difference was, and I think that was probably gendered in terms of the girls would want things to be done more frequently than the boys.’ (8F)

> ‘There seems to be very different expectations in terms of like what is acceptable in terms of like cleanliness, especially in the kitchen… boys seem to be very happy to leave that in a state that's like actually unclean. Whereas most of the girls I know don't think that's okay.’ (12F)

> ‘The most noticeable difference I have observed in my household is that the women I live with have a lower threshold at which tidying/cleaning has to occur (i.e. the guys are happier to wait longer to sweep/hoover or will allow more dishes to accumulate etc).’ (15M)

> ‘We argue about the standards of the cleaning and stacking the dishwasher - we all have different ideas about what 'good housework' looks like.’ (30F)

> ‘For the last two years me and the other girl have done the majority of the housework. Because we like it tidy, we just do it because if we didn’t, it wouldn’t get done. The boys just don’t seem to see the mess.’ (76F)

Female students are widely perceived to have higher standards of cleanliness than their male counterparts. While women wanted tasks to be completed more frequently, male students were happy to leave mess longer. Support is therefore offered to 'preliminary analyses' that show 'women generally have lower threshold levels and tend to dedicate more time to housework' (Charbonneau, Lachance-Grzela and Bouchard, 2021, p.191). As opposed to reaching a compromise, 'the person with the lower threshold level is the one who generally performs more housework' (Charbonneau, Lachance-Grzela and Bouchard, 2021, p.179). The idea of 'Gendered Affordance Perception', being that men and women perceive mess in different ways, applies here (McClelland and Sliwa, 2022, p.5). The example provided by McClelland and Sliwa of Jack and Jill is transferrable to student households. Upon entering the kitchen, Jill sees multiple things warranting action: 'she sees the dishes as to be washed, the floor as to be swept, the refrigerator as to be restocked, the counter as to wiped, the recycling bin as to be taken out' (McClelland and Sliwa, 2022, p.10). For Jack, on the other hand, he may see the same items in the same state, but he does not associate them with the action required (McClelland and Sliwa, 2022). This example resembles the experiences of participants in mixed-gender households and appears to be used to explain the greater contribution of female students to housework.

The notion that male students typically have a higher threshold for dirt and disorder, is reinforced by references to all-male houses. Households in which there are majority male inhabitants are reported to be particularly 'bad' in terms of their cleanliness:

> 'I think like females are viewed as having a higher standard of cleanliness generally, in these kind of student households, and in taking a higher degree of responsibility and maintaining the cleanliness of the household.' (6M)

> 'I know of households where it' s like, mostly households where it's all guys where it's just kind of the housework gets horrendous. And then often it's like girls who come to visit end up actually like doing their washing up for them and stuff.' (20M)

> 'All the all-boys houses I've been in have been, pretty much an absolute tip... several houses have been absolutely atrocious.' (44M)

> 'I have just generally noticed, houses with more guys tend to be just a bit messier. Like just things left out, questionable food safety. And houses that are majority women tend to be a bit more normal.' (123F)

All-male houses are recognised for being particularly unclean compared to households in which female students are present. All-male household therefore seem to defy the ideal that is sought elsewhere. This supports the idea that gender influences individuals' perceptions of mess, adding nuance to our existing understanding of thresholds. Earlier findings that mixed-gender households experience greater levels

of conflict may also relate to gendered perceptions of mess, as misalignment between male and female thresholds (though not explicitly discussed in this way between students), contributes to disagreements. While the 'Gendered Affordance Perception' helps to shed light on the frequency of conflict in mixed-gender households, an explanation for why mess is perceived differently by male and female students is not offered (McClelland and Sliwa, 2022, p.5). More exploration is needed to determine what shapes someone's mess affordance in the first place and individual coping strategies to reconcile differences, for example compromising on cleanliness, or willingness to do the housework.

4.4.2 Gendered Characteristics

Participants claimed a gendered difference in students' willingness to clean. Likely linked to their lower threshold for dirt and disorder, female students were more disposed to complete housework relative to their male counterparts. This is attributed in part to their own nature:

> 'I would say that the women of the household are keener to clean up than the men.' (10M)

> 'I think in general women tend to be more conscientious about housework and more anxious not to leave mess… I don't think they feel any anxiety about it at all or any obligation…they feel no need to prove themselves through housework, so I'm not sure why I do.' (12F)

> 'I do see an underlying pattern of the women in my house *generally* being more willing to do housework than the men.' (13M)

> 'I think girls are a lot more aware of other people in the house and there is a lot more respect there.' (37F)

Whether it is driven through a desire to clean, or a desire to please others in the house, participants portrayed female students as predisposed to housework. This resembles ideas that housework is a woman's domain, and 'women's presence and feminine care and duty' is connected to domestic practices (Szabo and Koch, 2017, p.1). It also supports research showing that 'men are not always reported as being either enthusiastic about housework or proactive in household management' (Meah, 2014, p.12). As 12F elaborated that she felt the need to 'prove' herself through housework, whereas her male counterparts felt no such pressure and were not so 'concerned about social consequences' (Thébaud, Kornrich and Ruppaner, 2021, p.1188). During the interview she described domestic labour as a means through which to feel 'useful' and to boost her 'self-worth'. This supports research showing that housework is a mechanism for some women to 'reaffirm their femininity' and nurturing character (Humphreys, 2016, p.14; Windebank and Martinez-Perez, 2018). This cyclical nature of 'doing gender' recalls Oakley's belief that 'women are, in part, the way they are because of the way they are thought

to be' (Oakley, 2018, p.1). While housework may create meaning for the individual, wider society does not recognise this as valuable.

Prior to forming partnerships, emerging adult women are 'still affected by the expectation that how well the home was run reflected on them' (Christopher, 2021, p.13). As Skeggs suggests, women are often expected to enact caring behaviours, something which my data set suggests is already embedded among students (2014, p.12). However, unlike suggestions that women 'unconsciously comply with certain social norms', 12F expresses awareness for this social pressure and seeks to be liberated from the urge to 'do gender' through housework (McClelland and Sliwa, 2022, p.13; Lyonette and Crompton, 2015). This indicates some awareness among students of cultural expectations. For some female students this results in a tension 'between striving for gender equality on the one hand and doing gender on the other' (Nyman, Reinikainen and Eriksson, 2018, p.36). 93F recalled having 'had arguments with myself about myself having to buy cleaning products and the cost not being shared'. This is just one example of the internal dilemmas experienced by women wherein they wish to uphold certain standards, like living in a clean domestic environment, but have to compromise on their desire to achieve these standards in an equitable way.

Male students, on the other hand, presented no such torment. Many conveyed indifference towards housework, framing it as a simple matter that does not evoke strong emotions:

> 'I think I'm pretty ambivalent towards it. I don't actually know that any emotion really springs to mind' (6M)
>
> 'It's never like at the forefront of people's minds.' (10M)
>
> 'I'm not going to lose sleep over it.' (38M)
>
> 'It just has to get done, there's not too much point fretting about it.' (57M)
>
> 'I don't know I feel like people make it more complicated than it is.' (117M)
>
> 'I will say I am quite happy because I don't have to do it.' (130M)

This lack of concern reflects the lower pressure on men to engage in housework. Domestic labour continues to be 'marginal to the daily lives of the male share householders of the study' (Natalier, 2003, p.265). Despite progress being made, the domestic sphere remains associated with femininity and therefore to show an investment in it would be to compromise one's alignment with hegemonic masculinity. Men have 'little incentive to take on female activities or jobs' and express nonchalance on the topic (England, 2010, p.149; Carlson, Miller and Rudd, 2020; Thébaud, Kornrich and Ruppaner, 2021). Male students may therefore be deprioritising housework to 'do gender', without considering

the implications that others are taking on an unequal burden, as in the case of 130M. One exception to this was participant 20M who expressed sympathy towards the women having to disproportionately shoulder the domestic burden:

> ‘I think there is a big problem with I guess women mostly, being left to do the vast majority of housework and then other people not realising or not caring that it is perhaps taking up so much of their time and energy.’ (20M)

Unlike the majority of men in my study, this male participant acknowledged the negative, gendered impact of inequitable housework arrangements. He talked about this somewhat passively as opposed to an active choice, with women ‘being left’ to complete housework (20M). Female students similarly acknowledged that the inequality they experienced was not necessarily intentional. They did however interpret the nonchalance of their male counterparts as disrespectful and careless:

> ‘It's not that I think the boys think we should do it. I just think they don't care about it, and don't care that we care.’ (12F)

> ‘We just share horror stories back and forth. And she's like, well, I don't know like why there's just this like lack of understanding and lack of care.’ (34F)

> ‘I don't know if it's like, conscious necessarily, like, I don't know if it's like, setting out to be disrespectful. But like, it comes across as like disrespect.’ (37F)

> ‘I don't even know if they think about it enough to have an emotion towards it.’ (67F)

> ‘I just don't think they care. I just don't.’ (76F)

By showing no regard, and no desire to remedy imbalanced housework arrangements, male students facilitate and perpetuate inequity. Domestic labour is not something they give much consideration to, nor do they feel that it is significant. Female students on the other hand, actively seek to achieve cleanliness, balance, and equity through their housework contributions.

