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Do “we” really want that sofa there?

A qualitative study of young, Danish couples' negotiations about the *stuff* that construct their common home, when moving in and living together



Master's thesis

Authored by Isolde Hornung-Nissen

Aalborg University 2017



AALBORG UNIVERSITY
DENMARK

Master's thesis

Title: Do “we” really want that sofa there? A qualitative study of young, Danish couples' negotiations about the stuff that construct their common home, when moving in and living together

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Author: Isolde Hornung-Nissen

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Abstract

This master's thesis examines young, Danish couple's negotiations when moving in together and living together in their common homes. Accordingly, the research question for this thesis is: *"How do young, Danish couples negotiate about the things that constitute their common home and how can it be seen as an expression of negotiations between the identities as 'I' and 'we', the relation and the genders?"*

The interest in the home and homemaking has become greater than ever, and the home has been seen as a catalyst for many things. In the reflexive and dynamic character of society it has become more and more important to have a safe base in contrast to the fast pace and unknown. This also means that people in general deeply care about their homes, and strong emotions are linked to the homes. This also means that strong negotiations constantly happen, when living together with a partner. Thus, the home is a perfect place for studying the constructions of it and how the relation, the identities and gender can be understood through descriptions of these constructions. The focus for the constructions of the homes are the different *stuff* the individuals bring from their 'previous' homes – which things survived the move into the new, common home? Who made these decisions?

The study's empirical data consists of four dyadic interviews with Danish, heterosexual couples aged 24 to 29. At the time of the interviews, they all lived in Aalborg in rented or own apartments. Some of the young people were studying, some were in search for jobs while others were working fulltime.

The study is guided by a constructivist approach, which involves a hermeneutic position of understanding, whereas the parts of the interviews always are understood in light of the whole, and included my own preunderstandings and preconditions as a precondition for researching.

The study's theoretical framework consists of concepts from Belk, Jenkins, Kjær, Winther, Löfgren and Monro, amongst others. These will create the frameworks for a deeper understanding of respectively identity, relationships, homemaking and gender in a theoretical analysis and discussion, which uses the notions and detected themes described in the empirical analysis beforehand. Thus, the analysis of this study consists of these two parts. Due to the nature of the research question, the purpose of the empirical analysis is to describe the major themes detected in the interviews, as this part of the analysis only is data-driven. The purpose of the theoretical analysis and discussion is to go beyond the young couples' constructions of their homes and

together with the theoretical concepts from the theoretical framework interpret the tendencies in a larger societal, cultural and historical context in Denmark.

The study has found that the young, Danish couples will go further than the needs of their I's in creating a common home, since they long for a togetherness with their partner in order to create a 'we'. They are also longing for a 'we' due to the dynamic and individualised character of modernity. They know that they stand a lot stronger as a 'we', where the other part can confirm their 'I', since they can be quite uncertain that their I's are 'good enough', which they also show by comparing themselves to other people.

To make the home and the everyday life work, they make use of cultural thirds, tools, which does not make the negotiations disappear but helps along the moral economy of the home, and makes the routines more silent.

The young, Danish couples know that they are part of creating the cultural notions in society, whereas they emphasise that the home is equally divided between the genders, and both people are in charge of the household activities.

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1 Introduction

When typing ‘homemaking’ in an online search, the search engine’s first two suggestions are “homemaking blogs” and “homemaking mom”. Both suggestions are very interesting and eloquent for this master’s thesis. Homemaking blogs are more popular than ever, making ordinary people experts on the domestic sphere of the home – which leads up to the next suggestion of the search; the women in the homemaking. How is the home actually constructed and who decides it?

This master’s thesis is a study of the negotiations young, Danish couples in Denmark experience when moving in together in their common homes, and will focus not only on gender, but also how on relations and identities can be understood in the light of the young couples’ constructions of the homes.

2 Problem area

The section holds the fields, in which this thesis operates. I will describe which topics the home and homemaking involves, for at last to state the research question I want to gain insight to in this study.

2.1 The thing about homemaking

The home and homemaking are topics discussed more than ever, and the interest for homemaking is present everywhere. Magazines, TV-shows, online DIY-tutorials, home fairs and art exhibitions on the home have increased, and the money the Danes in average spend on the home is near 20 percent of their private consumption in 2007, oppose to only 5 percent in 1948 (Mechlenborg 2007:72; Löfgren 1990:42-43). Many people make a living out of posting pictures on Instagram and Facebook of their homes and its arrangements decorations (Olsen 2016), and the amount of these types of users are only increasing (Elle 2017; Boligmagasinet 2016).

Every week on Danish TV, loyal viewers are ready in their sofas while they watch couples when they built and decorate a standard, raw house to make it their dream home (“Nybyggerne”), or when a (often economically challenged) family for three days move out of their house and leave it to experts who transform it into something more ‘like in the magazines’ (“Helt på plads”). Numerous shows on homes and homemaking are offered every day on TV, as they have been since the millennium shift. Whether it is inviting viewers in on celebrities’ homes (“Kender du typen”),

guessing the sales prices on houses (“Hammerslag”), or voting on the most wonderful home (“Danmarks skønneste hjem”) or even watching collectors betting on things in private people’s homes (“Sæt pris på dit hjem”), the viewer numbers are high (Berlingske 2003; Bolius Formidling 2007; Mechlenborg 2009; JydskeVestkysten 2014). Researcher Mette Mechlenborg argues, that the reason for the increased interest in homemaking might be because of people’s needs for creating a steady home (Mechlenborg 2007:72). Even though the home is ever changing, it still creates a space for relaxation and thoughts, in a time with degradation of traditions, and where transitions, change and development are everywhere (Mechlenborg 2007).

When creating a home today, many young, Danish people move out of their childhood home and into their own home, with the values wanted and needed, whether it is a place for relaxation or for social gatherings. Here it is his or her own job to decorate and arrange just the way, he or she would like to. What then happens with the young people’s belongings when they begin a relationship, and move in together with the partner in a new, common home? Which notions do young people then have about the decorations of the home? What happens to their belongings and who decides it? Do they agree about their things or do they disagree? What are the discussions about? And what do all these negotiations say about the homeliness and these types of social communities the young people create?

The increased awareness of the home and homemaking has created strong emotions about the home. A ‘home’ is more than just a ‘house’, and it gives status to have a neat home “*like the ones in the magazines*”, cultural sociologist Ida Winther explains in an article about her book “Homeliness” written after her Ph.D. thesis (Nielsen 2006). She further describes the difference between a ‘house’ and a ‘home’: A ‘home’ reveals more spiritual details such as artwork and children’s drawings and is a ‘safe zone’ where masks are unveiled and is a sacred space for emotions and thoughts, where a ‘house’ is merely the architecture and the technical characteristics (Winther 2006:7). The so-called artwork is seen as a symbol of the personal and private things it takes to create a sanctuary, that is, a place, space for completely being your self (Douglas 1991).

Moreover, a home does not have to be a house, as it can be a room, an apartment, a boat, a caravan or perhaps a tent, but the home needs to have a moral dimension, structure in time and happiness. The latter is also why there is a strong distinction between a home and a hotel, Mary Douglas stresses (Douglas 1991:289-290). The structure in time is also known as routines – and here the

new, common home is an excellent example of how routines are created and negotiated (Robinson and Hunter 2008, Reimer and Leslie 2004:189). Synchronising these structures in time is also what makes a home different from a hotel (Löfgren 2014:14). The home is viewed as “*a part of a structure, a systematic set of distinctions*” (my transl. Mechlenborg 2007:75). Thus, it is a space for creating a ‘we’ where the involved people can cohabit with different interests, as well as create a space for a ‘me’. In this process, two individuals must become a social unit.

In the modern homes’ increasing individualisation it becomes more and more important to stress what is mine and what is yours (Löfgren 2014:14-15). The home is a question of “*Who has seen the remote control?*” and “*Who takes out the garbage?*” (Ehn and Löfgren 2010:67), as it is “*ingrained reflexes about “the way we do things here”.*” (Löfgren 2014:14) and a systematic set of structures and procedures (Mechlenborg 2007:75). The home is, therefore, a complex size that holds many interests, and is a place both for ‘me’ and ‘we’.

Ethnologist Orvar Löfgren emphasises the constant negotiation happening inside the four walls of the home (Löfgren 2014:14). This view is shared by Douglas who looks at the home by seeing it as a model for distributing justice to all its residents – including the children (Douglas 1991:297). Löfgren points to previous research on the home, and states how there has been “*little attention to the fact that that homes, above all, are full of material objects, which constantly need to be handled.*” (2014:6). These things (objects) have not only been the centre of studies and articles on *mess* in the 21st century (see Löfgren 2014 and 2016; Dahlager 2015; Taulø-Jacobsen 2013), but the things have the ability to create conflicted interests in the homes. “What stays and what goes?” and questions alike often appear when moving together with a partner in a new house. The aim is to make the house into a home, where both parts are represented, as individuals and as a collective. But how is that done and how can it all co-exist?

Some of the inspiration I have read and will use in this thesis is of Danish and Scandinavian origin, while other is not, but still Western. Even though the context of this study is Danish, with empirical data from Danish young people, the overall notions of the home have for many centuries been the same all over the world. The home is in many languages female (*la casa, la maison*) which indicates that the home have ‘belonged’ to women in many cultures for ages. The home is thereby an intercultural dimension in this thesis besides gender, which I will get back to later.

2.2 Research question

This thesis sets out to explore how young, Danish couples experience the process of moving in together with their partner and which negotiations this process bring along. The purpose of the thesis is to explore the negotiations that happen between these young men and women when they live together as a romantic couple in a relationship. I want to explore what happens to the things that construct the couples' common homes. Additionally, how do these young men and women create their individual and social identities in the light of these negotiations? Or their identities as men and women? How do they create 'togetherness' if there are conflicting aims or interests? How do these negotiations reflect their individual identity, their social identity and their gender?

Thus, the following formulation is developed in order to gain insight to these issues:

“How do young, Danish couples negotiate about the things that constitute their common home and how can it be seen as an expression of negotiations between the identities as ‘I’ and ‘we’, the relation and the genders?”

The study is placed in Aalborg, Denmark, in the spring of 2017 and the therefore occurs as a question in this context and time.

3 Thesis structure

The aim of the study is to gain understanding of young couples' negotiations in their common home regarding his, her and their things. All of the sections will be part of providing an understanding of the research question. I will now explain the structure of this thesis by presenting the sections in it.

I introduced the overall topics in the problem area and narrowed it down to the research question in the study. Next, my research design will be highlighted before moving on to the chosen methodology of the study. In this I will explain the underlying design of this *qualitative* study, whereas I will present my constructivist paradigm, the dyadic interview method, present the couples and how to deal with the data generated in the interviews with the couples. Next, I will introduce the theoretical concepts I intend to use as tools for the second part of the analysis, including concepts on identity, relationships, homemaking and gender. These will be guided by theories introduced by Orvar Löfgren, Ida Winther and Sarah Kjær including Risto Moisio and Mariam

Beruchashvili as well as Russell Belk. As an introduction to the analysis, which will exist of two parts, I will outline the course of actions in the analysis strategy, before moving on to the actual analysis. As established, the analysis will consist of two parts: One data-driven analysis of the empirical data from the interviews and one theoretical analysis and discussion, which will make use of my concepts from the theoretical framework. Each part will hold some subchapters, which in both parts of the analysis involves *the home, the couple/relation, I, you and we, and the genders*. All of the parts will include final statements of the findings, which conclusively, in the findings of the study, will be gathered and commented on, which will give an answers to the research question. The nature of the research question calls for a lot of descriptive data, whereas the empirical analysis will make sure I can answer the question at the findings of the study.

4 Research design

The function of the design is to make sure that the data collected will be able to answer the problem in question, so the research design will ensure that the problem is researchable and that the data enables findings to the research question (de Vaus 2001:9).

Before developing a research design, one must to be clear about the research question, the literature and theory it will be based upon and which methodological questions that need to be asked. The aim of this thesis is to gain understanding to situations happening between to people. It therefore seeks to investigate interactions. It is not the aim to explain something and to built theory, but to describe and uncover something by a data-driven analysis and with the use of theory. The empirical data in this study consists of interviews with young couples living together, since studying this social unit will provide understandings to how they moved in together with his and her stuff and how it is to live together in their common home with their stuff. That is also why the study is a qualitative study, since qualitative studies can help to understand the complex understandings and constructions by people and between people. The nature of qualitative research will shortly follow.

Research design and method do not have the same function in a study: Method is about which data to collect while research design should provide a logical structure of the study (de Vaus 2001:9). Additionally, having one research design does not mean that you have to stick to one kind of method of data collection. This means that having a quantitative research does not necessarily force you to collect data through questionnaires, surveys or experiments, while qualitative is not only

capable of doing observations or interviews (de Vaus 2001:10). One way of doing “quantitative” methods in this qualitative study is the way of detecting the themes in the interviews by ‘counting’ them (cf. *8.1 Analysis strategy*).