4.4.3 Competence

An associated theory for why inequality pervades in student households, is that there is a gendered difference in housework ability. Participants remarked that female students have a more in depth understanding of day-to-day housework. As is found in marital homes, these differing levels of competence are used to justify am inequitable division of labour (Allen and Hawkins, 1990):

‘Many times, girls do take on more of the housework … I think the stereotype continues to persist that women are 'better' at cleaning and so are more expected to engage in housework.’ (33M)

‘Some people genuinely do not have the skills. They buy the wrong things, they bleach their clothes.’ (34F)

‘My female housemate has a lot more practical knowledge of how to clean things properly and how to keep a house in order than either of the other men.’ (45M)

‘One of the boys was like, I'm going to mop the floor and I was like, okay, sound. Came back in [and] the kitchen was like, a pool. I was like, you've done really well there, but I'm just gonna tell you, that you're wrong. It was quite painful.’ (67F)

‘Most men I have lived with don't know how to wash up properly. They never clean the sponge after using it to wash greasy pans.’ (86N)

‘The men in my house just don't know how to use the washing machine properly… They don't check pockets so our landlord had to get a washing machine engineer out to unblock the pipe. One of my housemates does his washing but then doesn't dry it properly so his clothes are always creased and he smells of damp… I find that I'm avoiding him more and more because he smells bad.’ (111N)

‘I do genuinely think just the two of them don't understand cleaning. They think washing up is the entire cleaning.’ (123F)

Participants suggested that male students fail to conduct housework effectively. In part they attributed this to a lack of understanding and education on what exactly constitutes housework, with 123F suggesting that male students regard washing up to be the extent of cleaning. Female students on the other hand recognised the broader scope of housework tasks. Ambiguity surrounding the precise nature of housework suggest that, as of university age, there are gendered differences in the definitions of domestic labour. Differing ideas of housework may contribute to individuals’ engagement in different tasks and may ultimately lead to unequal practices.

Even when male students did attempt tasks beyond washing up, they were often unsuccessful, worsening the mess or causing damage in the process. Examples such as breaking the washing machine or flooding the kitchen resulted in inconvenience and potential expense for other housemates. Notably it was largely female students who report being impacted by male incompetence. Many female participants were driven to greater domestic involvement in the knowledge that task quality would

otherwise be compromised. Others reported having to teach their male housemates how to effectively conduct housework, skills which female students already possessed prior to university. While not necessarily their intention, this may have the effect of making men feel incapable, thus lessening their willingness to engage in housework in future. This has the potential to exacerbate inequality by discouraging men, who may be learning housework for the first time, from participating.

Ultimately, university is not only a space in which housework arrangements are trialled and learned, but where, for some, housework skills are acquired. The impact of this is gendered, with female students having to facilitate men's learning:

> 'One of my male housemates walked in on me cleaning up after our other male housemate and told me I should stop because he'll never learn otherwise.' (2F)

> 'The guy I definitely like, I've literally had to tell him like, you have to do this. Otherwise, we're going to have problems like we're going to have like rats, or we're going to have mould growing in the sink.' (34F)

> 'Upon arriving at uni, I found myself teaching some of my male friends how to cook pasta, and how to put covers on duvets, things I knew how to do in secondary school.' (42F)

> 'A massive shock to me while at university has been how bad the males have been at household tasks, literally playing up completely to stereotypes (e.g., I had to teach a whole group of boys how to wash and dry their clothes).' (72F)

> 'I've genuinely considered, there's like a wikiHow article for how to clean that's actually really good. It's like, you know, don't use a soapy sponge to clean the counters, like spray it with cleaner and use paper towel. But it's fairly informative. I have considered dropping that in the group chat a couple of times.' (123F)

Women instructed men on how to conduct housework, setting expectations for acceptable behaviour and standards. Evidently, 'child participation in such gender-differentiated domestic and family routines' continues to 'directly influence children's social behaviour and gender typing', with female students taking on the responsibility of teaching housework (Weisner and Garnier, 1994, p.28). Unlike suggestions that women anticipate inequality, many female students expressed surprise at the imbalance in their households and especially at male students' lack of knowledge on housework (Charbonneau, Lachance-Grzela and Bouchard, 2019). University may therefore be a time in which women adjust their expectations for future division of domestic labour. It is perhaps the latter stages of emerging adulthood when women learn to expect to shoulder a greater domestic burden, than in adolescence.

Regardless of their expectations, female students are taking on the role of housework instructor and manager. Men's participation in housework therefore becomes dependent on women and by default, domestic labour becomes a job organised and spearheaded by female students. This perpetuates existing inequality and widens the gap in time and effort spent, and skill level completing domestic labour.

In previous literature, claims relating to housework ability have been considered part of the 'myth of male incompetence' (Lyonette and Crompton, 2015, p.34). However, the testimonies of students above suggest that male students are genuinely less able to do the requisite tasks to maintain a clean environment. Women appear to demonstrate greater skill and knowledge regarding domestic labour however the causes of this inequity are not immediately obvious. As housework routines are shaped over time, the background of male and female students is key to explaining their (in)competence and (un)willingness. The next section will consider these forces of socialisation and how they may explain the inequality characterising mixed-gender student housing.

4.5 Socialisation

Investigating the causes of inequality reveals a common underlying reason: students' gendered upbringings (Wenhold and Harrison, 2021). Coming straight to university from home, the setup of their familial home is key to shaping their housework attitudes and competence. In line with socialisation theories, two key factors emerge as factors in shaping children's future approaches to housework: the role modelling they observe, and the responsibilities they are given growing up (Cunningham, 2001). The sociology of housework acknowledges the embedded nature of gendered routines and the need for 'total liberation from the constraints of a divisively feminine upbringing in a decidedly sexist culture' (Oakley, 2018, p.187). Building upon this, I explore the 'origins and implications' of gendered differences, focussing particularly on the transition to independent living (Oakley, 2018, p.188)

4.5.1 Role Models

A number of participants described observing a specialised division of domestic labour between their parents, with each parent responsible for certain tasks. Mothers are almost unanimously associated with routine, daily domestic tasks, while fathers are linked to manual and outdoor tasks:

> 'Mum did the majority of housework. Some things were done by my dad namely the things within his sphere of knowledge – anything that required physical labour was done by him.' (7M)

> 'My mum did everything.' (50M)

> 'Any maintenance issues are completed by my dad – e.g. DIY and fixing. Cleaning, laundry, tidying [were] completed by my mum.' (93F)

> 'Dad tends to do garden tasks, e.g. mowing the lawn, hoovering, drilling, drying dishes; mum tends to do dusting, most cooking, laundry.' (117M)

> 'Mum organised and distributed tasks to others.' (121M)

Household tasks such as laundry and cleaning are primarily the responsibility of mothers. The more infrequent maintenance and garden-related tasks are more often fathers' concerns. This reinforces the 'distinctiveness of mothers' and fathers' spheres of influence' (Allen and Hawkins, 1999, p.201). This traditional division of labour, associated with gender, influences the tasks that children gravitate towards, with girls often mimicking the actions of their mothers, and boys their fathers (Blair, 1992). A precedent is set in which boys do not associate their male role models with domestic labour, but rather see it as a mother's, and by extension, women's prerogative. This association between women and

housework is strengthened as mothers were reported as playing a greater role in educating their children how to perform housework:

> ‘My mother taught me to cook and I was always taught to clean up after myself.’ (23F)

> ‘I asked my mum questions and helped her with chores before leaving for uni.’ (30F)

> ‘Mum taught me to cook from a young age.’ (39F)

> ‘I already knew how to clean and cook because my mum has always made sure that I took part in cleaning tasks.’ (79F)

> ‘From 15/16 I wanted to take part more so my mum taught me.’ (137M)

> ‘I have been able to cook and clean having been taught well by my mother and grandmother.’ (143M)

As described by participants, mothers were often more involved in the process of transferring and teaching domestic skills. By receiving instruction from female role models ‘from a young age’, participants are likely to form gendered associations (39F). There is also a risk of relying on female guidance when it comes to housework tasks. This was found to be an issue among male participants in particular, who were accustomed to their mothers doing housework for them, and would explain why female students become the teachers of housework.

4.5.2 Participation in Housework Growing Up

An unequivocal pattern emerged with regards to the preparedness of male and female students’ housework participation in their family homes. The general disparity between female and male exposure to housework is remarked on by various students:

> ‘One of my flatmates, he'd never changed his own bed before he came to uni. Whereas it was, I've been doing that since I was like, primary school age.’ (37F)

> ‘I didn’t have to learn anything, I was already familiar with how to cook and clean as I would often have to cook for myself as a teenager.’ (82F)

> ‘When I lived at home I already cooked once/twice a week. Knew how to clean and wash clothes.’ (102F)

> ‘I did chores from a young age, I knew how to cook, clean and use all appliances.’ (112F)

> ‘I already knew how to cook and clean so I felt I was prepared for living out.’ (132F)

Participants explicitly acknowledged that their gender was a defining factor in their housework participation:

> ‘I was expected to help as I like grew older, whereas I can see very much that some boys in households aren't expected to help.’ (12F)

> ‘Many boys were raised in households where they were not expected to contribute to housework or taught many basic life skills that all university age girls seem to know.’ (42F)

> ‘I will say that I always felt I did more than my brother even though he claims it was equal.’ (84F)

It is commonplace for female students to have contributed to housework since early on in their childhood. Upon arriving to university, they subsequently felt prepared to maintain a house, and undaunted at the prospect of cooking and cleaning independently. On the other hand, as alluded to by 37F, male students did not possess a similar level of domestic preparedness, strengthening findings that ‘a girl or a woman is more likely to receive formal or informal instruction in these skills’ (McClelland and Sliwa, 2022, p.14). While female students reported being exposed to housework from an early age, they suggested that male students were often not involved in the domestic domain. Male students reiterated this lack of exposure:

> ‘Some [male students] have never had to do any degree of washing up or something. And then have chosen not to learn.’ (6M)

> ‘Back home I wasn’t really made to do any chores almost ever, like the most I ever did was help with a bit of gardening every few weeks … when I came to uni it’s kind of like, oh now I actually have to do some of this stuff, so it was a bit of a change.’ (41M)

> ‘I don't know how to do any housework.’ (94M)

> ‘I'd never cooked or cleaned.’ (118M)

> ‘In all honesty as a child to even now I never had to do any housework.’ (135M)

As these excerpts indicate, male students often have less experience with household chores growing up. Some acknowledged their absence from the domestic domain growing up, without associating this with their gender. Nevertheless, a striking pattern emerges in which male students are unaccustomed to housework upon arrival to university, whereas female students ‘already had their schedules that they'd done at home, and they kind of just transplanted them into’ their student accommodations (41M). There are evidently gendered differences in the way that teenage boys and teenage girls spend their time, with

the latter doing more unpaid domestic work (EIGE, 2022). Accordingly, the gender socialisation theory is maintained, whereby 'which skills we acquire is mediated in various ways by gender norms and expectations' (McClelland and Sliwa, 2022, p.14).

4.5.3 Transition to University

Upon arrival to university, many male students experienced a shock at living independently from their family, and therefore having to navigate their own way through domestic tasks. Female participants expressed the feeling that male housemates were particularly reliant on their mothers:

> 'I think (at least in my house) the boys are used to their mothers at home doing everything for them, so they aren't used to cleaning up after themselves.' (2F)

> 'Their mums or whatever, do the stuff that we now do. They haven't ever clocked that it needs to be done.' (67F)

This aligned with the experiences of male participants, who expressed difficulty in adjusting to university. Where they are used to being reminded, or having housework completed on their behalf, they are now having to learn to 'motivate' themselves (20M):

> 'Boys are a bit more difficult to talk to as it is quite difficult for them to understand that their mom isn't just here to clean everything up.' (9M)

> 'I've kind of got to motivate myself to do it a bit more. Yeah, it's not being told this is what you've got to do, do it now please by mum or whatever.' (20M)

My data set revels there is a tendency for male students to rely on their mothers to complete domestic labour. Therefore, entry into an environment in which their mothers are absent, leaves them unsure how to proceed. Having 'observed sex-based division of tasks in their homes', they have formed expectations regarding who is responsible or better-suited for housework (Alberts et al., 2011, p.28). This expectation that their mother will pick up after them carries through to university, with female students then being expected to pick up the slack.

Exploring parents' division of labour in their childhood homes helps elucidate the patterns observed in student households. Another important factor is students' own contributions to household labour during their upbringings. With little exposure to domestic tasks growing up, male students are faced with an additional challenge upon their transition to university. Male students, in order to catch up with their female counterparts, must learn domestic skills alongside adjusting to university life:

> ‘I had to learn how often different parts of the house need cleaning once I moved into the student house.’ (4M)
>
> ‘Some things I simply didn’t know before a few months before uni (how my dryer works, how to iron a shirt in the proper way) so had to learn on the fly.’ (11M)
>
> ‘I knew how to cook to some extent, but I had to learn everything else.’ (41M)
>
> ‘I can cook but I had to learn how to clean.’ (105M)
>
> ‘If I was late to a lecture or something… I wouldn't dry my stuff or whatever… I didn't really anticipate how much time it would take to dry everything up.’ (117M)

Due to their upbringing in which they did not contribute to housework, multiple participants had to learn domestic skills upon arrival to university. For most students at Durham University, this occurs in two parts due to the prevalence of catered accommodation in first year. The initial transition to university therefore requires knowledge of laundry and grocery shopping. A second transition occurs when students then move from university accommodation to communal housing, where they have to contend with, and share, everyday cooking, and cleaning.

Whether it be acquiring knowledge of the frequency of routine household tasks, the effort level involved, or how to complete tasks, male students were far more likely to express ignorance on the topic of housework. The notion that ‘strong cultural currents’ affect male and female students’ participation in domestic labour, is reinforced (Alberts et al., 2011, p.30). Something to note here is that male students often had more knowledge of cooking than of cleaning, perhaps because of its status as a more rewarding and less gendered practice, something highlighted earlier in the subsection on task completion (Szabo and Koch, 2017). While the ‘normative climate prescribing sex-typed allocations of men’s and women’s responsibilities’ is particularly influential when it comes to cleaning, it is possible cooking is more encouraged among boys (Mikula et al., 1997, p.277; Szabo and Koch, 2017). As shifting conceptions of masculinity mean ‘men are now being pulled into domestic food preparation’, it is unsurprising that male students are more equipped to cook than they are to complete other domestic tasks (Szabo and Koch, 2017, p.2).

The gendered interaction of males ‘doing the task inadequately (to prevent future requests)’ (Charbonneau, Lachance-Grzela and Bouchard, 2019, p.292; Allen and Hawkins, 1999, p.203) that is commonly observed in heterosexual partnerships, is also observed in student households. However, unlike research that suggests these interactions as deliberate ‘equity-resisting strategies’, male students appear to lack the initial ‘training’ on how to conduct housework (Charbonneau, Lachance-Grzela and Bouchard, 2019, p.292).

Overall, the ramifications of gender socialisation are substantial, as the gender norms instilled during childhood 'provide us with schemas which shape how we perceive and respond to the world' (McClelland and Sliwa, 2022, p.5). This may provide a better explanation for why women are 'more attuned to domestic affordances than men', as they have built up an awareness over time (McClelland and Sliwa, 2022, p.16). Being sheltered from domestic tasks growing up, male students lack the confidence and skills to complete housework when they arrive at university, hampering their transition to independence (Conley et al., 2014). Males have to learn how to complete domestic tasks, and teaching these skills falls on housemates with greater knowledge and experience, i.e. female students. The limited exposure of boys to housework in their childhoods not only hinders their own adjustment to university life, but it also creates a burden on women to model housework practices.

Some participants reflected upon this failing, and discussed ways in which they hoped it would be different. They recognised that the inculcation of gendered roles at home occurs early on in one's upbringing:

> 'I really think this has to be put in place earlier in life by training children to be able to live on their own.' (9M)

> 'I think most sort of 18-19 year olds if they get told how to do housework are going to turn around and laugh in the faces of people trying to run that workshop.' (10M)

> 'I think more needs to be done when boys are growing up to teach them how to cook and clean (as many I know are clueless) and to suggest that domestic labour is shared.' (27F)

> 'Within the first month or so you can give it a try…But at this time everyone is stressed about work and the last thing they want is someone getting on their backs about housework' (38M)

> 'Why am I still having to tell people to tidy up after themselves? …To me, it should be a basic life skill that you've learned by the time you come to uni.' (67F)

> 'I don't really know if a course, like a twenty minute talk on it is going to make that much difference. I think it probably needs to start like way earlier.' (76F)

The consensus of participants was that household skills should be integrated and taught in childhood, and certainly 'by the time you come to uni[versity]' so that everyone is equipped to live independently in a clean and harmonious environment (67F). This ideal was rarely realised. My study illustrates preparedness to be gendered, with many males arriving to university ill prepared to deal with housework. As a result, students often reported seeking interventions to mitigate this underlying

inequity. There is currently no such intervention in place to educate young adults arriving at university on domestic tasks and their involvement.

4.6 Tactics and Interventions

Students implemented a number of interventions to try and achieve a fairer distribution of housework. 26% (39/150) of the sample reported using a formal rota to try and effect change. Other tactics employed included outsourcing cleaning, confronting housemates, and refusing to do housework altogether.