5 Methodology

The purpose of the following section is to define my paradigm and sustain the choice of its ontological, epistemological and methodological questions. I will also describe my interview process, from recruiting the couples, creating a semi-structured interview guide, conducting the interview and to transcribing the interviews.

Throughout the section, tools to ensure high quality will be considered. This includes ethical considerations, role of the researcher and process of the interviews. How qualitative research works, will now follow.

5.1 The nature of qualitative research

A qualitative method is chosen for exploring the problem. This is due to the comprehensive character of the qualitative methodology, which has the ability to generate in-depth knowledge about complex problems. In this thesis, the purpose is to explore young couples’ negotiations when moving in and living together, and not to create generalisable results, for which a quantitative approach would be appropriate. Experiences, thoughts, emotions, single words, observations and attitudes are all valuable knowledge, and is knowledge possible to attain through qualitative interviews (Silverman 2006). Opposed to the quantitative method to create a natural scientific model, the qualitative method is used to gain understanding about the social world through the people in it (Bryman 2012:380), which is one of the strongest reasons for why this study is qualitative.

Often in qualitative research, building trust is fundamental to gain access to fieldwork, and it increases the trustworthiness of the data generated and as well as the high quality of the study (Caldwell 2014:499). In the interviews with the couples, two things worked as trust-building: That the interview situations happened in there own sphere (the home) and that I am in the same situation as many of them – being young, a student and in a relationship myself, whereas I can relate to it and

vice versa. If the interviews took place in my home, the power structure would be very uneven. In their own homes they would have the ability to feel safe. Building this trust is then considered good, but it can in some cases make the informants misspeak and later regret what they said, which often only happen if the informants read the later transcriptions of the interviews (Kvale and Brinkmann 2009:92). I did not offer this to the couples since I do not consider the topics we talked about to be vulnerable topics.

5.2 Paradigm

Throughout this thesis, exploring the problem will be guided by a constructivist approach. I want to understand how young couples negotiate about their things that constitute their common home. The research question I want to understand is formulated as it is due to my constructivist stance, and vice versa. Therefore, making the choice of wanting to understand a social phenomenon that happens between social actors (the couple) is only a natural – and intertwined – choice of being the constructivist I am (see Bryman 2012:33, 629).

It is crucial that the processes throughout the study are explained in how and why they are done, that is, how understanding is achieved and how to interpret what the couples say (Bryman 2012:630).

Even though the position I have – as a constructivist – is intertwined in the different steps of the study, I will now make it clear why the decisions made in the study were made. If it is not clear how and why the different steps were made and under which conditions, the research and its quality can be questioned (which it of course always can, but after making these perspectives clear, the quality of the study is easier to discuss). On the other hand; making it clear how the I view the world and how my perspective is, makes the reader aware of the basic set of beliefs supported in the study of the phenomenon (Guba and Lincoln 1994:107; Guba 1990:17).

Thus, belonging to a paradigm – and making it clear which one – gives practical tools to determine for instance whether or not the method in use is appropriate, the amount of informants is enough, whether or not it is okay to write ‘I’ in the study and how trustworthy the results are.

As established, exploring the problem will be guided by the constructivist approach. As a constructivist I acknowledge that the world is complex with many different constructions that need to be identified. The goal is to understand the specific and unique in the couples’ worlds, since there

is no such thing as ‘one reality’: “*“Reality” exists only in the context of a mental framework (construct) for thinking about it.*” (Guba 1990:25). Knowledge is a human construct, but once knowledge is understood, it is ever-changing, individual and situational (Guba 1990:26). Moreover, it is only natural to find conflicting realities in the search for ‘a reality’ (Guba and Lincoln 1994:111). On the contrary, even though the goal is not to appoint one truth and one ‘reality’, it cannot be precluded that certain similarities could be found, that is, one or two constructions where there is consensus (Guba 1990:27). For my thesis, this means that the understandings I get insight to by interviewing the young couples that I do, would not be the same understandings I would find in other couples. However, as explained, some tendencies might show between the couples (and the *individuals* in the couples), which would not be completely surprising, since all the couples live in the same city in the same country and therefore the social and cultural context is the same. To define my paradigmatic stance, questions about ontology, epistemology and methodology need to be addressed next.

5.2.1 Ontology

The ontological question deals with the nature of the knowledge that we think is ‘out there’, and what characterises this knowledge (Guba and Lincoln 1994:108). In this constructivist ontological position no *one* truth exists ‘out there’ but several constructions, according to the human beings in question (Guba 1990:26). These constructions are therefore multiple constructions found in different people, whereas knowledge is an outcome of the humans’ activities. Each individual person constructs his or her own reality through his or her understandings (Guba 1990:36; Bryman 2012:380). That is also why I am interested in the individuals in the couples, and not only the couples in themselves, as focusing on the individual may show me something unique for instance about gender or identity. Opposed to phenomenology, where the phenomena exist separated from the people involved, the phenomenon here is considered to be an outcome of the interactions between the people (Bryman 2012:380). Given this view, in the interviews with the couples, the people involved were the man, the woman and I. In the interviews I also questioned social categories, when I asked them to describe a ‘typical’ relationship and when I asked them if their homes were most masculine or feminine (cf. 5.3.2 *Interview guide*). These categories are in fact social products of the social world, and created to help people to understand the natural and social world (Bryman 2012:34).

5.2.2 Epistemology

The other important question to stress is the relationship between the researcher and the world. If interaction is the way to unlock people's minds – and as realities only exist here – I must take a relativist stand. As a relativist, I cannot, and choose not to, separate myself from the 'reality' – it is impossible to be objective (Guba 1990:26). This results in a data collection where I am seen as 'isolated' from the settings, but nevertheless interpret the data in a hermeneutic way (Koro-Ljungberg et al. 2009:690; Koro-Ljungberg 2009:689). This does not mean that I do not take part on the interviews, but nevertheless, I do not become a part of the couple. The hermeneutic stance taken in this study will be explained more later on.

Having this stance in the interview situations means that the conversations would evolve not only according to the couples' constructions, but also mine, since it is in the meeting with their preconceptions/understandings and my preconceptions/understandings that it is possible to gain understanding of the 'phenomenon' (Bryman 2012:27).

5.2.3 Methodology

In constructivism, several constructions reveal themselves when interviewing people. These constructions are compared and contrasted hermeneutically in a dialectic process, where the aim is to reconstruct 'a reality' – in other words understand the young couples' experiences when moving in and living together (Guba and Lincoln 1994:112; Guba 1990:26-27). Hermeneutics as a methodology will allow the study to reach a higher level of interpretation by the use of the hermeneutic spiral (Berg-Sørensen 2012:221). Different approaches within the hermeneutic methodology exist, and these approaches have different sets of beliefs (Jørgensen 2008:224). This study will make use of the philosophical hermeneutic by philosopher Hans-Georg Gadamer, as it is found relevant for the study. In this approach it is central that the informants' experiences are understood in a larger societal and theoretical context – with its traditions – which is in line with the present study (Schwandt 2003:301): The societal and historical context as portrayed in the problem area, and theoretical context in the theoretical analysis and discussion, since: *“”Reality” can be “seen” only through a window of theory, whether implicit or explicit.”* (Guba 1990:25). It is therefore crucial to acknowledge that understanding is knowledge in this study and that

“understanding is not “an isolated activity of human beings but a basic structure of our experience of life. We are always taking something as something. That is the primordial givenness of our world orientation, and we cannot reduce it to anything simpler or more immediate”.” (Schwandt 2003:301).

So, firstly, being a human equals understanding, and secondly I cannot separate myself, and must not strive to get rid of, my sociohistorical heritage or prejudices (preconceptions) (Schwandt 2003:301-302). Only when I engage my biases I can reach an understanding; *“traditions “shape what we are and how we understand the world, the attempt to step outside of the process of tradition would be like trying to step outside of our own skin”.”* (Schwandt 2003:301). In Gadamer’s philosophical hermeneutic it is further on important to state that hermeneutics is not considered a method, but as a way of being (Kvale and Brinkman 2009:234).

The hermeneutical process is characterised by a constant reciprocity that takes place between the parts and the entity. The parts can only be understood when they are part of the entity, and the entity only through the parts. It is therefore this connection between the smaller parts and the big picture that creates meaning – and is crucial when understanding and exploring a problem (Berg-Sørensen 2012:223). Essential in this approach is the reciprocity between the data and the cultural and historical settings, but also the relation between the myself and the couples.

The hermeneutic spiral “begins”¹ with a preunderstanding or a understanding which leads to interpretation, which leads to a new understanding and a preunderstanding, which again leads to interpretation, and so on and so forth. The hermeneutic spiral is then seen as a definitive and unfinished process, since every understanding refers back to a preunderstanding. Preunderstanding is therefore an essential condition for gaining understanding, but what also is important is preconceptions (prejudices), whose origin is history, culture and tradition. My preunderstandings and preconceptions make my horizon of understanding, which, naturally, always is dynamic. In the meetings with the couples, our understandings, preunderstandings and preconceptions meet and fusions of horizons occur (Berg-Sørensen 2012:224). We both “end up” with broadened horizons, and our preconceptions are challenged, but as the process is dynamic and ever changing, these understandings are not the end – they are only part of the understanding and preunderstanding of the larger process (Berg-Sørensen 2012:224-225). Therefore, what I as an interpreter explore is

¹ In fact, you cannot talk about it “beginning” somewhere, since one will always have preunderstandings and so on.

subjective and theoretically and historically bound. My preconceptions are what I know and believe, and consist in this particular study also of the previous studies and literature I have read, and the theory used to explore the problem in the second part of the analysis. This also means that my preconceptions have helped to build up the thesis.

In line with this, I want to emphasise the iterative process, which has helped me to formulate and reformulate the research question in a repetitive spiral, since the iterative process also is reciprocity between theory and the questions in focus (Andersen and Boolsen 2012:60). This means that the research question first formulated has been reformulated until I reached the final question.

When understanding has been achieved, another point must be emphasised. Since understanding is produced in the interviews with the couples in these specific moments – with their and my understanding, preconceptions and traditions – the understanding is temporal and processive (Schwandt 2003:302). This for instance means that I cannot expect the same answers from the same couple, if I interviewed them again a later on. Had another person conducted the interviews with the same couple, the answers would also be different. The point is, that understanding is produced in that exact situation with these exact people, and later on reproduced by me in interpreting the data.

Due to the nature of the hermeneutic spiral, and also my ever changing understandings, I will never be able to conclude a ‘final’ answer or a ‘right’ interpretation, which also shows how understanding is temporal. Understandings will be different due to my changing horizons but also the questions that I ask (Schwandt 2003:302-303). What might the purpose then be? The purpose of this thesis is not to solve a problem, but to broaden my understandings, my horizons and my self-knowledge (Schwandt 2003:304).

5.3 Dyadic interviews

The empirical data on which this thesis is based upon consists of four dyadic interviews conducted in April 2017. The dyadic interview is an interview method consisting of two people excluding the interviewer, often with informants in pre-existing relationships. It could be referred to as a ‘couple interview’, ‘relationship interview’ or ‘duo interview’. In this thesis I will use the term dyadic interview, used by Morgan (2016), Morgan et al. (2013), Eisikovits and Koren (2010) and Caldwell (2014), who, among others, describe how they collect and analyse data, using the dyadic interview method for their interviews.

One of the advantages of doing interviews with couples is getting insight in the interaction happening between them, which can be studied. The interaction is helping the conversation develop since one informant's comment draws forth another comment, and back again. In pre-existing pairs like these relationships, however, this might also become a disadvantage, as the couples know each other well, resulting in some answers being an expression of a common opinion (Morgan et al. 2013:1276; Morgan 2016:23-24). I do not see this as an issue in this thesis, as co-constructions, overlaps or contrasts of answers all will help to gain understanding of their negotiations about their things. In this way, I do not want to control the conversation if the couple, or one part of the couple, briefly want to talk about something other than answering the question, as this only broadens the understanding of the research question.

In the dyadic interviews the aim is to reach a dyadic story that is more than the sum of the two individuals' stories (Eisikovits and Koren 2010:1642). Moreover, it is to capture the individual within the dyad (Caldwell 2014:497). Balancing this is not easy nor is it the aim, however if one of the mentioned goals is not achieved at the end of the interview, it can be useful to ask questions directly to one part instead of both as a couple. Depending on how long the couple have known each other, one goal is achieved easier than the other, as long time together also means long time with a shared narrative. In this, it becomes especially interesting to explore their "I-ness" and their "we-ness" in order to understand what happened with their things when they moved in together and now that they live together (Eisikovits and Koren 2010:1645; Löfgren 2014).