4.6.1 Formalised Rota

Many thought that by establishing a structured division of labour, with more accountability, that equity could be more easily achieved:

> 'We use a rota so that all the appliances and surfaces in the kitchen are cleaned once a week.' (55N)

> 'More recently myself and one of my other flatmates decided that we would push to set up a rota for different cleaning jobs as out of our four flatmates we were the only people cleaning.' (79F)

> 'We have a rota to organise the cleaning of communal spaces.' (99F)

Some found that rotas were successful in creating a structured routine to follow because housemates would 'adhere to these rules with no complaints' (99F). On the other hand, households in which there was low engagement on the topic from certain members, did not see the benefit of a rota. Overall most students found that rotas were futile since they were often ignored, and still relied on someone to enforce them. Despite their aim to equalise the distribution of domestic labour, the implementation of rotas created additional mental load:

> 'I think the males in this house that do less housework … I think they would definitely not want the rota to be in place, as they know that they're going to have to do stuff.' (8F)

> 'I think if you force a rota on people then they're naturally going to fight against it if they don't want to do it.' (10M)

> 'We have a rota, but it is not followed… it is easy for people to pretend that the mess is not theirs when it is. It ends up being me and one other girl cleaning at the end of each week.' (27F)

> 'We tried doing that and people still ignored it.' (38M)

> 'The rota is the right idea, but people don't stick to it and it is very imbalanced.' (50M)

A couple of male students claimed that rotas introduce too much commitment and competition in households:

> 'I feel things such as rotas can create a lot of issues depending on external circumstances. I for one dislike them because I feel obligated to sort things despite having deadlines…it's unnecessary stress.' (56M)

> 'I know I need to catch up…I mean I don't feel massively guilty to be honest – it's their fault for getting so far ahead.' (145M)

The above participants were irritated by the enforcement of structured housework and appeared happy to disregard it in favour of 'more pressing or attractive claims on time' (Clark et al, 2018, p.7). In order for a rota to be useful they require 'articulation work' by certain housemates (McClelland and Sliwa, 2022, p.11). This undermines the intention of rotas to spread the domestic burden evenly (McClelland and Sliwa, 2022, p.11). It rings true that 'those who ignore chores are as likely to ignore rosters', undermining the efficacy of the rota for all (Clark et al, 2019, p.235). As opposed to being 'the safest means of coping with household chores', rotas are either enforced by female students or are ignored (Clark et al, 2019, p.233). This builds upon the work of Mikula et al. in 1997 by showing that there is a gendered component to the success of rotas.

Certain responses from participants, such as 56M and 145M above, challenge the idea that students who are 'over-benefited' are 'likely to experience guilt and shame' (Charbonneau, Lachance-Grzela and Bouchard, 2021, p.181). While there is evidence to suggest whoever does less in a couple sometimes experiences 'distress and negative feelings', this does not appear to be the case for students, with 145M explicitly stating his lack of sympathy (Carlson, Miller and Rudd, 2020, p.3). The greater emotional attachment in couples may explain this disparity, relative to student households where people may feel less obligated to act communally. Any potential guilt felt by those who are 'getting a better deal' than their housemates seems to be outweighed by the benefit of doing less (Charbonneau, Lachance-Grzela and Bouchard, 2021, p.181). Formal arrangements in which 'collaboration' or 'turn-taking' are incorporated, therefore do not appeal to those whom they are targeted at, as they do less than their fair share (Mikula et al., 1997, p.197). Rotas ultimately do not improve satisfaction, reduce conflict, or equalise the distribution for most students living in mixed-gender households.

4.6.2 Initiating Conversation

Rotas fail to provide a solution for the majority of students. Particularly for female students, who by and large assume most of the housework, rotas do not help to ease domestic inequality. Instead, they add a further administrative burden. In a bid to rectify the inequality in their households, some women

tried to engage in conversations with under-contributing housemates. Some of these yielded successful results:

> ‘The boys have gotten much better following an intervention that happened earlier this term.’ (2F)

> ‘It has definitely got a lot better. There is a kind of like a growing awareness of like, okay, they don't like it when the house looks like that.’ (37F)

> ‘[He] has progressed so much from first year because he would leave everything out and probably be the worst in the whole house. And now he's one of the better ones.’ (46F)

> ‘I've changed a lot since first year and I actually like to keep stuff clean now.’ (41M)

> ‘Actually that housemate that refused to do the hoovering he did apologise at the beginning of this year because he was like I'm sorry, I didn't realise how much work went into doing the housework.’ (76F)

> ‘It used to be that sometimes something would be out for days, and I'd completely forgotten. Like that, that never happens now... so it's getting better.’ (117M)

Regarding progress towards equity, some female students have observed a longer term change in their male housemates. Some male students have acknowledged this too, stating that they have improved since arriving at university. There is a decrease in the number of women feeling dissatisfied or very dissatisfied from second to third year (46.3% to 39.6%) which suggests that some positive change is occurring. For some, pursuing conversations was a triumph leading to greater awareness, yet others felt as though it was ‘more effort than it was worth’ (12F) and it didn’t yield success. Even when greater equality is achieved, it takes time, and is due to the efforts of women, who tended to initiate conversations. Frequently attempts to bring up the topic are met with resistance from male housemates who do not deem it necessary to alter their behaviour. Overtly misogynistic masculinities appear to manifest here (Pope et al., 2022). Employing certain interventions or tactics is thus a risk for women, as it can upset the group dynamics within a household. Sarcastic retorts, mockery and contempt were often received in response:

> ‘I suggested to one of my male housemates that we should each have a shelf in the fridge for our food…He proceeded to say that it would never work, and when I told him that it worked in my all-girl house in second year he said, “Don’t fucking talk to me” and started slamming cupboards loudly.’ (1F)

> ‘When asked to contribute they often react frankly like children, putting me and my other female housemates in an uncomfortable position and feeling like we’re being ‘bossy’.’ (42F)

> ‘When I try to broach the topic the other two just ignore me and don’t change their ways whatsoever.’ (103F)

> ‘The male housemate will often be incredibly patronising about our studies and extra-curriculars to act like we all have far more time to do the work. Whenever we attempt to raise the issue, we will be dismissed with comments like “I do my own laundry” as if it’s a joke.’ (133F)

The above excerpts depict attempts by female students to enact change through dialogue with housemates. These efforts failed to generate results, instead they often led to hostile interactions. With some retorting back and others simply ignoring the requests to do more, a general picture is painted in which men ‘resist changes requested… as they tend to be advantaged by the housework arrangement’ (Charbonneau Lachance-Grzela and Bouchard, 2021, p.192). The balance within households is portrayed as delicate and vulnerable to disruption. For women trying to achieve the ‘ideal’ of equity, they run the risk of being perceived as a nag or damaging the cohesion of the household.

Male students appear to use ‘communication tactics like avoidance, withdrawal, and negative affect’ (Carlson, Miller and Rudd, 2020, p.14) alike men in cohabiting and marital relationships. Cumulatively these strategies are found to have an impact on female students’ attitudes towards intervening. Many describe giving up trying as in the past it has not been worth it. These strategies used by male students evidently have the desired effect of preserving the status quo (Charbonneau Lachance-Grzela and Bouchard, 2021):

> ‘I think this year I'm putting up with it because I don't have the time nor the energy to be arguing with people about it.’ (8F)

> ‘There's no point, and I know that sounds defeated, but I would just rather not have the conversation, the confrontation.’ (12F)

> ‘However change is brought about, it would end up, like part of the burden falling on like the girls and women…it would be like us taking on the mental load of explaining.’ (12F)

> ‘In my first year it was four guys and one girl. She was initially the one who was most fussed about keeping trying to get things tidy of stuff. I think she, yeah, she gave up after a few months.’ (20M)

> ‘I just clean what I use, I used to clean the house a lot in my second year but I can’t be bothered now as I was always just cleaning everyone’s stuff.’ (31F)

> ‘I don't bother telling him that it's an issue, because I know he's not going to do anything about it.’ (34F)

> ‘At the start of the year… I wasn't sort of worn down by a year of doing all the cleaning.’ (123F)

Despite attempts by certain housemates to intervene in the issue at hand, many ended up conceding due to resistance. This interestingly demonstrates how housework routines are fashioned over time, particularly during the years at university where this is a novel challenge for emerging adults to contend with. Several female participants expressed a growing sense of resignation to inequitable arrangements as they progressed through university. Upon receiving such minimal responses to their efforts to share housework more equally, many were disheartened and give up trying to fix a problem they feel is no longer resolvable. Rather than experiencing a decrease in dissatisfaction due to improved conditions, it seems female students are lowering their expectations in line with the behaviour of their male counterparts. There was a decrease in the percentage of female students that ranked cleanliness as extremely important between second year and third year (43.9% to 32.6%) reinforcing that women may be compromising on their standards.

Owing to the failure of rotas, and household conversations, some female students reported taking more drastic action, outsourcing domestic labour altogether.

4.6.3 Outsourcing Labour

Employing a cleaner is a route taken by some Durham University students which appears to reduce the tension around housework. While some Durham students possess the economic capital to pay for a cleaner, it is important to note that this is not an option for many and is not representative of the vast population of students:

> ‘We pay for a cleaner…I don't understand it. Staff are paid to do their job regardless of sex.’ (94M)

> ‘We don’t really have [a] designated rota or tasks, we just do it when we do or sometimes a parent will pay for a cleaner.’ (105M)

> ‘We have a cleaner who does a big clean once a week and gives the kitchen a good going over. The rest of the time we each clean up our own messes and do our own washing up in the kitchen.’ (113F)

> ‘I live in a mixed house, but we pay a cleaner. I don't think gender plays a role.’ (139F)

> ‘The cleaner just does it and we're very happy with her work, so we have no reason to talk about housework.’ (140F)

For these participants, collectively employing a cleaner appears to minimise discussions on housework and ease the burden on certain individuals. In doing so, these students dismissed gender as a factor, despite most likely outsourcing their cleaning to a local working class woman (Álvarez-López, 2019). As the previous chapter highlighted, university provides an opportunity, for boys in particular, to learn housework. By outsourcing domestic tasks to a cleaner (having likely come from an environment where their mother was primarily responsible for housework), those who have not yet grasped domestic management delay their opportunity to learn further. This raises questions around their future contributions to housework and their potential reliance on women to clean.

One female student goes on to acknowledge that the boys in her house were in fact the ones to ‘push’ for a cleaner to minimise their contribution as much as possible:

> ‘Thinking about it now, it was the boys who pushed for more hours for the cleaner… I think the boys wanted to make sure they did like no cleaning, but the girls didn't mind doing their own rooms.’ (140F)

140F continues to explain that, despite the wishes of the female students to hire a cleaner only for communal spaces, they proceeded to pay someone to clean all rooms in the house. She explained that ‘in an ideal world, I would probably clean my own bedroom and that would save a little bit of money per week’ (140F). There is a conflict here between the individual and collective, and how ultimately the resolution favours the desires of the men involved. Instead of spending more time on cleaning, like most female students in other mixed-gender households, this participant is spending more money. Employing a cleaner, while solving domestic problems in some ways in the short term, introduces new challenges for students to negotiate, and potentially defers the problem of how to share work fairly in the long term. Outsourcing labour may be an option for students with the economic capital to do so, however for the majority of students, particularly those from a low-income background, paying for a cleaner would not be possible.

4.6.4 Striking

Where conversations failed and outsourcing was not an option, certain female participants withdrew from housework for days to weeks to prove a point about their disproportionate contribution. While this is less often an option for those in long-term arrangements, withdrawing from housework is feasible for

female students due to the temporary nature of university. By going on housework strike, participants sought to raise awareness of their greater contributions and invite more input from housemates:

> ‘I am the only person that has ever taken the recycling out in this house … I was leaving it to see if anyone noticed it was an issue... It took four weeks. We had a massive pile of recycling, it was like spilling onto the floor onto the table.’ (34F)

> ‘I sometimes wait a couple of days, if, like we've run out of fairy liquid or like soap or something. I waited for a week thinking like surely someone else will notice…if you're touching, like raw chicken, and then, like you're not washing your hands because there's no soap in the kitchen.’ (74F)

> ‘I kind of leave it now to see if they do [it].’ (76F)

> I stopped cleaning the hobs and generally the surfaces for two months and the place got worse than Shrek's swamp, so I cleaned to avoid any health issues.’ (96M)

> ‘I said the girls do all the work. They got annoyed, so us girls didn’t do anything. House got super messy (because we didn’t do anything) and the boys still said whose job is it to tidy up? Will someone please tidy up?’ (97F)

The majority of students that reported resorting to this intervention were female however one male reported doing the same. Broadly, this intervention did not achieve the desired effect, rather the houses deteriorated in cleanliness. Reluctantly many would renege on their strike, prioritising the hygiene of their living environment to a longer-term lesson on equity. This is a key point of difference between student households and those inhabited by couples or families. In university households, the house itself bears no significance to the students – it is a temporary rented accommodation with no long-term emotional or financial stake.

While they may not have continued abstaining from housework altogether, the proportion of women doing more than their housemates decreased. In third year, 62.8% of female participants reported doing more than their housemates, 10.4% fewer than in second year. This may explain why marginally more women are satisfied in third year than first year, not because men are increasing their contributions, but because women actively decreased their own (Kingston, 2017).

4.6.5 University Intervention

Women have attempted to tackle the issue of inequity on an individual level, initiating discussions with housemates, employing rotas, and even striking. However, they have found these strategies to prove ineffective in achieving their goal. Men’s limited involvement in housework is too engrained to be

overcome by micro-level action and warrants structural intervention instead. Given this, and the universities' duty of care over its students, female participants underscored the need for university intervention. Suggestions were made regarding a university-wide workshop in which basic domestic skills could be taught and equitable divisions of domestic labour encouraged:

> 'You could just have like a little, not workshop, but a little talk or whatever, which is just like: this is what it's like when you live out.' (10M)

> 'Something with some basic cleaning skills and kind of how to live, would probably be very useful for a lot of people.' (20M)

> 'I would like the university to encourage men to take cooking and cleaning courses in first year or before coming to university, just as they did with consent courses.' (83F)

> 'I think it could be effective if like when you get to college like in the sort of Freshers Week, that they have some sort of talk saying like, you know, this is how you clean… it's important to clean so your housemates and the people who you're living with don't hate you.' (123F)

> 'Being in university is the best time to do this kind of thing…it's like everyone's expected to pitch in at least a bit.' (145M)

The provision of education on housework is thought by these participants to benefit all involved. In addition to bringing those without previous knowledge of domestic skills up to speed, it would reduce the burden away from those who take on the responsibility of upskilling housemates. As this is found to, most often, fall on the shoulders of female housemates, it would help to equalise the domestic load. An interesting paradox emerges here between students' desire for independence, and their request for intervention. While university may mark the transition to adulthood, students are still in an emergent stage and the opportunity for certain behaviours to be shaped and equity encouraged, remains.

General cleanliness, housemates' relationships and overall wellbeing would be improved in light of this education. University is a particularly suitable time to intervene as it marks the transition to independence for most and is an opportunity for behaviours to be addressed before they are engrained further.

Participants expressed scepticism at the thought of a university run intervention, predicting resistance from other students. They diagnosed the root of the problem as deeply embedded and therefore requiring a more sustained approach than a singular workshop. To the contrary, some participants did not acknowledge the need for any form of intervention – arguing that housework is not an issue.

4.6.6 Impacting Future Decisions

Given that university support was not forthcoming at the time of interviews, participants sought to avoid repeated patterns of housework inequality through making strategic decisions regarding future housing. Some female students were so inconvenienced by the housework arrangements in their mixed-gender household, that to avoid the issue recurring, they opted to live in same gender houses in the future. Their choice to live with others demonstrates both their commitment to making a longer-term change, and the strength of their feelings on the issue:

> 'If you know that you are someone who can't function as happily and as productively in a messy household, and you know that they're messy boys, just don't live with them because it's not worth your time to try… just cut your losses and go and live in a single sex household.' (12F)

> 'I used to get very frustrated when the boys would cook and leave the washing up for days so that we would get fined by college, and for this reason I chose to live with all girls in second year.' (31F)

> 'Next year, we're doing an all-girls house…I just think that like, we all kind of are aware of the situation in our house at the moment…and that we want to live in a nice, clean, tidy space.' (37F)

> 'I didn't want to be with all girls when I was signing this year like this house, because I think it's better to have a mix, to balance it out. But now … I'm just going to live with all girls.' (74F)

> 'I deliberately chose to live with girls who also want a clean and tidy house, so we all clean up after we've cooked our meals and wipe the surfaces and the floor.' (136F)

> 'I think it's more common to have all girls… from the top of my head anyway, than all boys, because I think once you get some girls in the house, and like everything's, like a bit more streamlined, let's say… some of the messier boys they quite like that and they don't want to leave then.' (145M)

For these female students, living in an unclean and hostile environment had 'great implications for the time and energy' available to them (Nitsche and Grunow, 2016, p.80). They were not willing to accept inequity, and so sought alternative arrangements, opting to live in all-female houses in the future. By attributing their housework issues to it being a mixed-gender household, they reinforce the idea that gender is a highly relevant factor.

Inequitable living situations at university influenced students' perceptions of housework and its distribution in later life. Female students were apprehensive at the thought of transitioning into another

mixed-gender household after university, whether that be with a partner or peers. They sought to avoid replicating the inequitable arrangements of their previous households, but anticipated this being an active effort:

> ‘Any future house I live in, I'm going to make sure that I set some ground rules and say, the housework has to be divided equally, because otherwise it's going to cause animosity, and I will resent you.’ (34F)

> ‘I just hope that it won’t occupy my thoughts as much.’ (37F)

> ‘I am not going to be someone that does everything for a man, basically…that is not going to be the case.’ (76F)

> ‘I would say it's made me a bit more negative on it. Because it's hard to not to come out of this with a negative point of view.’ (123F)

> ‘I feel like it's gonna end like after I leave uni, but, I'm going to be, well, I'll probably move home next year, but after that, I'm gonna have to do this all over again and it's just like, Oh, God.’ (150F)

Female students’ view of domestic labour became more pessimistic; however, they retained hope that their experience at university is not representative of the future. Despite university being a key preparatory stage for emerging adults, participants considered their university experience to be a distinct phase of life. Female students constructed university housing as a unique microcosm, distinct from adult cohabitation. By framing it as a liminal stage of life, these female students rationalised having unfavourable domestic arrangements:

> ‘As a student, you're, you're more likely to just be like, “Oh, well, just get on with it.”’ (8F)

> ‘I would like people to understand that communal living doesn’t last forever and that while we live communally the best thing to do is just chip in everywhere you can.’ (29F)

> ‘I complain all the time. But like, I'm just kind of dealing with it. Because it's my last year, it's the last year I'm going to have to live with people who I don't know very well.’ (34F)

> ‘If I've like, got a full time job. I don't want to be living like somewhere as gross as this. Yeah. Like, it's fine right now when I don't do much in the day and like, I'm a university student, but, like, everyone needs to be better as we grow up.’ (150F)

In expressing their aspiration for a 'better' household setup in the future, these students positioned communal living as temporary (150F). Akin to a 'social island set off from the rest of society', university is portrayed as a deviation from the trajectory of adulthood (Arnett, 2014, p.167). Female participants reassured themselves that university, and the affiliated approach to domestic labour, 'doesn't last forever' (29F). Accordingly, the unfavourable household arrangements which they have experienced are attributed to student-hood, and housework inequality deemed a finite issue. This ultimately leads to a cognitive dissonance among female students where they effectively learn to tolerate dissatisfaction.