During the interviews the 'unspoken' interaction or dynamic can be observed. This is for instance if one part is talking more than the other, how that is performed, and how they address each other, both in language and physically, to see their responds to each other. Observations may help to gain a better understanding of the couple 'behind' the words. In some cases a conversation can be interpreted differently in the light of the observations – if the couple already before the conversation agree to disagree due to the structure of the relationship, this might be shown in the physical actions, which then can justify or explain their words (Eisikovits and Koren 2010:1646).

Another advantage of doing the dyadic interviews is a broadened and deepened perspective on the topic (Eisikovits and Koren 2010:1642). Compared to focus group interviews, where this often is the outcome as well, a strong trustworthiness is expected in dyadic interviews with pre-existing couples, whereas a safe space is created from the beginning of the interview. Thereby, much time is

not spent on creating a safe and open environment, which ensures a great amount of relevant data within rather short time (Morgan 2016:19-21; Morgan et al. 2013:1277).

5.3.1 Criteria for informants

For this thesis I have conducted four dyadic interviews with young, Danish couples who live together. The criteria were heterosexual, young couples without children, living in Aalborg. The choice of the informants' sexuality was, naturally, a practical choice to interview heterosexual people, so I was assured people who were in a relationship with the opposite sex, where the negotiations between the genders could be studied. The specific ages of the young couples I expected were between 22 and 30. This decision was based upon the age, in which young people begin living together with their partner. Had I chosen older generations, it was my fear that the couples would have other experiences with living together as a couple from previous. This would make the data unreliable, since I would not know whether or not the person's opinions would come from previous experiences or with the current partner.

Another criterion was couples without children. Children often have a big say in decisions in the home and their impact would needed to be included, whereas the problem would become a completely one different if I had interviewed people with children. The question would not be able to focus on the negotiations between the genders or identities, as some choices and negotiations did not needed to be discussed, since the obvious choice was the child's choice (Winther 2006:33).

5.3.2 Interview guide

A semi-structured interview guide guided the conducted interviews. Using an interview guide provides higher chance of ensure uniformity in the data collecting, since the same questions are asked in every interview situation. Furthermore, making the guide semi-structured creates space for me to adapt to the specific situation and ask the questions in different orders, leaving out some questions or adding other questions and follow-up questions, rather than sticking to the guide. In line with the hermeneutic process of understanding and interpreting the informants' expressions, making sure to ask follow-up questions will contribute in exploring the problem (Kvale and Brinkmann 2009:159).

The interview guide was written in Danish, as I wanted to interview Danes. It is built up by four structured themes, besides three general themes on *intro*, *background info* and *outro*. The four

themes are *the relationship*, *the home and homeliness*, *the negotiations* and *a gendered home*. The themes are not coincidental themes, but themes I encountered several times when I began my research for the study and its theory, which I believed would be fruitful to include.

To ensure that most of the conversation in the interviews would provide me with the type of interpretation I was looking for, the themes in the interview guide are theoretically bound (Kvale and Brinkmann 2009:266). Had I first considered the theoretical concepts in the analysis process, I would risk not being able to interpret the interviews on the grounds of the theory (Kvale and Brinkmann 2009:266). Of course, interpretation can always happen, no matter how the interviews turn out to be, but by doing so, I was ensured that the type of interpretation I got was the one I wanted. Other questions are not directly theoretical but were questions in line with the topics in the study, and were also questions I thought would be relevant for the data-driven analysis – the empirical analysis. In some cases these are merely questions I found relevant to the theme in the interview guide, and in other cases I asked the questions as follow-up questions.

The order of the themes was planned as such due to a need of knowing a bit about the couple and their relationship before moving on to their home, and so on and so forth. Asking the questions in this chronological way made it easier to proceed with the remaining questions and would also help to make the questions more relevant as adjustments could be made along the interview (Eisikovits and Koren 2010:1645).

The questions in the interview guide will be explained more detailed now, followed by a walk-through of what we ‘actually’ talked about in the interviews.

The relationship: The first theme contained questions of how and when they met, what their story is, when they moved in together and if they did any specific things do make it their common home. The interviews were built up chronologically to make it easier for me to follow their narratives, but also to make it possible to have the ‘same’ understandings during the interview. In the beginning of the interviews I gave them the opportunity to tell them about their relationship to get a sense of their circumstances for being the relation, as inspiration found in Kjær and Löfgren (cf. *7 Theoretical framework*).

The home and homeliness: I wanted to gain insight to their practical matters in the home, which is why I asked questions about their childhood home and its values, and which things they had in the living room, bedroom and kitchen. Besides the practicalities, I asked them how important a home

was for them and what a home meant for them. Inspired by Winther (cf. 7 *Theoretical framework*), the main aim in this theme was to gain understanding of their notions of a home.

The negotiations about the things in the home: I considered this the ‘main theme’ in the interview situations as it dealt with the couples’ things. I asked if they had any negotiations about one or two things when they moved in together and how these negotiations had ended. Which things stayed in the home, which were thrown away, and where their things were placed in the home were also questions in this theme. I wanted to get an understanding of the couples’ notions of ‘mine’, ‘yours’ and ‘ours’, as well as if, or when, they considered themselves to be an ‘I’ or a ‘we’, as approached by Löfgren (cf. 7 *Theoretical framework*). The aim was also to gain insight to what the negotiations indicate about their relationship, their identities and their genders.

A gendered home: The final theme contained questions about their everyday life together in the home. It was questions about the housework such as cleaning, shopping and cooking, and where in the home the two people in the couple were the most – whether it was the living room, the bedroom and so on. Moisio and Beruchashvili and their study on *mancaves* inspired the latter question, while the former was Winther and Kjær (cf. 7 *Theoretical framework*). The purpose of these questions was to see whether or not one of the people involved had their ‘own’ room in the common home, and if so, who did the cleaning in that room. The analytical purpose of the questions about cleaning and so on was also to gain understanding about their negotiations in a broader societal, cultural and historical context.

A last question in the interview guide was about their hopes and desires for the future, and was actually a question I added in the interview with Martin and Laura since they expressed that they knew they would not live at their apartment forever, whereas they indicated that they actually had further thoughts for their common home that could not be a reality in their present home – due to its size.

5.3.3 What did we talk about in the interviews?

One thing is what I asked about, but another thing is what we actually talked about in the interviews, mostly with focus on the themes not just described. I will now highlight the general topics in the interviews.

Most of the couples spent relatively much time on talking about how they met each other and about the time when they lived in the other part's apartment before moving into the common home. As a result, I felt as it was easier for me to ask follow-up questions since I knew a bit about their circumstances as a couple. Of course the first two-three of questions in the interview guide I also asked because I wanted to understand their situation before moving on to further questions, but I had not expected that the couples would let me in on so much. In general, the couples did not themselves talk that much about small, specific things they each brought when they moved in together, which was why I needed to ask more follow-up questions about this. They talked more about how they actually felt in the situations of moving in together, first in the apartment of one of them and afterwards in their new, common home. After reflecting, this was actually not surprising to me since the young people told me their understandings of how they experienced the situation, which they of course only can say from their own perspective, but also the field of homemaking is of strong importance, so naturally, strong emotions would be involved.

5.3.4 Recruiting informants

Recruiting informants who meet the set criteria can be very time consuming. Much is done online today to get people's attention, so I posted a message on the Facebook page for my dorm, where I requested couples who would participate in the interviews. At the dorm, most of the apartments are two-bedroom apartments that only are rented out to couples, in which one of the parties must be a student. By posting my message there, the chance of reaching young couples without children was great.

The amount of couples was decided along with the process of interviewing. Three of the couples responded to my post – two present residents and one previous – and by having conducted the third interview I felt the need to add a fourth interview to gain more insights to the problem (Kvale and Brinkmann 2009:133). The fourth interview I found via a more offline sampling, by helping a friend with her thesis in return for an interview with her thesis partner and her boyfriend. At the end of the fourth interview I was satisfied with my data collection and did not recruit further informants. A larger amount of data would not necessarily have brought more knowledge on the research question, and as it is not my aim to generalise, the amount of interviews then matches the aim of the thesis and its research question (Kvale and Brinkmann 2009:134).

5.3.5 Transcribing

In preparation for the analysis of the thesis, one step is transcribing the recorded interviews, which can be done in different ways. I decided to transcribe everything said in the interviews, apart from certain sentences focusing on something completely different or repetitions including the small talk in the beginning and the ending of the interviews. Since I am interested in the experiences of the young couples, and not aiming for a analysis on their conversation, words like “uhm” or “mmh” are not included in the transcriptions, besides once when it was part of the understanding of the sentence (Kvale and Brinkmann 2009:202-203). Short or longer breaks are marked by three dots (“...”), which is also an expression for places where one informant interrupts or overlaps the other or wants to add something to the sentence. In longer breaks I stayed quiet to see if the couples had more on their minds after some seconds of thoughts. Some places, the informants or I started a sentence without finishing it, which I have left out, only leaving the meaning of the completed sentence. Whenever I felt it was part of the meaning to describe the situation, I have marked where the informants laughed – these are brackets. I have also used brackets whenever something unsaid was part of the meaning, for instance if the informants pointed at something but never mentioned what it was.

One advantage of having conducted and transcribed all the interviews myself is a deepened understanding of the all interviews. This ensures higher uniformity in the transcriptions, than if several people had transcribed the interviews, and leads to a well-founded analysis.

In the transcriptions “I” stands for interviewer and is therefore what I asked about during the interviews. Whenever a part of the couples said something this is indicated by the use of their initial.

5.3.6 Ethical considerations

I have replaced the couples’ real names with other ones and will only use these names in the thesis and transcriptions. Moreover, in the case of the informants mentioning the name of a smaller establishment, the transcriptions will only show what type it is, but not which specific one it is. This is for instance done in the case of a student dorm and a working place. I have done this since the protection of personal information must be guaranteed in interview situations.

At the beginning of all interviews I, as the interviewer, informed the couples about their anonymity and asked them to say what ever came to their mind, as there were no ‘correct’ answers to the questions. I also reminded them that they were not forced to answer the questions they felt were too personal. Of course it was my hope that they would feel secure in the situation, as they would be together with their partner at their own home. Additionally, I hoped that they would trust me, as all of them would be able to put themselves in my situation, both in relation to my situation as a student and my age. All of the informants had no trouble answering the questions and in all of the interviews I felt a symmetric and balanced setting (Kvale and Brinkmann 2009:50-52).

The ethical attentions, however, go beyond the interview situation and must be questioned in other steps of the study. If wanting to transcribe the interviews, no matter how it is done, the meaning must be the same of what the informant said. This will ensure data that is reliable and ensures quality in the study. If the transcriptions are only part of the truth, the analysis will be untrue as well, whereas the most ethically is to transcribe what has been said, not leaving anything out and not changing anything (Kvale and Brinkmann 2009:81). The sentences I have left out were unimportant to the thesis whereas I argue that the thesis would be no different had I included them in the transcriptions.

5.3.7 Role of the researcher

In connection with the ethical attentions, the role of the researcher is crucial to consider for the quality in the study. Qualitative studies with interviews as methods for collecting data are interactive studies, in which the researcher interacts more or less. In some situations the interactions start to become emotional attachments where the researcher emphasises with the informant, which leaves the researcher biased by the situation. This could possible affect the informant’s answers, decreasing the quality in the study (Kvale and Brinkmann 2009:93).

To avoid situations as such, keeping a professional distance is the desirable. Finding a balanced place where the atmosphere holds trustworthiness and empathy without an uneven power relation is not always easy. In my interview situations I found many similarities from the informants’ experiences to my own life, and when it felt right I let the informants know this to create a safe space in which we were equals and where identification could be used as a positive way of letting the informants feel safe. In these situations I still managed to keep the distance needed and paid

attention that expressions were not gendered in a way, as this also might become a problem, since I as a female researcher am the only researcher and interpreter (Kvale and Brinkmann 2009:94).

In line with the position as a constructivist, it was not my aim to become a part of the couple in the interview situation, however subjective interaction is the way to unlock and understand their experiences (Guba 1990:26). In this, it is important to understand that it was not an aim to take up the couples' horizons of understandings but to expand my own and challenge – or reconsider – my preconceptions (Schwandt 2003:302). Two examples would be my preconceptions as a young, Danish woman in a relationship, having dealt with the situation of moving in together with a young man, as well as the preconceptions gained throughout the literature review for the present study.

5.3.8 Presentations of the couples

The eight people in the couples were all Danish², characterised as middle class citizens and were between 24 and 29 years old at the interview time. They had all moved to Aalborg to study, and some of them were still students, while some were unemployed, in between education and work, and some working fulltime. They all lived in the centre of Aalborg in two- and three-bedroom apartments on 60-80 square meters.

All of the couples would be characterised as well-founded relationships with at least four years spent together as couples and also due to the fact that they made the decision of living together. Aside from Patrick and Marie, all the informants were students or just finished their education and were in search for a job. In line with this, Patrick and Marie were the only couple who owned their own apartment, as the others lived in rented apartments. What separates Patrick and Marie from the other couples is basically money and another time frame: Money, as a natural fact of having fulltime jobs instead of being a student or unemployed, and a different time frame, due to the work. Individual presentations of the couples will follow.

Couple A: “Patrick” and “Marie”

Patrick is 29 years old and works at a college as a lecturer. Marie is 26 years old and finished her education as a jurist last summer, and now works in Viborg. They live in their own apartment in Aalborg C, and are both originally from North Jutland. They met each other in college. When Marie

² All were Danes besides “Peter”, who was German. Before he moved to Aalborg in 2012 he lived his life in Flensburg where he had gone to German-Danish schools, which meant he was fluent in Danish and had been introduced to Danish culture and alike.

started to study in Aalborg, she moved into Patrick's apartment in Aalborg Ø, and in February 2012 they moved into their first common apartment in Aalborg C, where they moved out October 2016 and bought their own place.

Couple B: "Martin" and "Laura"

Martin is 26 years old and finished his degree in IT management last summer, and is hoping to find his dream job soon. Laura is 24 years old, is studying to become a nurse and is currently on her second semester. They both moved to Aalborg to study and met at the annual Carnival event in 2012. After some time, Martin moved into Laura's apartment, and in October 2016 they moved into their first common home in Aalborg C. Martin is from South Jutland while Laura is from Central Jutland.

Couple C: "Peter" and "Louise"

Peter is 26 years old and finished his bachelor in pedagogy in February 2017. He is searching for a job, but has also applied at pedagogical sociology or psychology study starting this summer in Aarhus. Louise is 25 years old and is finishing her degree in social work August 2017. They met each other on the bachelor. Louise moved into Peter's apartment in May 2015 and two months after they moved into their common home in Aalborg C. Peter is originally German, but went to Danish/German speaking schools in Flensburg, whereas he sees him self as a little of both. Louise is from Central Jutland.

Couples D: "Christian" and "Mia"

Christian is 28 years old and is finishing his degree in medicine in August 2017 from SDU. Mia is 26 years old and is also finishing her degree in social work in June 2017. They met at a club 8 ½ years ago, and have had an on/off relationship with several break-ups. They have lived together before in Christian's apartment in Odense, but when Mia started her bachelor in Aalborg, they broke up. Now they are committed to each other and live in a common apartment in Aalborg C. They are both from South Jutland.

5.3.9 Descriptions of the homes

Even though the physical homes are not the real objects of analysis, I shortly want to describe the couples' homes and their things. These presentations are descriptive presentations of what I saw

when I entered their homes, and can be helpful to read in order to get an understanding of my understanding, since the observations I made and the atmosphere in the homes will create a picture of the homes, whereas some of the points in the thesis will be easier to follow. I considered taking pictures of the homes, but decided not to as it broke with my ethical considerations about anonymising the couples.

Two of the couples lived in student dorm apartments built in 2009 – Martin and Laura and Peter and Louise. Both of the apartments would be characterised as spacious student apartments. Peter and Louise's home was characterised as a 'typical' apartment where students live. Some of their furniture were clearly brought from their childhood homes, while some of them were from IKEA. I did not see any designer brands on furniture or other things. It was nice and tidy, no dirty dishes in the kitchen. The home and especially the living room seemed a bit empty compared to the three other homes. In fact, Martin and Laura's home was also a bit empty, but due to a vintage lamp, an old blue-painted chest with roses³, an authentic, big painting, and some plants, the place seemed more welcoming and cosy. The chairs, the sideboard and the vases were designer brands, and seemed 'handpicked' and did not make the home look like a typical student apartment. Christian and Mia lived in a bigger apartment. The contrast from the student apartments was big, since their quite older home had 'soul'. The dining table, the bookshelf and the closet⁴ were all older, good wooden handcrafts. Their home seemed like the most personal – and traditional – home with older designer brands on the wall⁵ and small trinkets and pictures from travels. Designer brands were also the dominating things in Patrick and Marie's apartment, but they were newer, like Montana bookcases, Normann Cph lamp, quality leather sofas and down to the smallest detail – Arne Jacobsen cutlery (which I noticed since the dirty dishes were on the kitchen counter). The plants were *the* plants that are in style now as seen on Instagram. Their home looked expensive and it was easy for me to name their things.

5.4 Quality of the data

Besides being aware of my role as a researcher, the ethical attentions and the use of the interview guide, some other considerations throughout the interview were important. The quality of the

³ *Dragkiste*

⁴ *Karleskab*

⁵ *Bjørn Wiinblad-platte*

empirical data must be considered. Opposed to quantitative research that works more static and fixed, qualitative research is more soft and messy, whereas determining the quality becomes complex (Silverman 2006:35). This included making sure to ask follow-up questions if I did not understand what the couples said, and to make sure that I would ask short and precise questions. It also included making sure that I would use my new preunderstandings and preconceptions in the interview situations (Kvale and Brinkmann 2009:186).

The findings in any research or study can always be seen as a result of the data, the methods, the design and structure and the theories chosen – generally everything in the study – whereas the study it is a good idea to assess these choices further. By doing so, the study and its findings will be based on more accurate and well-founded claims, and ensures higher trustworthiness of the findings.

For this purpose, I will shortly present three concepts emphasised by Bryman (2012) and Hirschman (1986), among others: *Transferability*, *dependability* and *confirmability*. At the end of the present study, the concepts will further be used to evaluate the study and the trustworthiness of the findings.

To begin with, transferability is the qualitative counterpart to quantitative research's generalisation, however to generalise is not the aim in this study. When wanting to ensure transferability, you need to stay true to the social, cultural or historical contexts you are operating in (Hirschman 1986:245). Opposed to quantitative research's aim to create width, this study is aiming for depth, which it does by orienting the empirical findings to the context of the social world it is in (Bryman 2012:392) – the social world as described in the problem area, which is the Danish context.

Further on, dependability deals with the interpretation and analysing of the study. Opposed to quantitative studies' analysis devices for measuring, in this qualitative study the tool for analysing is a human being – myself as a researcher – whereas the process is much more complex, since all the interpretation is done by me (Hirschman 1986:245-246). Adopted by Guba and Lincoln, Bryman suggests an *auditing approach* (Bryman 2012:392), to make sure that the procedures in the study have been followed, as they should.

Finally, confirmability is about the role of the researcher, who is expected *not* to be emotionally neutral and objective. The role of the researcher should, and will, affect the study, whereas own my understandings should be part of the interpretations, which is in line with the hermeneutical approach as exercised in the interviews and the analysis of this study (Hirschman 1986:246). This

means that my preunderstandings (as the Danish, young woman I am) also are a part of the study's methods of gathering data and interpreting the data.

5.5 Processing the interviews

After I conducted and transcribed the dyadic interviews with the couples, I began the preparatory work for the two-parted analysis. It was important to consider how the should be executed before conducting the interviews, since it will play a part in the production of the interview guide, the interviews and the transcriptions (Kvale and Brinkmann 2009:212).

In most qualitative on individual level, I decided to highlight significant statements, sentences and words for the data-driven analysis that would provide understandings of how the young people negotiate about their things (Eisikovits and Koren 2010:1645). However, the focus was not only on the individual level, but also on the collective level since I wanted to capture the couples' common experiences as well. Since the second part of the analysis in this thesis will make use of theoretical concepts, I emphasised sentences that were in accordance with the theories in use, by Löfgren, Moisio and Beruchashvili, Winther and Kjær. Thus, I also read through the transcriptions using my theoretical understandings as a context of interpretation (Kvale and Brinkmann 2009:239, 261-262). One drawback of only doing a theoretical reading is the risk of reading the transcriptions and 'getting lost' in the theoretical reflections. This means that relevant details might be neglected if they do not belong to certain theoretical categories (Kvale and Brinkmann 2009:265). To make sure that I would not neglect any of the young people's experiences, I read the transcriptions several times, and was aware that I kept my own understandings in mind, which for instance was done by researching previous literature. Thereby, I kept to my iterative process in this study.

In line with this awareness, I was aware of the reciprocity between the parts and the whole, which is in correspondence with my hermeneutic approach. This means that I never interpreted a sentence in an interview without considering the whole interview, as it is the relation between them that makes the interpretations possible (Jørgensen 2008; Kvale and Brinkman 2009:233). As established in 5.2.3 *Methodology*, I read the transcriptions with my own prerequisites in mind, and read the transcriptions in the context they are in (Kvale and Brinkmann 2009:233). My own context was then included which created the reciprocity between the couples and myself, but the understandings gained by this will not be the final understanding. This questions when the interpretation should

end, and one principle is that the interpretation of meaning is ‘finished’ when you have reached an interpretation without any logical contradictions (Kvale and Brinkmann 2009:233).

5.6 Limitations of the study

The empirical data in the study consists of four interviews with young couples. Even though the study is a qualitative study done in line with a constructivist view, I still need to consider what how much I actually can say after analysing the data. The aim is not, and has never been, to generalise my findings into the entire population of young couples in Denmark, but what I can conclude are tendencies found in my empirical data with these young couples. Since I also will include the social, cultural and historical context of these young couples, and since they all are Danish and living in the same city in the same country, it would be completely surprising *not* to find some minor tendencies among them.

The phenomenon studied in this thesis is also not a ‘one time event’ only happening once or twice in specific places, but is a global phenomenon happening not far from the majority of people’s minds, and thus, people can relate to it.

6 Overall theoretical inspiration

Before moving on my theoretical framework adapted for this thesis, I want to shed light on some literature, which has been an inspiration for this thesis. The main focus will be consumption in homemaking, which therefore is not completely a part of the concepts, I will use for the concept-driven theoretical analysis, but still is a field worth spending some time on.

Often when new homes are created, new things are bought, which, as well, calls for negotiations between the involved residents. Consumption is then a big part in the constructions of new homes. The home and its consumption has been a sphere dominated by women in many centuries all over the world, which prevailing literature have shown (Robinson and Hunter 2008; Meah 2014; Baker et al. 2009; Reimer and Leslie 2004). The woman in the family has been seen as the main consumer while the man the producer or the breadwinner – leaving the home and homemaking gendered (Robinson and Hunter 2008:466; Holt and Thompson 2004; Reimer and Leslie 2004). A shift in the traditional ‘breadwinner/homemaker’ has been seen since the 1960’s which now, at least in theory,

leaves the man and the woman with equal time to spend inside the home as outside the home, for instance at work (Robinson and Hunter 2008). Western literature have stated how the gender roles are changing inside the home: More men are cooking, taking care of children, taking maternal leave, doing housework and so on (Carlson et al. 2016; Meah 2014).

Höijer has stated how the home has become a ‘consumer unit’ instead of a ‘production unit’ (Höijer 2013:14) with a renewed interest in homemaking. This is highly visible in some young people’s homes, where only the ‘right’ brands are good enough and even the radiator must be an aesthetic piece of the home decorating (Winther, 2006:207; Licitationen 2017). But is this an interest for both women and men? Prevailing literature might point towards an uneven division of household activities between the genders (Taulø-Jacobsen 2013; Robinson and Hunter 2008; Leslie and Reimer 2003; Bech-Jørgensen 1997) and uneven power to place the furniture in the home (Berlingske 2016), when, at the same time, the men *want* to co-determine where the furniture go and how the kitchen looks (Bolius 2017) – and take part in the shopping for the decoration cushions (Nyvang 2014). But then a survey finds out that nine out of ten Danish men are asking for their own ‘man caves’ or ‘man rooms’ (other than the bathroom) where they can have ‘masculine’ alone-time for a couple of hours (Politiken 2007; Moisio and Beruchashvili 2016). As Nyvang points out, you never hear any talk about a ‘female room’ only for the woman (Nyvang 2014). One might question if that is because all the other rooms belong to the woman, for her to decorate, and will also be highlighted in this thesis. Or do the women care more about it?

For the theoretical framework for this study I will among others use Ida Winther (2006) and her study of homeliness. Her study has brought inspiration for mine, however, where Winther’s study focuses just on the home and how homeliness is created, the present study will focus on homemaking regarding the *things* in the home, which are brought in it from the two parts in the relationship; the man and the woman. Where Winther’s empirical data consists of conversations with children aged 10 to 11, the data in this study will consist of interviews with young couples, aged 24 to 29, in their own homes, not their parents’.

This has brought up different topics in the fields of the home, homemaking, consumption and gender, but is a rather limited review of the many studies and articles that exist within the field.

At last I want stress that much literature points towards a need to study the fields further, especially when so much is still changing inside the home – gender roles and interests, among other – and also justifies why the present study is relevant to do.

7 Theoretical framework

In this section I will present my theoretical perspectives adapted to this study and its problem. The theories chosen will work as tools for analysing how the couples negotiate about the things that construct their common home, and how this can be seen as an expression of negotiations between the identity, the relation and the gender.