Male participants in particular used the characteristics of student living as an excuse for not contributing to housework. 10M directly attributes his untidiness to being at university, predicting that he will become 'tidier' in later life. 117M considers his disinterest in housework a product of not having his own, long-term accommodation:

> 'I think once I'm done with university, I will probably be a bit tidier, anyway.' (10M)

> 'Because it's not mine…I care less as a result.' (117M)

These male participants justified their lower contribution to housework by associating their untidiness with their student-hood, implying that they will improve in future. In doing so, they ascribed their lack of contribution more to their context than as an active choice. While male and female students both perceived student-hood as transient, it informs their behaviour in dichotomous ways. Male students used the short term nature of university as an excuse for neglecting housework, while female students saw it as motivation to make the best of the situation and 'deal' with it for the time being (34F). The hope that it will be 'better as we grow up' (150F) builds on the observations of a recent study that 'emerging adult women expect to take on most of the childcare and housework' (McConnon, Midgette, Conry-Murray, 2022, p.51).

Instead of accepting it as inevitable, exposure to the inequitable arrangements at university has made these female students more aware of the issue and more determined to find ways to address it. Their experiences of housework division at university are therefore 'likely to affect their division of labour in their future homes' (McConnon, Midgette, Conry-Murray, 2022, p.50). Emerging adult women feel as though they 'have the potential to restructure the future', especially when it comes to settling with a partner (Wenhold and Harrison, 2021, p.218). While they are optimistic that they will make sure to not perform the majority of domestic labour in their future household, they do not acknowledge – or are not aware – that crafting egalitarian arrangements is a form of labour in itself.

Contrary to the collective optimism of participants, research points to the persistence of gendered housework inequalities throughout all stages of adult life (Baxter, Hewitt and Haynes, 2008). As the first opportunity to independently establish housework routines, university provides a sandbox for

testing and refining arrangements. Although participants viewed the unsatisfactory conditions at university as temporary, research suggests that the habits formed during emerging adulthood are enduring (Charbonneau et al., 2021; Cui, Hong and Jiao, 2022). The failure to model equality in university households therefore significantly hinders the prospect of embedding equitable arrangements in later life. The sociology of housework is broadened by this discovery that student-hood, while theoretically an opportunity to address domestic inequalities, is not perceived in this way by students themselves.

5. CONCLUSION

My study provides a novel perspective, adding nuance to theoretical understandings of the gendered division of domestic labour and its detrimental effects. While the manifold ways in which gender dictates housework are understood within established heterosexual couples, the housing arrangements that precede this stage of life have not been explored. By focussing 'mostly on the experience of well-established adults', the transitory phase between childhood and adulthood, known as emerging adulthood, has not been given sufficient attention (Charbonneau et al., 2021, p.178; McConnon et al., 2022). During this phase, emerging adults 'build the foundations on which their future relationship experiences will be based' (Charbonneau et al., 2019, p.291) and make 'work and family role decisions that will impact their future lives' (Fulcher et al., 2015, p.178). As a developmental stage where independence is gained, arrangements are tested and habits, embedded, it is particularly pertinent to explore the housework decisions made in this time (Charbonneau, Lachance-Grzela and Bouchard, 2021). This is where my study makes an original contribution. As an increasing number of emerging adults pursue higher education, university provides a unique institution through which to examine housework routines. My original contribution is grounded in the thematic analysis of mixed methods data obtained through a survey of 150 students and semi-structured interviews of 20 students.

It became immediately apparent that, parallel to the 'spoken' vs 'lived' egalitarianism observed in established couples, students demonstrate a dissonance between their values and their reality (Lyonette and Crompton, 2015). 84.7% of the sample believed that an equitable division of domestic labour was 'important' or 'extremely important', yet few households reflected this in their arrangements. The fundamental misalignment between students' aspiration for equity and their actual distribution was a source of huge frustration for female students in particular, as they were most disadvantaged by the arrangement. Female students were primarily responsible for the general upkeep of the household, undertaking most of the cleaning and washing up. Male students on the other hand, minimised their overall contribution and prioritised self-serving tasks such as cooking. From the type and frequency of tasks undertaken, to the quality of task completion, many of the gendered patterns found within cohabiting and married heterosexual relationships arose too within mixed-gender student households.

Comparison with peers revealed housework to be a widespread issue among mixed-gender student households. Rather than motivating change, this observation made students feel as if inequity was the norm and that striving for anything fairer would be futile. This is an especially important discovery given that, for most, university is their first experience living independently and therefore where expectations are moulded. These expectations are decidedly gendered. While female students were faced with the reality of taking on the majority of domestic labour, male students were left thinking that this was an acceptable norm. The precedent set by other mixed-gender student households was one way

in which the gendered division of domestic labour was perpetuated. Another common justification proposed was female students' lower tolerance to mess and dirt. This was in part attributed to their intrinsic natures as women, reflecting an undercurrent of covert misogyny. It was not only male students who referenced stereotypes, but a number of female students also denoted domestic labour as a mother's prerogative. The environment in which students are raised, marred by forces of socialisation, were undoubtedly potent in shaping these views. Using Coltrane's (2000) findings as a foundation, my study demonstrates the importance of modelling equitable practices from an early age.

As their first opportunity to establish their own housework routines, many defaulted to performing gender based on observations from their upbringing. Several students mirrored the approaches to housework undertaken by their parent of the same gender, demonstrating the strength of role models. Exposure to housework growing up was a further determining factor in students' contributions. Male students were, by and large, not given housework responsibilities, reducing their confidence and familiarity with housework tasks. Female students, on the other hand, were well-versed, having been introduced to domestic labour from a young age. To bridge the gap in their peers' knowledge, female students provided instruction on how and when to appropriately perform domestic work. In this way, the labour of teaching housework is effectively being passed down from mothers to female housemates, reinforcing the association of women with the domestic domain. University marks this transition, and the subsequent realisation for many women the extent to which the gendered division of domestic labour is engrained.

Female students felt as though their male peers deemed housework 'women's work', and therefore their participation was discretionary (Meah, 2014, p.3). Accordingly, there was an assumption that female students would compensate for others' lack of contribution. As a result, female students' contributions to housework were frequently overlooked. This compounded the feelings of injustice among female students. Navigating these feelings for the first time posed challenging and led to significant disagreements among housemates (Foulkes et al., 2021). A few experienced positive changes as a result of engaging in open dialogue with their housemates, however most were met with a negative reception, increasing conflict. Others who sought to enact change through formalised interventions found them largely ineffective as they only increased the mental load (Daminger, 2019). As a last resort, some female students abstained from completing housework altogether, which, in light of the declining cleanliness of their living environment, was eventually reneged upon. Although mostly unsuccessful, university is evidently a time in which different remedies to housework inequity are experimented with. This is an important discovery for the sociology of housework, as by the time researchers explore housework routines in established couples, potential solutions may have already been tested and disregarded.

Additionally, my study shows that university is a place in which students grapple with the effects of housework inequity for the first time. Whether due to the time spent on housework, or the negative atmosphere created because of housework negotiations, female students described the daily negative impact. Their households' division of domestic labour ultimately interfered with their ability to study at home, their participation in societies and extra-curriculars, and their housemate relationships. Despite participants' optimism that housework is a concern unique to student housing, research suggests this marks the beginning of a recurring issue. Considering that housework has such a significant, problematic, and potentially long-term impact, it would be within the interest of higher education institutions to address the cause.

Universities have a duty to support their students, particularly with matters that may affect their degree participation or wellbeing more broadly. Recognising that the transition to independence is a key challenge for students, universities are increasingly providing resources and lifestyle guidance. Durham University offers initiatives around safe sexual practices, budgeting, mental health, and career planning. However, to date, housework as a topic does not feature in the support provided to students. This speaks to the entrenchment of the gender order, and the normalisation of inequitable divisions of domestic labour in wider society. It underscores the enduring invisibility and trivialisation of domestic labour that Oakley sought to address several decades ago (Oakley, 1974). My study emphasises that it is in the interest of universities, particularly in light of the Athena Swan Charter, to address housework inequalities. In alleviating the disproportionate burden facing female students, they would be able to engage fully in their education and leisure time. By drawing attention to this area in which progress is needed, my study acts as a 'tool toward greater equality' (Szabo and Koch, 2017, p.7).

In addition to its pragmatic impact, my research makes a novel contribution to sociological theory. The sociology of housework, as the overarching approach, coalesces with other theoretical drivers to add texture to the specifics of housework in different household types. Doing gender and emerging adulthood provide a particularly insightful lens through which to view students' approaches to domestic labour. The application of these theoretical frameworks in conjunction, illuminate housework negotiations at university as experimental performances of gender. These insights were facilitated by the robust mixed-methods framework in place. By triangulating surveys with semi-structured interviews, the respective weaknesses of both methods were negated as they possess 'differing and possibly complementary strengths' (Harris and Brown, 2010, p.2; Schoonenboom and Johnson, 2017). Furthermore, the strength of results was bolstered by having a large data set, a carefully constructed typology and thorough thematic analysis.

There are several ways in which future research could build on my findings. First and foremost, it would be beneficial to conduct research amongst a more diverse and therefore representative range of students.

Although generalisability was not an objective of my research, gathering a heterogeneous sample, in terms of ethnicity and socio-economic status in particular, would enhance the strength of insights drawn. Furthermore, by researching other universities, an understanding would be gained into the experiences of students in a non-collegiate environment. With predominantly catered accommodation in first year, Durham University students experience a somewhat delayed transition to independence. There would be methodological and theoretical value in tracking this transition over the course of university as students negotiate other compounding issues in their emerging adulthood such as final examinations and the search for employment.

My study alludes to the change in attitudes towards housework, for example the growing frustration of female students, however this could be understood in more depth through a longitudinal study. This would provide an in-depth insight into how students' approaches to housework each year may be determined by the previous. A particularly critical transition point to focus on would be that of female students moving from their final year of university to future housing. They appear to be positive about the equity of their future housework arrangements despite all evidence pointing to the contrary. Another key avenue for future research would be the exploration of people at different phases of emerging adulthood. Postgraduate students, who typically have a shorter time at university, and may have more experience living independently, are likely to have an alternative perspective on navigating housework in shared housing. Moreover, it is important to understand how emerging adults in different settings, for example those who pursue vocational careers over higher education, may experience the division of domestic labour.

A number of participants in my study referenced the different dynamics of all-female or all-male households to mixed-gender ones. While there is a strong suggestion from participants that mixed-gender households are particularly prone to housework disagreements, a comparative study could confirm this more accurately. Similarly, other factors that may affect students' experiences navigating housework could be explored in future research. Considering the limitations of my resources, it was not possible to analyse the impact of demographic factors such as religion, ethnicity, or sexuality on domestic approaches without detracting from the objective of understanding housework as a gendered experience. Feminist research, however, emphasises the importance of adopting an intersectional framework. In future studies where there is the scope to do so, consideration of factors that compound the effects of gender would enhance the sociology of housework further.

Ultimately, my study provides a unique sociological contribution to conceptions of housework. Contrary to the suggestion that 'households of students sharing flats are characterised by arrangements and rules which ensure that all members contribute to the household tasks', the vast majority of participants experienced inequity (Mikula et al., 1997a, p.204). Despite reported desires for equity,

gender is evidently a ‘powerful ideological device’ that exerts influence on housework arrangements from the outset of emerging adulthood (West and Zimmerman, 1987, p.147). From the preparedness of students for domestic independence, their attitudes towards housework, and their overall contribution to tasks, the gender disparity is marked. By highlighting this environment in which gendered habits are trialled and established for the first time, my study emphasises the importance of further research and possible university-wide interventions.

6. BIBLIOGRAPHY

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IV. APPENDIX 1: DIGITALLY ADMINISTERED SURVEY

Housework Among Students

An outline of this study, undertaken as part of the MA by Research in Sociology and Social Policy, is provided below. Please read this information carefully before you decide to take part. If you have any questions, please get in touch via the contact details at the end of this page.

A significant amount of research has been conducted into the gendered dynamics of housework among heterosexual couples. Despite eroding gender norms, studies point to the greater proportion of time spent by women on housework, inhibiting their contribution to the paid labour market among other things. While the notable difference in approaches has been widely evidenced in the context of heterosexual married or cohabiting couples, there are marked gaps in the research. In particular, the approaches of students have not been explored. This study looks to fill this gap by investigating students' experiences of sharing housework, utilising the theories already developed around women's greater contribution to domestic labour.

Therefore, in a bid to understand how gender might inform domestic labour among students, this study is looking for Durham University students of any year group that occupy a mixed gender household. If you fit this criterion, I would be grateful for your participation so that we can better understand housework patterns and therefore inform practices to make it more equitable.

Why you are invited: You are invited to take part in this study because you are a Durham University Student living in a mixed-gender household.

What you will do: Participation will entail a one-off ten minute survey gathering some demographic information and exploring your housework contributions and attitudes. Should you choose to provide your contact details at the end of the survey, you may be contacted for participation in a short semi-structured interview. With informed consent, this would take place over the phone, and would be audio-recorded and transcribed.

What your data will be used for: Your data will be used to inform a postgraduate thesis which will be submitted for assessment as part of an MA by Research degree.

How your data will be kept confidential: Survey responses will be stored digitally on a password protected device, accessible by the researcher only. You will not be required to provide your contact details unless you consent to. Should you choose to provide your contact details, you may be contacted for a follow up interview which will be handled with the same level of confidentiality. For further information about the University's policy for handling private data, including your rights and how to make a complaint, see: www.dur.ac.uk/research.innovation/governance/ethics/considerations/people/consent/privacynotice/

What are the risks: The survey will discuss numerous factors such as gender identity and

its influence on domestic life. Some people may find this uncomfortable to talk about. If you believe that these topics are likely to result in significant distress or anxiety, it may be best to refrain from participating. Should you commence the survey and feel uncomfortable, you may also choose to withdraw at any point (see below).

If you change your mind: Participation in this study is entirely voluntary. You may choose to withdraw from the survey and if you are uncomfortable answering a question then you are encouraged not to.

How to get in touch: If anything in this information sheet is not clear or you wish to ask any questions, please contact Natalie Drapper at natalie.drapper@durham.ac.uk or +447544558872

If you have any concerns or complaints about the conduct of this project, please contact one of the project supervisors Kimberly Jamie at kimberly.jamie@durham.ac.uk or Stacey Pope at stacey.pope@durham.ac.uk

* Indicates required question

Housework habits

1. Please confirm that you: *

Check all that apply.

- [ ] Have read and understood the above information
- [ ] Understand that your participation is voluntary
- [ ] Agree to your survey answers being analysed
- [ ] Agree to participate in the study

2. Please describe how housework tasks were organised/distributed in your childhood home *

3. In terms of housework, how did you prepare for living out in a student house? *

Were you already familiar with how to cook and clean? Was there anything you had to learn?

4. How important is it to you that the kitchen is clean and tidy? *

Mark only one oval.

- Not at all important
- Unimportant
- Neutral
- Important
- Extremely important

5. How important is it to you that you and your housemates share responsibilities equally? *

Mark only one oval.

- Not at all important
- Unimportant
- Neutral
- Important
- Extremely important

6. In your own words, please outline how the cleaning of your kitchen in your student house is organised *

7. Please describe, if applicable, a recent interaction that you have had with housemates regarding housework *

For example, a conversation or disagreement about washing up

8. Overall what contribution to housework do you make in your household? *

Mark only one oval.

- Substantially less than most housemates
- Some less than most housemates
- Equal to most housemates
- Some more than most housemates
- Substantially more than most housemates