7.1 Structure of theoretical framework

The structure of this section will be as such: Firstly, I will provide a theoretical understanding of the concept *identity* by Belk and Jenkins, as a highly social concept, but also what the things we have mean to us, and further on I will describe concepts introduced by Kjær, that will make me able to understand the couples and on what grounds their relationships were built. Secondly, I turn to Winther and describe some of her concepts on the nuclear family, since I want to challenge the rhetorical idealisation of the family that exists. Winther will additionally bring out concepts on domesticity, in which Löfgren takes over, as I will introduce some concepts approaches by him to help to gain understanding to how vast they have been with each other's things when moving in together. Thirdly, I will shed light upon some gender concepts from Monro and Lorber to explain what it is and how it has evolved. To contrast the gender concepts I have chosen to focus on masculinity as well, since it has been neglected in prevailing literature about the home and homemaking. The latter will be guided by a study from Moisio and Beruchashvili.

Other researchers will be used, however not to describe concepts I will use in the field, but to outline the field. These researchers are amongst others Giddens, de Beauvoir and West and Zimmerman. At the end of the theoretical framework I will shortly describe how I intend to use the concepts in the analysis, as leading up to the analysis strategy in the next section.

7.1.1 Homemaking and domestic life

The main character in fairy tales has often followed the model 'home-abroad/out-home' (Mechlenborg 2007:76). The home symbolises the stabile pillar and the safe base, but mostly it symbolises the known, in contrast to the outside world's unknown (Winther 2006:160). Not much has changed in the home today, according to Winther. She argues that the world's unknown today has become the late modernity's flexible and mobile character, whereas the need for home is bigger

than ever. Yet, what *has* changed is how the home not necessarily has to be *a home* (and the main character does not have to travel abroad to come home again) because abroad can also be home and home is also connected to the outside (Winther 2006:170).

To further understand what a home is Winther makes use of the term *domesticity* (2006:119). Domesticity can at best be translated into family life or home life at home, and is a private and intimate matter (Winther 2006:123). Thus, it is a place where *togetherness* is created (Winther 2006:139), and it is an ideal place to study how this togetherness is created, that is, how young people negotiate about the things that constitute their common home.

One point, Winther makes, is how people can ‘home it’⁶ places that are not their homes. This also clarifies why abroad/out can be home. The homeliness can be created in a hotel room, at grand parents’ house or at a friend’s house, as long as the place contains people or objects that are familiar (Winther 2006:188-189). This actually makes the home mobile since the feeling of home is possible to move, as long as the homey feeling is present from something familiar (Winther 2006:194).

Löfgren explains how the home is constructed through a strong ‘ours’ (Löfgren 2016). In *ours* there are *mine*, *yours*, *you* and *I* as well, which are in constant *negotiations* within the members of the family living in the home – the family being the couple. In the home there are conflicting aims, silent routines, symbolic messages and dreams and longings – all in a *throwntogetherness* that co-exist (Löfgren 2014:4, 14). But how does it all co-exists and become an agreement of ‘the way we do things here’? Löfgren looks at the home as a ‘moral economy’. The moral economy of the home deals with an in-house order with systems, patterns and morals (Löfgren 2014:14). Since this is often invisible and hidden in mundane situations (Löfgren 2014:15), I have delimited and isolated three concepts all describing it: *Solidarity*, *sharing* and *fairness*. Together with Winther’s concepts, these three concepts will be used as tools for analysing the couples’ negotiations in moving in together and living together. It takes solidarity to be able to share, and in sharing, being fair is a must, but fairness does not exist unless solidarity is present. The three concepts are thereby interrelated.

According to Löfgren, increased individualisation in modern homes has created a need for ‘my room’ or ‘my priorities’ and all of a sudden, negotiations about what seems *unfair* becomes negotiations about power structures, because ‘my things’ and ‘mine’ is emphasised more than ‘our things’ and ‘we’ (Löfgren 2014:15). In this thesis I am interested in what ‘he’ and ‘she’ brought to

⁶ “*At hjemme den*” (Winther 2006:189).

their common home, which things he or she got rid of and what that meant for their individual identity as well as their social identity through their things.

7.1.2 The relation

The dyadic, romantic couple is the smallest social unit in the society, Sarah Holst Kjær stressed in her ph.d. thesis (Kjær 2009:13). The present thesis deals with Danish young men and women in relationships, living together in an urban area – Aalborg. This social unit is characterised of what it should or should not contain and with an understanding of something common which keeps the unit together. These *fantasies* (or cultural notions, as I will call them) (Kjær 2009:22) and norms are culturally and socially determined, whereas a study of a couple might seem to say a lot about the society and the culture the couple is part of, both what the ideal is and anti ideal is. How ‘good’ or ‘bad’ a relationship is, is determined by these cultural notions and will also be visible in the way the couple themselves talk about their relationship, as they are part of their notions of what is good and bad. The notions also ‘determine’ which things are mine and which things are yours – for instance, does the sofa belong to the man? And the garage? Does the kitchen belong to the woman? If so, who is to determine the stuff in it? Moreover, whether or not situations in everyday life are ‘good’ or ‘bad’ are determined by cultural notions (Kjær 2009:23). Kjær argues, however, from de Beauvoir’s words, that two people can create a situation completely free from the cultural notions – but in these situations the people involved can make use of the cultural notions to promote or define a relation between man and women (Kjær 2009:22-23). Due to this, I asked the couples to mention specific situations during the process of moving in together and in everyday life, where they had discussions about certain belongings, certain rooms in the home and the stuff in it.

From the cultural notions, Kjær defines a concept called the *cultural third* (Kjær 2009:23). The cultural third is seen as tools such as the sofa, text messages communicated together or dance lessons taken together. It is more or less tools that connect the two people via the environment. Thereby, it can be used to analyse how everyday tools work as conditions for the relationship, as I am interested in the couple’s cultural, situational and material order (Kjær 2009:24). This also means that the couples will be treated as separate couples with what their situation might be, besides understanding the individuals inside the couple as individuals. Yet, when certain themes will show to be present in more than one couple, it would not be unexpected, as, already accounted

for, the cultural notions do exist, and all the couples live in the same society, same city, are around the same ages and in the same social class.

In line with the cultural third, Kjær operates with the concepts *timing* and *match*, as ideals in relationships and examples of what makes a relationship ‘good’ (Kjær 2009:170). Timing is about the mutual synchronisation between to like-minded people and about a common course in past, present and future. Match deals with the spontaneous meeting that leads to a socially meaningful relation, which at the end leads to family (Kjær 2009:170). Both of these concepts are in accordance with the romantic, normative story of how the ‘good’ couple was, is and will be (Kjær 2009:170), and will thereby help to understand on what grounds the relationships were built, to be able to understand some of the negotiations the couples expressed.

Kjær also operates with *narratives* from couples’ lives. Getting the couples to tell me their narratives gives me the opportunity to understand their life together and to see whether or not they are reciprocal synchronised in some of the things they do inside the home (Kjær 2009:24). In this narrative it is possible for the couples to express their ‘togetherness’, for instance in the habits and norms in their everyday life. Even though these habits are often left unsaid – since they are part of routines happening every day – putting some words on these practices and actions can be very eloquent to explore how the relations and the negotiations happen between them (Kjær 2009:25). Kjær’s concepts will thereby also be used as tools for analysing the couple’s negotiations inside the home. These concepts will be used to understand the circumstances the couples have and their ‘tools’ for making their everyday life work.

7.1.3 The family and the home

As previously approached by sociologist Anthony Giddens, Winther wants to expand the predominant notion of a ‘home’. In the process of doing this, she came across the ‘family’, since she underlines how a ‘home’ often is being reduced to a ‘family’ and reverse (Winther 2006:139). In the 19th century, the family and the house blended together and became the home, which represented the normative ideal (Winther 2006:139). Winther points out how many constellations of families are present today (for instance a family of two adults of the same sex or one adult and a child), whereas a home is so much more than just the family, however, she states, people and studies often talk and write about *the nuclear family* as an ideal picture of the family. By keeping up this picture, a rhetorical idealisation of the family is happening – and this might be expressions for

desires to go back to a time where the nuclear family contained the working man, the housewife and the two children with its values (Winther 2006:141; Löfgren in Winther 2006:124), or simply because it still is considered the 'ideal'?

My thesis is not a study of the family, however, I too feel the need to shortly engage in this field, as possible explanations for my informants' doings or sayings might be found in this idealisation of the family. Living together as a couple with a certain togetherness involved, is more than how you live together and with whom. Living together is a social relation (Winther 2006:139), where negotiations and trust find place every day, and where nothing is constant – not even the relation (Winther 2006:145). When I want to involve this, it is due to an importance of having in mind that the interviewed couples are a family in a post-modern sense, and that this family makes the home come alive – without concluding that the home is reduced to the family, but keeping in mind what is to be studied: The social relation with its negotiations inside the home, while additionally, being aware of the idealisation of the nuclear family and if, or how, the couples express it (see Kjær 2009:171). If they express it, how is a couple a 'good' couple, and what does the 'good' couple say or do? Moreover, this can help to study whether or not the negotiations inside the home are helping towards a more broadened definition of home and family.

7.1.4 The identity and the things

Consumer researcher Russell Belk argues that possessions are part of our *extended self* (Belk 1988). These possessions are not only things – that he calls 'stuff' (Belk 2001) – but also includes other elements than material goods, such as people, places and body parts, among others (Belk 1988:140). He states: “ (...) *in claiming that something is “mine”, we also come to believe that the object is “me.”*” (Belk 1988:141). The possessions work as reminders of our identity, help us to create time lines and are often part of big role transitions in life. Reminders of our identity could be certain heirlooms in our homes (not necessarily on display), and in role transitions a thing could be a mailbox when buying a house. We create certain attachments to the possessions we have, and what they all have in common – material or non-material, individually or collectively – is that they are defining our selves (Belk 1992:37). To be attached to something or someone is then part of our extended selves, however, a difference is made between the emotional attachment we for instance have to a pet and the functional connection we have with a closet (Belk 1992:38). The possessions also work as socialisations, since they help to evolve the identity, both individually and collectively.

Having a home, scholars state and the things in it, is part of the construction of identities (Moisio and Beruchashvili 2016:657; Gabriel and Lang 2006; Miller 1987). Löfgren agrees: *"Home-making has become very closely related to identity formation: home is a place where you actively try out different sides of the self."* (Löfgren 1990:50). If having something that is 'mine' is 'me', a loss of possessions is then considered to be a loss of self (Belk 1988:142), which also would explain why people who lose their home lose part of their identity (Moisio and Beruchashvili 2016:657). In my interviews with the couples, it therefore became particularly relevant to ask them about specific incidents, where he or she had to get rid of something, and how that felt. It might also be, that some of his or her stuff ended up in their storage room, whereas it was interesting to hear what they had stored.

In Belk's view, the home and its stuff is seen as a strong source of identity, however consuming stuff for the home is not enough – it needs to be appropriate and they need to know what to do with it. When buying a device you do not know how to use, the device is nevertheless in your possession, but not part of your extended self (Belk 1988:150). Reverse, the object needs to come alive, for instance by wearing the clothes or driving the car in order to make it part of the extended self (Belk 1988:150-151).

Scholars in modern and postmodern times have stated how 'individualised' people are (Giddens 1991; Leslie and Reimer 2004), but others also talk about identity being a highly social process happening in socialisation with others (Jenkins 2014). Others, like Beck, explain 'individual' as being personally responsible for your own biography in the social surroundings (Beck 1992:131). Beck also speaks of 'being on the move' in the postmodern society, where the dynamic and reflexive character of the society makes it hard for people to stay steady and 'rest' in places (Beck 1992).

In this thesis it is not only relevant to reflect on these views, but also the socialisation of things. How do the couples feel about own and their partner's stuff when moving in and living together? Which values are important for them?

Along with the increased individualisation in the modern homes, as approached by Löfgren, Jenkins discusses the individual and the collective, social identity. Jenkins states that identity is about knowing who we, and others, are and then knowing who we are and us knowing who they think we are. *"This is a multi-dimensional classification or mapping of the human world and our places in it,*

as individuals and as members of collectivities.” (Jenkins 2014:6). A membership of a collectivity presupposes something significant in common and boundaries to everyone who does not belong. Therefore, defining one classification, category or collective – defining ‘us’ – means defining what is not us; ‘them’ (Jenkins 2014:104). The categorisation is a generic, interactional process whereas the identification of others very often is part of identifying ourselves (Jenkins 2014:107). Moreover this process is something that we do, not something that we have, which also is why people who ‘are’ the same, do not have to ‘do’ the same (Jenkins 2014:146).

The above-mentioned on identity have helps to broaden the home and have showed another way of conceptualising the home. Belk’s view will help to gain understanding of the young people’s attachment to their stuff, while Jenkins’ view will contribute with an understanding of their identities as individual people and social people.

7.1.5 The meaning of gender

“One is not born, but rather becomes, a woman” (de Beauvoir 1953:267).

The gender perspective is also an intercultural dimension in this study. To be able to understand the couples’ identities and negotiations as men and women, and analyse them within a suitable frame, relevant gender theories will now be presented.

Sociology professors West and Zimmerman wrote about ‘doing gender’ in 1987: *“Doing gender involves a complex of socially guided perceptual, interactional, and micropolitical activities that cast particular pursuits as expressions of masculine and feminine “natures.”*” (1987:126). Gender is here used to legitimise one of the world’s biggest categories in society – men and women. It is characterised as *“the activity of managing situated conduct in the light of normative conceptions of attitudes and activities appropriate for one’s sex category.”* (West and Zimmerman 1987:127). These normative conceptions of attitudes can vary culturally and historically, whereas gender also varies according to the interaction it is put in (West and Zimmerman 1987:129).

In continuation of this – and with Simone de Beauvoir’s quote above in mind – according to philosopher and sociologist Judith Butler, gender is a socially constructed phenomenon (Butler 1999). Butler developed her theory with inspiration from Foucault who is relevant to include here

as well (Butler 1999:4). In *The History of Sexuality – The Will to Knowledge* (1978), Foucault clarifies his bio power of how the family is used as an installation to gain and keep system in the society. Professor in Women's Studies, Judith Lorber is on the same side when she states: "*As a social institution, gender is one of the major ways that human beings organize their lives.*" as well as when she questions what would happen if gender were invisible (Lorber 1994:55).

The empirical data in this thesis consists of conversations with heterosexual couples. As these couples are heterosexual and living together as man and woman I do not have much use of Western theories on the decreasing believe in binary systems, as it deals with different types of multiple gender, transgender and intersex. However, what might be useful in this thesis from these types of gender theory is the way that *gender pluralism* makes it possible to broaden the gender categorisation (Monro 2005:36). Professor in sociology Surya Monro notes that gender pluralism involves considering sex and gender as fluid in a spectrum where masculinity and femininity overlap (Monro 2005:37-40). In this, several contributors have discussed the demand for a less gendered society (Monro 2005:36). Lorber (2014) calls this the *degendering* of the society, which involves less heavy gender norms about what is considered male and female.

7.1.5.1 ...and masculinity

This thesis does not emphasise one gender at the expense of the other, nor is it the aim to contribute to one part of the gender theory more than the other. However, when this is established, I have felt the need to present a contrast, and dwell a bit on literature pointing towards a disparity in the coverage of the genders and the home spaces. In fact, prevailing literature have been invisibly gendered with a focus on the female domestic space of the home. Thereby, early in the process of this thesis, it became important for me to get both genders' experiences and opinions, which the interview guide reflects.

Two researchers who were aware of this disparity were professors Risto Moisio and Mariam Beruchashvili (2016) who covered a gap in literature on home's male spaces as venues for men's identity creation. As they noticed, much literature had neglected the creation of masculinity in homes, whereas the purpose of their study was to develop insight to so-called *mancaves*, such as garages, workshops, barbeque pits or gardens, and how these mancaves contribute to domestic masculinity. Along with Belk (1988), Moisio and Beruchashvili emphasise the home as a

possession that reflects extensions of identities, and makes it clear through conversations with men, that this happens for men and not just women (Moisio and Beruchashvili 2016:672). *“The men’s possessions allow them to engage in a masculine form of nesting”* (Moisio and Beruchashvili 2016:663). These possessions can be anything from a chair in the living room, where only the man sit in, to an entire “man room” covered in sports-related possessions (Moisio and Beruchashvili 2016:663). What they all have in common, Moisio and Beruchashvili argue, is a *“phallic object that evokes symbolic undertones of masculine power”* (Moisio and Beruchashvili 2016:663). Some of the men from the mentioned study felt the need to validate their male space, such as having a home office for ‘productivity’, others as a reward of working all day long (Moisio and Beruchashvili 2016:664), and many of them to deal with workplace frustrations (Moisio and Beruchashvili 2016:665). The male spaces can be viewed as the connection between the work and home, often with an ambiance of a sports bar or alike to contrast the work space-look. The male spaces can also be seen as a refuge from the identity pressures from roles as fathers, husbands or household members (Moisio and Beruchashvili 2016:666). The time spent in the mancaves therefore enables them to act better in these roles and thus, works as a space for *“therapeutic self-reflection”* and for *“revitalization of men’s potential to live up to these responsibilities.”* (Moisio and Beruchashvili 2016:666-667). Lastly, the male spaces can be viewed as social spaces to bond with children over do-it-yourself projects or other male family members (Moisio and Beruchashvili 2016:667-668). On the other hand, some of the men expressed how they felt no need for having a mancave, since they consider it a *“regressive form of masculinity that is not in sync with contemporary times”* (Moisio and Beruchashvili 2016:670-671).

Through this, it has been made clear that men’s mancaves may play a central, but rather multifaceted part in the creation of masculinity and identity at home.

7.2 Applying the theoretical framework

As quoted in the previous section: *“”Reality” can be “seen” only through a window of theory, whether implicit or explicit.”* (Guba 1990:25), this quote is useful in understanding how my theories will help me to obtain knowledge about the research question. I have presented my theoretic orientation in the field of identity, homemaking and gender, which I intend to use in the following way: Before I was able to do my theoretical analysis and discussion I read through the transcriptions while being aware of the theoretical concepts *extended self, fantasies, cultural third,*

timing, match, the ideal nuclear family, domesticity, togetherness, solidarity, sharing, fairness, gender pluralism, degendering and negotiations in what is *mine, yours and ours*. The aim is not to confirm or weaken the concepts, but to use them as the tools in the theoretical analysis to interpret and discuss how relation, identity and gender can be understood through the young couples' construction of the home, as will be analysed in the empirical analysis.

It may turn out that some concepts from my theoretical framework will provide deeper insights to my research question than others. In this case, the remaining concepts will still have helped this study in broadening the theoretical understandings that operate within the context of the study.

8 Analysis

This section holds the analysis of the study, which will consist of two parts, an empirical analysis and a theoretical analysis and discussion. In the analysis strategy next, I will provide an overview of the analyses.

8.1 Analysis strategy

The aim of the analysis is to answer the research question:

“How do young, Danish couples negotiate about the things that constitute their common home and how can it be seen as an expression of negotiations between the identities as ‘I’ and ‘we’, the relation and the genders?”

Like the themes in the interview guide, the themes detected in the empirical analysis are not random themes as well, but themes that arose from reading the transcriptions. In some way, the themes are thereby a minor result of a “quantifiable” way to do qualitative research; the more times I noticed a specific theme, the more certain identification of a theme I had (Bryman 2012:624).

The purpose of the empirical analysis is to detect common tendencies in the interviews with the couples, since it is data-driven. I will therefore emphasise places, sentences, words or statements, which the couples had in common in the different themes of the interviews, to build up common points whenever I detect them. In places where a common point cannot be found I will describe so.

The statements or words used are in accordance with the theme, where they are used. Whenever I use a statement from an interview I will interpret it as a part of the whole interview, which is in line with the hermeneutical spiral. In some cases, I will use the same statement, or parts of it, in different themes, due to it being relevant for both. The purpose of the empirical analysis is thereby also a preparation for the theoretical analysis and discussion, in terms of being able to understand the data in a broader context.

The purpose of the theoretical analysis and discussion is to provide a broader understanding of the interviews from the couples, whereas I, besides the theoretical concepts, will analyse and discuss the data into the Danish societal, cultural and historical context.

For practical matters, whenever I use the Danish quotes from the couples, I have translated them into English. In these translations I have focused on stating the meaning of the quote, whereas the quotes are not all literally translated word by word. If wanting to see the original quote, I have included references at the end of each quote – the letter referring to the couple and the number referring to the page (cf. appendixes 2 to 5).

9 Empirical analysis

The analysis of this thesis will consist of these two parts: Now, an empirical analysis of the data – the interviews. Afterwards, a theoretical analysis, in which I will discuss my theoretical concepts to be able to analyse my own considerations on a higher level, for at last to round it all up in findings about the young, Danish couples.

The empirical analysis will consist of three overall themes with subthemes I noticed in the interviews. The three overall themes are *the home*, *I, you, we* and *gendered home*. After the first theme, a small theme about *the relation in the home* will follow, but the emphasis will be put on the other three sections. In each beginning of the different overall themes I will describe the structure of the section, and in case the theme involved particular questions asked in the interviews, I will present these as well.

9.1 The home

The following part will deal with three main foci on the home and one on the couple in the home. First I will describe how the homes looked like and how the young couples had used their childhood

homes as inspiration – or the opposite – to create their own, common home. I will also clarify the places where the couples talked about having experienced that aesthetics and practical matters clash. Next, I will highlight which values the homes should contain, in which the home as a safe space was detected as a theme as well as the when the couples talked about a balance between private and public in the home. After this, I will highlight how the home is used, both about the daily routines, but also *where* in the home the different people stay the most. Next, a smaller section about the couple will follow, since it was surprising to me how the couples talked about themselves whenever they wanted to stress how ‘good’ a couple they were.

9.1.1 How does the home look like?

As mentioned, this section will describe how the couples’ homes looked and also why they had arranged different stuff as they did – what or who had influenced them?

9.1.1.1 Influences from the childhood homes

In the interviews I asked the couples how a home should look like and why their home looked as it did. Some of the young peoples’ answers took their childhood homes or their heritage as a starting point, whereas this is one of the themes I want to take up in this part. Another theme I think deserves some reflections in this part is a balance between aesthetics and practical matters, which all of the couples in one way or the other expressed in the interviews.

Some of the young people talked about their childhood homes, when I asked them about how a home should look like. However, their point of talking about it differed, and can be divided into two groups: One group who did it to state how a home should look like and which things it should contain, and one group who did it to state how a home should not look like. In the second ‘group’ is Peter and Louise, as they both talked about their childhood homes’ stuff as examples of stuff they did not want to have in their own home. Louise said:

“I think with trinkets, it can really be way too much. My mom had a lot of trinkets when I lived at home and now she has even more, and I actually also had more than I have now. She went a bit crazy and that has made me less crazy about it. I can’t spend money on it now.” (Louise C:2).

Louise made a determined choice of not wanting small, useless trinkets in her home – when she lived alone and now in their common home – because of her experiences at her childhood home. Even though she liked having them in her room by her mother's, she did not see the idea of spending money on them now. Peter also talked about his childhood home, where his parents have a lot of stuff they do not use:

“I think, maybe it’s just something happening when you get older. The older you get, the more stuff you have. When I think about my parents’ home, they really have a lot of stuff they don’t use and do not throw away – at least not right away, maybe after a couple of years, and that is a habit I do not share with them. I can use it and then it’s fine, otherwise I throw it out. Maybe it’s also because we’re limited with the space here.” (Peter, C:2).

When I heard the couples state this, it actually did not come as a surprise to me, or at least it sounded very obvious what they said, since this couples’ home was the most ‘empty’ one of the four couples I visited. The atmosphere in their home seemed a bit ‘unwelcoming’ in contrast to the other couples’ homes.

In the other group, the three remaining couples are, since they all, in some ways, expressed how their childhood home and the family they come from had been part of shaping their new, common home.

Firstly, in Martin and Laura’s home, she said herself that she brought the cosiness in the home, which was a value she brought from her childhood home. She also told me a decisions about a red sofa and a wooden, homemade bench, she had made with her father – a decision that had to exclude one of the pieces of furniture (B:6). Here, Martin actually made the choice for her and chose the homemade bench, which she by the way was pleased with, but nevertheless, which Martin chose due to its history.

Secondly, Christian and Mia both mentioned that they wanted furniture with soul in their common home, whereas the decision about their closet was an obvious choice for Mia. She explained how the closet they bought used was nearly identical to one her parents have:

“(…) my parents have one like it at home, almost identical. And they used it for glasses, plates and alike, and I have always thought it was a bit funny because it is an old closet for clothes, and then I

thought ‘well, it would be nice if you could get one of those’, because it’s quite white and new here [pointing towards the kitchen] and I had a strong idea about what I wanted, and Christian was just like ‘well, let’s do it’.” (Mia, D:2).

As Mia expressed, Christian liked the idea, and in some ways this helps me to understand the statement he came with, which he did not finish: “(...) *you take some values with you from your childhood home, and you find out that you are different from your parents in some ways (...)*” (D:2). This might only be a reflection of his *own* childhood home, which probably contained some things he did not want in his own home – maybe because the stuff in his parents’ home lacked the ‘soul’ and story he appreciated in his own home (D:2). In this way, Christian might belong in the other group with Peter and Louise, since he did not want what he was used to in his childhood home.

Thirdly, along with these couples, Patrick talked about four specific heirlooms he had from different grandparents – a piece of driftwood, a chair and a polar bear and a bird for decoration. He expressed how he did not care where they are in the home, as long as they are there, and Marie agreed:

“Maybe I feel like – of course I can see that it’s not okay just to throw it out. I also want a home with some history in it and where it is not just the stuff that is on Instagram. I also want something that is personal.” (Marie, A:5).