9. How satisfied are you with your current share of household tasks? *

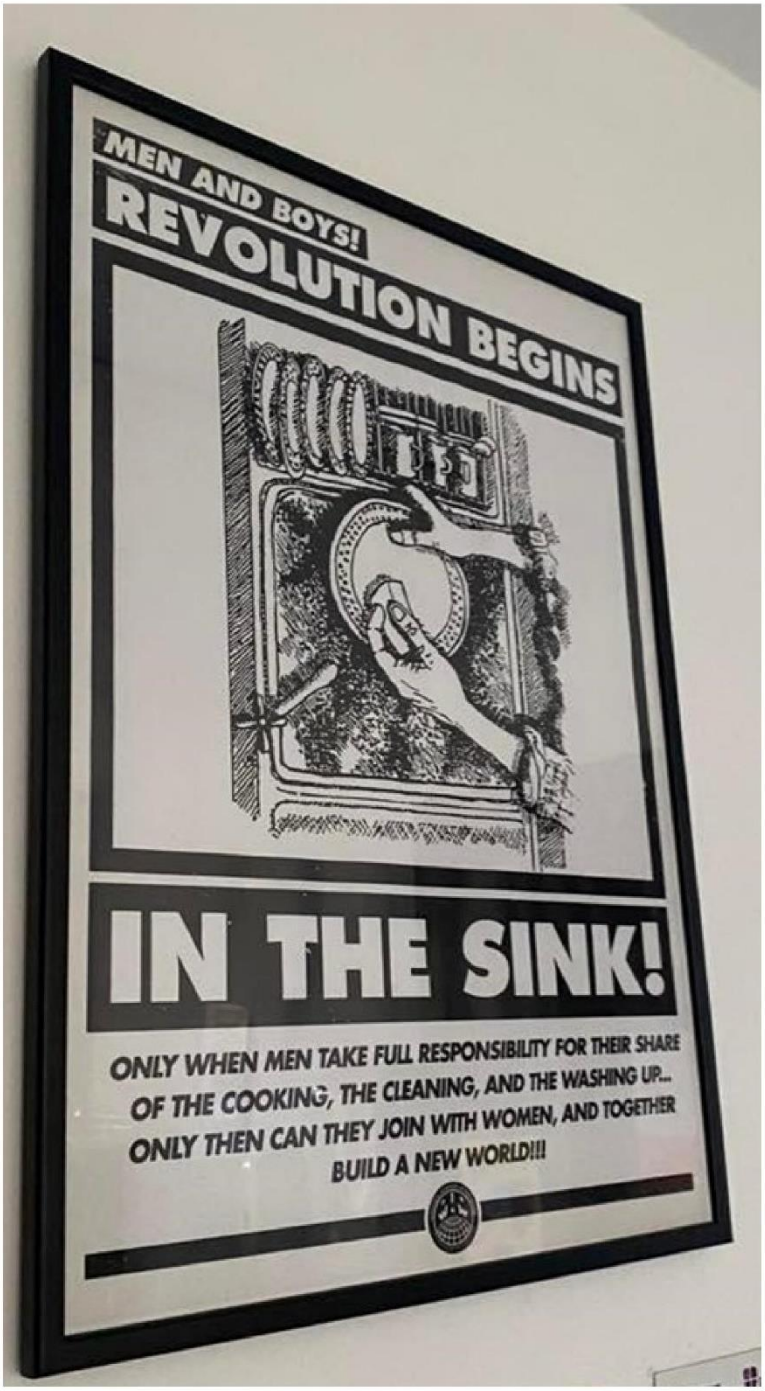
Mark only one oval.

- Very dissatisfied
- Dissatisfied
- Neutral
- Satisfied
- Very satisfied

10. If you could change anything about how housework is distributed in your student household, what, if anything, would you change and why? *

Reflections on Housework and Gender

Please have a read of the poster below:


MEN AND BOYS!
REVOLUTION BEGINS
IN THE SINK!
ONLY WHEN MEN TAKE FULL RESPONSIBILITY FOR THEIR SHARE OF THE COOKING, THE CLEANING, AND THE WASHING UP...
ONLY THEN CAN THEY JOIN WITH WOMEN, AND TOGETHER BUILD A NEW WORLD!!!

11. Please describe your initial reaction to this poster *

12. What are your final reflections on gender and housework in your current student household?

Demographic Questions

13. What year of study are you in? *

Mark only one oval.

- 1st year
- 2nd year
- 3rd year

14. What is your student status? *

Mark only one oval.

- EU student
- Home student
- International student

15. In your own words, please describe your ethnicity *

_____

16. What gender do you identify as? *

If you wish to self-describe please do so using the 'other' option

Mark only one oval.

- ◯ Female
- ◯ Male
- ◯ Non-binary
- ◯ Other: _____

17. What type of secondary school did you predominantly attend? *

Mark only one oval.

- ◯ Independent School (boarding)
- ◯ Independent School (day only)
- ◯ State School
- ◯ State Selective School
- ◯ Other: _____

18. If you would be happy to be contacted for a follow-up interview, please leave your email address below:

_____

V. APPENDIX 2: PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET

An exploration into the division of domestic labour within mixed-gender student households

Participant Information Sheet

I would like to invite you to take part in research on the gendered division of domestic labour in student households which is being undertaken as part of the MA by Research in Sociology and Social Policy. An outline of the study is provided below. Please read this information carefully before you decide to take part. If you have any questions, please get in touch via the contact details at the end of this form.

RESEARCH OUTLINE

A significant amount of research has been conducted into the gendered dynamics of housework among heterosexual couples. Despite eroding gender norms, studies point to the greater proportion of time spent by women on housework, inhibiting their contribution to the paid labour market among other things. While the notable difference in approaches has been widely evidenced in the context of heterosexual married or cohabiting couples, there are marked gaps in the research. In particular, the approaches of students have not been explored. This study looks to fill this gap by investigating students' experiences of sharing housework, utilising the theories already developed around women's greater contribution to domestic labour.

Therefore, in a bid to understand how gender might inform domestic labour among students, this study is looking for Durham University students of any year group that occupy a mixed gender household. If you fit this criterion, I would be grateful for your participation so that we can better understand housework patterns and therefore inform practices to make it more equitable.

PARTICIPATION DETAILS

Why you are invited: I am contacting you because you provided your details at the end of the survey on students' housework arrangements. I am hopeful that you are still willing to participate in a 45 minute interview on this topic.

What you will do: If you are willing to participate in an interview, it will take place over the phone and last approximately 45 minutes. With your informed consent, it will be audio-recorded and transcribed later for analysis. Excerpts from your responses may be quoted in the research, using a pseudonym to protect your anonymity.

What your data will be used for: Your data will be used to inform a postgraduate thesis which will be submitted for assessment as part of an MA by Research degree.

Durham University
Department of Sociology

How your data will be kept confidential: The transcripts produced from the follow up interviews will be securely stored. The audio-recordings will be destroyed following transcription, and the transcripts destroyed upon the completion of the thesis. To ensure anonymity, identifying information will be excluded from transcripts. Further, transcripts will not be shared with anyone, and only short excerpts/quotes will be used in the final report. In all cases, a pseudonym will be used in place of your real name when referring to your data.

For further information about the University's policy for handling private data, including your rights and how to make a complaint, see:

www.dur.ac.uk/research.innovation/governance/ethics/considerations/people/consent/privacynotice/

What are the risks: Discussions around gender identity, or of household conflict, may be upsetting for some. Participation in the interview is entirely optional and will be handled with the utmost care. Should you feel uncomfortable at any point during the interview, you are free to refrain from answering, or withdraw altogether with no questions asked.

If you change your mind: Participation in this study is entirely voluntary. You may choose to withdraw from the interview and if you are uncomfortable answering a question then you are encouraged not to.

If you complete the interview but decide later that you wish to withdraw, please contact the researcher directly within the week after the interview asking for your data to be destroyed.

How to get in touch: If anything in this information sheet is not clear or you wish to ask any questions, please contact Natalie Drapper at natalie.drapper@durham.ac.uk or +447544558872

If you have any concerns or complaints about the conduct of this project, please contact one of the project supervisors Kimberly Jamie at kimberly.jamie@durham.ac.uk or Stacey Pope at stacey.pope@durham.ac.uk

VI. APPENDIX 3: INTERVIEW CONSENT FORM

Durham University
Department of Sociology

An exploration into the division of domestic labour within mixed-gender student households

Consent Form Interview

By signing below, you confirm the following:

- I have read and understood the Participant Information sheet and have had the opportunity to ask questions about the study and my participation;
- I understand that my participation is voluntary and therefore that I may refuse any question asked of me and withdraw within a week after the interview without explanation;
- I agree to my participation being audio-recorded and later transcribed for analysis; and thus
- I agree to participate in the study

Participant Name

……

Participant Signature

.....

Date .....

Researcher Name: Natalie Drapper

Researcher Signature: 

Date: 27/10/2022

VII. APPENDIX 4: INTERVIEW GUIDELINE

The semi-structured nature of the interviews means that while there will be some predetermined questions, there is flexibility to delve further into the topics raised by participants. The following list is to demonstrate the types of questions that will be asked.

Experience of survey

- Talk me through your experience of the survey
- Had you given this topic much attention beforehand?
- How do you feel about this topic having completed the survey?

Expectations for student household

- How did you feel about living independently for the first time?
- Did you feel prepared for living independently?
- How did you picture the student kitchen living environment?
- What did you expect the arrangement of housework to be like in your mixed-gender student household?
- Does your current arrangement align with your expectations?
- How do you feel your household arrangements growing up have influenced your approach to housework?

Experience at university

- How does the housework get completed in your current house?
- At what point do you feel that the kitchen is in an unacceptable state?
- Do you discuss housework in your student home?
- Have you observed any gendered patterns in the way that housework is distributed?
- How does your current arrangement make you feel?
- Do you feel that your current arrangement is fair?
- How do you think that it could be made fairer?

Impact of housework

- How does housework affect the relationships with your housemates?
- How does housework affect your participation in your degree/extra-curriculars?
- Is your current approach to housework something that you wish to replicate in future houses?
- What do you hope your future housework arrangements will look like?

Interventions

- Do you feel that there is any need for change in the way that housework is distributed in your own home?
- Do you feel that there is any need for change in the way that housework is distributed in wider society?
- How do you think this change, if any, could be brought about?
- How would you feel about an intervention designed at encouraging a fairer division of housework among students?