Interestingly, Marie did not have any own heirlooms on display in the home, but was happy to let Patrick’s stuff take the space on the big bookshelf in the living room.

Still, after pointing towards these two groups in the childhood home-theme, these lines are not so easily drawn as such. Even though Mia expressed her desire for having a closet like her parents, she also explained how the cleaning after dinner in her childhood home should be done right after eating, which she, in her and their common home, did not want to follow (D:2). Additionally, Louise told me about all the trinkets, which her mother was ‘obsessed’ about – which made her need for trinkets very small. But at the same time, she and Peter are sometimes sitting in front of the TV to eat their dinner, which she admitted was something they did in her childhood home (C:2).

Thus, there is a difference between *having/not having* the same *stuff* as in their childhood homes, and *doing/not doing* the same *activities*.

9.1.1.2 A clash between aesthetics and practical matters

The other theme I noticed, in how the home looked, was how all of the couples directly or indirectly talked about the balance between aesthetics and practicalities. This does not necessarily imply that they all had negotiations about things that either should fulfil a desire of aesthetics or practical matters, but rather that the couples all mentioned how these two sometimes can clash.

Three of the couples mentioned the issue in quite explicit ways. Peter and Louise talked about their negotiations with his gaming area when they first moved in. The gaming area meant a lot to Peter, he expressed, but Louise was not fond of it being in the living room: *“In the beginning I thought ‘really, it can’t be there, it’s too tight’. It was mostly about how it would look, but I also found it strange especially when there was so much space in the bedroom (...)”* (C:3). They both mention that the solution turned out great for both of them, but the next aesthetics-practical issue they told me was a recent buy – his computer chair. Even though she admitted how she thought the chair seemed a bit ‘intense’⁷ she said that the previous chair was not good for his back, whereas they, again, were pleased with the solution. Thus, the issue of aesthetics-practical is part of an on-going negotiation, which it is for Patrick and Marie as well. Patrick even mentioned several times explicitly, that the two often clash (A:7). He mentioned their wooden bench, which she thought looked well, but he found it impractical in the beginning. Once they had the bench in the home, he was surprised how well it actually worked. He also mentioned the TV furniture, which he himself said was not the most aesthetic piece of furniture, but very practical, because it could hide all the wires (A:2). Another not so clear example was the time when Patrick anyway was drilling holes in the wall for different things. He was home alone and decided to put up a Tintin poster on the wall in the kitchen, which was not well received by Marie (A:6). But as he stated: *“(...) It was one of those days when I was all playful and hung lamps up, and a picture we had talked about in the bedroom, so I had the drill out.”* (A:6). For him it was a matter of practicalities that he hung the Tintin poster up, but Marie did not like it there. Maybe she most of all did not like how she was not invited in on the decision. Lastly, an example of arranging his books also ended up as an *“unpleasant*

⁷ ”Kæmpe monstrum” were her exact words about the chair (C:3).

conversation” (A:3), because Marie arranged them after colour to make it look good, but Patrick wanted them according to subject.

In the other two couples, it was the women who in the beginning felt that the computer desks and gaming equipment took up too much space in the living room, which clashed with their sense of what seemed aesthetic, but after a while, they actually found it quite practical and nice to have it in the home anyway (B:2). In the interview with Christian and Mia, they both admitted that they probably always discuss something, which also includes this clash between aesthetics and practical matters (D:3). One of the more indirect negotiations that also is part of this issue is the discussions about how clean and neat their home should be. On the one hand, both of them see themselves as organised people, because they like that the home should work practically, but on the other hand, Mia liked that you can skip the dirty dishes one night, and Christian sometimes left the home in the mornings without cleaning a bit up after breakfast or alike (D:2, 4).

In line with this, I can detect that the boundaries between the aesthetics and practicalities are not as strict as such, which also is something Patrick mentioned. He used the phrase “*the set-up on the shelf*” (A:5) and liked how the big cushions matched the wooden bench, which shows that he also likes when the home and its things look nice.

9.1.2 Which values are in the home?

Common for all of the young people were the importance of having a home that works as a safe or comfortable base where they can relax and do what they want. I will shortly highlight some of the places. The other relevant theme I noticed was how the couples did not agree on how private or public the home should be, which I afterwards will outline.

9.1.2.1 The home as a safe space

I asked the couples to tell me what a home meant for them as to which values a home should have. I detected two main themes that appeared from the answers in most of the interviews. The first theme was the value of having a home for its ability to create a safe space, while the second theme was a balance between private and public.

Most of the young people agreed on which values a home should have. They indicated that the home first and foremost should be a safe space for relaxation. Marie stated which values a home should have: *“A place where you can relax. Where it’s cosy and you can be yourself.”* (A:2). She emphasised that the home should be a sanctuary from the world outside – not as if you cannot be yourself in the “outside world”, but she clearly distinguished between the home and the “outside world”, since the home is where she should be able to be herself. Marie then emphasised the values inside the home as very different than the ‘values’ on the outside.

Moreover, the young people expressed that the home was a place where *“You should feel comfortable”* (Martin, B:1), where *“you can live⁸ and do what you want to do”* and where *“it is okay to go lie on the sofa if you have eaten too much”* (Mia, D:2) and *“where you can relax”* (Peter, C:2). Two of the young women also mention the word *“cosiness”* (Laura B:2; Marie A:2) in their answers, which in the Danish context more or less can describe the above-mentioned statements. All of the mentioned statements indicate that the home should contain stuff that would make them feel as if they can do what they want to do, and is also a contrast to the outside world and its norms and rules, which will be explained later in the theoretical analysis and discussion.

Two of the young men had a hard time answering this question about the values in the home, and therefore gave me no final answer. One of them was Christian: *“I don’t know... you take some values with you from your childhood home, and you find out that you are different from your parents in some ways... it’s hard to put into words.”* (D:2). As established, Christian did not express which values he meant that “you” take with you from your parents, but he indicated later in the interview having a *“good base, where you feel safe”* (D:2), which most likely is a value he thinks is important in a home. Patrick, on the other hand, did not answer the question, but Marie answered it for him as she said: *“So, a home for you is a place where it practically works, where there is room for all the stuff you need.”* (A:2).

9.1.2.2 A balance between private and public

The other main theme I noticed in the interviews was the balance between private and public – how the couples think the home should be arranged, that is, whether or not the home should be a place for private matters and being alone or public matters and social occasions. No one in the couples

⁸ An interesting side note is how “to live” is the overall translation to both the Danish “at leve” but also “at bo”. Here, Mia means (and said in the interview) “leve” and therefore means *not just* a place where she physically lives (“bor”).

strictly said that the home should be used for either one purpose or the other, but I want to draw a picture of the differences between the people in the couples to make it clear that the values in the home are more many-sided as pointed out above – but also to show how the individuals in the couples not always agree with each other.

Some of the young people expressed how the home should be arranged so that guests could come by. When I asked the question to Martin he promptly answered “*Yes of course, friends and family, everyone!*” (B:1), but her partner saw the home as a mixture of relaxation and having guests – that is, a mixture of private and public: “*(...) here we can come home and relax, and it’s not so important that it’s super clean – it should be cosy here, both for us and others.*” (B:1). For Laura, the need for cosiness goes beyond her self and her home, but it is also an important value whenever she and Martin have guests. She then thinks about the home and its appearance when the public is invited in and she thinks about her home being on display when the public is present at the private.

“It’s primarily a place where you can relax and put your feet up. But it’s also important to me that you can invite people, and there is space for it, even though the space is tight, you just have to squeeze in 17 people in the living room.” (Louise, C:2).

The two young women brought out another important value to the question I asked about, since they did not *only* care about how the home looked like for themselves but also for their guests. However, the reasons for having a neat home were a bit different in the case of Louise and Laura. Where Laura stated that it was “*not so important that it’s super clean as it’s cosy*” (B:1), Louise only talked about having the space to invite (a lot of) guests over.

I discovered different interests between Louise and Peter in the interview, since he emphasised that the home should be a place for relaxation, but she emphasised how much it meant for her to be able to have guests over. Remarkably, as already noted, I observed that their home was the most ‘empty’ home of the four couples’ homes, which could be due to her desire to fit “*17 people in the living room*” (C:2). Of course, Louise also mentioned the home being a place to relax, but Peter did not mention anything about the value of having guests in the home. Neither did he express his dislike towards it, whereas he probably did not mind, but nevertheless, was not something he needed.

9.1.3 How is the home used?

The home consists of many different interests, but something also need to be done to make the home work – and how did the couples do so? I will first explain some of the ‘tools’ the couples use in their daily routines, or *how* they made the daily routines work. Next I want to describe what the couples told me when I asked them who used the different rooms in the apartment the most.

9.1.3.1 How are the everyday life routines?

I asked the couples to describe how they used their homes and asked them to give examples of how each one of them used the home in their everyday lives. Some of the couples did not know what to answer, so I helped with complementary questions like who did the cooking, cleaning or grocery shopping. The daily routines was therefore one of the themes I noticed in this part of the interviews. Another theme I want to emphasise deals with their answers to my question about where in the home each one of them mostly stays. Here, I, besides the points I will emphasise, also detected a gender division, but this will be dealt with in the analysis part *9.4 Does gender play a part?*

In creating a common domesticity where both people can live and do what they want to do, the couples used different ‘techniques’ or ‘tools’ to make it work. In general, all of the couples expressed that their everyday lives worked, which might be due to these different tools I now want to discuss.

Interestingly, the couples that specifically made use of one or two tools, were the two couples with the clearest individualists – Christian and Mia, and Martin and Laura. Christian and Mia told me about a cleaning plan they had in the home. The cleaning plan was made part of their domestic environment to ensure fewer discussions about cleaning and other things that would annoy Mia. Even though they had the plan, Mia expressed that it was not working as first thought. When she talked about it in the interview she almost sounded apologetic in a way, as if she knew I would judge her and them, and as if their social unit (their relationship) would fail if the cleaning plan failed. It is clear that this couple, and especially Mia, would like to live up to the cultural notions about the ‘good’ couple and how the ‘good’ couple’s everyday life and their routines work.

Additionally, Christian and Mia told me about their weekly grocery shopping, where they intended to buy everything for an entire week, but sometimes it was not the reality:

“M: (...) and then we try to go grocery shopping once a week – big shopping.

C: Well, but it’s not really working, as we would like it to.

M: No, but it works fine, I think.

C: Sometimes we just have unpredictable lives (...)” (D:4)

In the conversation about the shopping, it seemed like Mia was trying to convince herself, Christian and me to think that it worked out well, while at the same time Christian was trying to justify why the shopping was not working out. When Mia realises that they do not entirely live up to the cultural notions, she still, convincingly, tells me that it works out fine.

Another, yet not so obvious, tool this couple made use of was in the use of the kitchen:

“C: We take turns cooking the dinner, but we can both become a bit bossy in the kitchen, so one would like to control it, so automatically only one of us decides while the other one is in the background. So we take turns.

(...)

M: Yes, you just have to say in advance ‘I’ll cut the carrots now, so don’t come and comment on it, you can do the sauce’, or likewise.

C: Well, it was maybe worse in the beginning – now we’re better.” (D:3).

The kitchen is then primarily ‘reserved’ to one of them to avoid discussions of “*who knows best*” (D:3), while the other one stays in the background. The kitchen is in this case a place for creating and recreating power structures between their individual identities and their identities as man and woman but also their origins, since questioning their methods equals questioning their parents’ methods. Cooking might not be a social activity in their lives, but eating is nevertheless, whereas they actually are preparing, cooking and bossing individually but for the purpose of their social life together (see for instance Winther 2006:233).

In line with Christian and Mia's use of different tools, Martin and Laura told me about their weekly dinner plan. Besides being an advice from consumer experts as well, for Martin it was also a matter of practical reasons, so they would avoid "*running down to the store 80 times*" (B:5). As well as having the plan written in an excel sheet, they both had an app on their phones containing the same document that synchronises. The app works as a everyday life tool for them, making their everyday life together 'scheduled'. In the interview, Martin could have decided not to tell me about the weekly plan or the app, but he did, knowingly that tools like these make them seem like a 'good' couple. Martin and Laura's lives are then synchronised through the everyday life activities in their home.

In Patrick and Marie's apartment they had a TV in the living room as well as in the bedroom. They explained how the TV mostly was for Marie's sake, since the TV in the living room often was filled with soccer because of Patrick's interest in sports (A:2). To avoid discussions of what should be on the TV, both were happy with the extra TV as a tool, which was part of making their everyday life in the relationship work, but was probably more a luxury than a necessity, like the other couple's tools. Patrick mentioned that they had different priorities when moving in together in their first and second apartment. Noticeable is it that *he* mentioned how he did not need a TV in the bedroom, which could have been one of the priorities from Marie – but this only became a strong priority for her due to his need for watching soccer in the living room, on their 'common' TV.

Opposed to the other couples, Peter and Louise did not tell me about any specific tools they made use of. They talked about being very equal in every household activity, and were happy with the 'arrangements' in the living room, where Peter's computer for gaming was placed, which worked well with the activities Louise otherwise wanted to do in the living room during the day. Had the living room been filled with a hobby of hers, it may be an issue, since Peter's needs for social activities are smaller than Louise's, as already established.

9.1.3.2 Is the space in the home divided?

The other important theme in this section was where in the home, the different people mostly were. I asked the people in the couples where in the home they stayed the most. However, it was hard for almost all of them to answer the question since all of the apartments more or less consisted of one

area in which the kitchen, the dining area and the living room were, including the bedroom in a separate room.

Generally, it was a bit easier for the men than the women to answer the question. Peter and Christian's answers pointed towards their gaming area with their computers or PlayStation (C:2, D:3), while Patrick's answer was "*his room*" – the office (A:2). Even though Christian mentioned that both Mia and him mostly used the living room and dining table-area together, he also mentioned his Nintendo and PlayStation, and talked about the chair in the living room – a black leather chair (B:5). He did not say that it was 'his' chair and only se used it, but he was the one who mentioned it.

Patrick talked about the office, which was their third room's function: "*(...) I think it's important with the office we have in there. I am there a lot, I think it's me who is in there the most. It's sort of like... my room.*" (A:2). One of his priorities was clearly to have an office, since he needed a room to prepare for his job as a teacher, which made good sense. He therefore indicated that he used the room for productivity. Thereby, as already mentioned a bit, he became annoyed when Marie changed how his books were arranged in 'his' room:

"P: And yes, I think one of the biggest conflicts Marie and I have had was about my books – if they should be placed in subject order and how I used them, but Marie really wanted them placed in a colour order. Then one day, Marie spent a long time placing them in colour order. It developed into an unpleasant conversation.

M: Yes, and now they are placed according to the subject.

P: We fought about it an entire evening, don't you remember?

M: Nope." (A:3).

Clearly, the discussion meant more to Patrick than it did to Marie, since she did not remember it. This was perhaps because Patrick considered it 'his' room and a violation of 'his' space.

Even though Patrick mentioned the office, he also indicated spending time in the kitchen and the living room – which was the same for all of the men. Peter agreed with her partner when she said that they are together in the living room, and Christian indicated how the big kitchen, dining table, living room area probably were where they spend most of their time together. Thus, besides Patrick,

all of the people in the couples did not really mention any rooms specifically or exclusively for them.

Of the young women, Mia was the only one who mentioned a room where she spent most of her time, but this was the bedroom since her desk was placed there (D:3). This could be a practical matter and also an indication for her being a clear individualist. Yet, Mia also mentioned spending time in the big space in the kitchen, dining table and living room area. The other women did not mention any particular spaces.

Common for the other women was that they all indicated how they wanted to spend time together with their partner in the home. For Laura is seemed like the most natural thing, when living together as a couple, that you spend time together. Even though she mentioned her and Martin's plans for moving in to the apartment, where they talked about the liveable loft room would be used as a study room for Laura, the intentions never fully became a reality. So, she expressed the advantage of having the opportunity to have a room for her studying, but it did not seem like the natural thing for them to be 'apart in the apartment', since they claimed they did everything together. Martin agreed and stated: *"(...) we can better talk together or discuss something when we're both down here. It's nice to be at the same level."* (B:4). Martin and Laura clearly see themselves as one unit instead of two people living together, which Peter and Louise also expressed when they said they were very happy with the solution they found in the living room, even though Louise could not imagine it in the beginning, it seemed right now:

"(...) but it makes sense now, that we're not doing the same thing but we can talk together, if something just comes to mind, then you can say it. It's really nice that we have it there. Otherwise, mostly we sit in the sofa together." (Louise, C:3).

After talking to the couples about their space in the homes, all of them implicitly emphasised how fairness and solidarity were important and there was not real division in the homes.

9.2 The couple in the home

From this part of the interviews, I want to focus on a smaller, yet very relevant, theme I detected. The theme is about the 'good' couple, and was rather surprising to me, as I had not expected to hear

the couples talk about it in this way. When I read the transcriptions of the interviews I noticed how some of the couples in a way expressed what they thought they ‘were good at’. In general, the cultural notions of what the ‘good’ relationship is, was implicitly present in all of the interviews, whereas I shortly want to highlight this.

9.2.1 The ‘good’ couple

In three of the interviews, they talked about being “*good at something*”:

“P: Yes, so yeah, there are big emotions in it, but I think we’re good at talking about it.” (Patrick, A:7).

“M: It’s not like it’s just one of us who goes grocery shopping.
L: Yeah, we’re good at doing it together.” (B:4).

“I: What about the kitchen, who cooks?
L: We take turns, I think.
P: I think so too.
L: I think we’re good at that.” (C:3).

The cultural notions of what is ‘good’ seem to be what is good, and therefore, the three couples emphasise it, since what they do what ‘good’ couples do. On the other hand, you might question if they do it *because* it is what ‘good’ couples do.

In their notions, a good couple is a couple who takes turns doing the cooking, the cleaning, who goes grocery shopping together and who talks about their different interests, which almost all of them expressed they did. In Denmark, the cultural notions of what seems right is also about equality for men and women in a relationship, and since the four young couples live in modern relationship in modern times, they ‘should’ follow the cultural norms of what is ‘right’.

9.3 ‘I’, ‘you’ and ‘we’

In these parts of the interviews I did not directly ask the couples about their thoughts on how they were an ‘I’ or a ‘we’, but the following sections will deal with some of the places where I asked them indirectly and where the couples expressed something relevant about themselves, on their own, and themselves in the couple. This part will be divided into three main themes, which I detected in the transcriptions.

The first theme will deal with their answers to my question about what they did to create a common home, in their new common home. The overall focus is thereby ‘I and we in the home’. In the second theme I want to describe all of the things the couples brought, and which of these things survived in creating the ‘we’ in the common home. Which negotiations did they have about which things? Did they agree or disagree? Thereby, a main focus here is ‘I and we and the things’. The third theme deals with the types of identities the individuals and the couples indicated they had. Which tendencies from the interviews about certain types of we’s did they express? The main focus is, naturally, ‘I, you and we and the identity’.

9.3.1 How can you and I create our common home?

I asked the couples what they did in order to create a common home. Some of the couples answered my question by mentioning the specific stuff, they brought and which was important for them to bring – but that will be dealt with in the next section. Now, I will focus on the overall ‘actions’, or doings they told me about.

Common for the couples were how they thought, that the common home should represent both individuals in the home. Mia mentioned how the home should represent both of them, because she did not want a “*neutral*” home:

“ (...) I’m thinking, I like that it is both of us here. Some of it should be me and some of it should be more his, instead of it all becoming a bit neutral, so as long as I’m allowed to have my stuff here, for instance that bookshelf, as it is pretty much all my stuff there – then I’m fine with it.” (Mia, D:5).

For Mia, it was important that the atmosphere in the home should reflect both of them, so it would be clear for them and their guests that both of them lived in the home. Due to a bit ‘untraditional’ structure of their relationship, Christian and Mia actually had lived together before in Odense, when they were together for the second time. But both of them did not consider *that* home their ‘first, real common home’. Thereby, I could sense how important *this* home was for them. Where the other couples followed a more straight line of getting to know one another, becoming a couple and living together, Christian and Mia had periods of on and offs for more than eight years. The relationship is then stabile now, and this should the home also reflect, Christian stated:

“Some years ago I might have thought that I could live anywhere, as long as you had a small place, or you could live with your family and friends, then you would be alright, but now I can see how nice it is to have a good base, where you feel safe and at home. There is always someone you can count on. It means a lot.” (Christian, D:2).

Mia agreed, since she before in her life had moved a lot. In creating their common home, they thereby both agreed how they wanted to create it, and with which values also.

As established, having a home, which represented both the man and the woman, was important in creating the common home. So did Marie express, when I asked her the question:

“Well, when I moved into Patrick’s place in Aalborg East, it was only his stuff, so we felt like, when we were going to move into the dorm, we should buy some stuff together, so it would be our common home. Before, it was me living at Patrick’s place, and now we should have something together.” (Marie, A:1)

Patrick agreed with Mia’s statement, and expressed how nice it was to create something together.

In line with these two couples, a third couple agreed. Martin said: *“I think it’s important to mix it a bit, that each one of us has his or her way of decorating or arranging the home – that you ‘stamp’ it, it should be possible for both parts.”* (B:2). This couple also told me how they asked each other a lot in the ‘fusion’ of making two homes into one, since no one should feel left out (B:3).

The last couples also talked about creating a common home, in contrast to creating a home just for one person. Of this, they said:

“P: I think it’s more like a ‘childhood home’ now, where you live together. The time where I lived on my own, it was much more just my place, where I was for my self. Now you share the everyday life together, and that means a lot to a relationship.

L: Also just, it’s not only big things you tell the other person, but when you get home you can tell about anything. I think – the contrast to living alone or living with a friend, like I did previously, is also, it feels more family-like, without being a family with dad, mom and children.” (C:3).

Thus, having a place where you can share thoughts and experiences was an important thing in creating their common home. The sense of sharing the space in the home is overall strong in all the couples’ homes, which could be due to the fact that the couples are happy with their situations as being in relationships where you live together. In sharing the space in the home, the ‘I’ and ‘you’ become the ‘we’ in which both parties should be able to co-exist, they told me. However, in creating a common home where both can exist, the space in general should be ‘our’ space instead of ‘your’ or ‘mine’.

9.3.2 Which things did I, you, we bring?

In the second theme I want to highlight which things the couples brought, and which of these things survived the move into the common home, in order to create a ‘we’. Which negotiations did they have about which things? Did they agree or disagree?

Before moving on to the next theme, I want to emphasise again how all of the couples had lived together before moving in to the apartment, they lived in when I interviewed them. They had, as stated, lived together in either his or her place. When I want to stress it, it is due to the fact that it may mean something, when looking at which things the couples had in their (new) common home.

In the interview with Patrick and Marie, Patrick did most of the talking. In fact, he was the one who had offered their help with the interview without asking Marie. So in the interview situation Patrick was prepared about what the interview was about, while Marie needed a further introduction.

Patrick had no trouble pointing his stuff out in the apartment and talking about it, while Marie stayed more quiet in the interview situation. So I asked Marie to point of some of her stuff. Even though she had not lived on her own before, she could have brought smaller stuff to the apartment from her childhood home or some things from the other apartment they lived in before (their first common home). All the vases and the cookbooks in the apartment were Marie's and primarily she was the one who brought the posters, pictures and plants into their home. The stuff she had brought were thus not functional stuff like chairs, knives or a rack but aesthetic and "nice-to-have" stuff – which is also what Patrick meant whenever he talked about the balance between aesthetic and practical things.

The things that Marie brought in to their common home were also some of the things, I rather quickly detected in the four homes I saw. If this is due to my own focus (as of what I notice whenever I walk into a room) or if these things actually had more 'central' position in the home, I cannot say.

Martin had an old robe, which he himself probably not would have thrown away if Laura had not questioned it:

"M: Or 'this old robe, don't you think it should go?"

I: Is that an example you have?"

[Both laughing]

L: Yes, it was an old, dingy robe, and it got packed and he loved it, no doubt about that.

M: But yeah, when you then can see 'you can't really fit in to it and it looks horrible', then it better go." (B:3).

But when Laura did question the robe, he realised how worn out the robe actually was, and thus, he threw it away it. In the interviews with this couple, it was quite clear how their priorities were different about which things the home should and should not have. Martin told me that he was "very cold and cynical" and considered trinkets to be the worst thing in the world (B:2). I asked him more about it:

"I: So how do you feel about having all the trinkets in your home?"

M: Well, we have some struggles sometimes...

I: Do you have an example?

M: That would be the lamp over there.

L: Yes, that is an eternal struggle [laughs].” (B:2).

Even though their taste in stuff differ a lot, Martin still lives with the mentioned lamp, because he wants a home where both of them feel at home.

It could also be, that Martin softened a bit up after the time he lived together with Laura in her place. At that time all of his things were in storage, which meant that they only lived with Laura’s stuff. At that time he did not have a ‘choice’ of choosing his own stuff or not choosing her stuff, whereas he got used to all stuff including the trinkets. Another explanation could be, that in their common home now, he is also represented with his own stuff – a “proper TV” (B:2) and his electronics, whereas he does not feel that the home becomes ‘too’ feminine.

Of bigger furniture all the couples mentioned bookshelves, desks, lamps, sofas and TVs. Laura told me about her red sofa, which she got from her parents:

“L: (...) it’s not comfortable to sit in, but it’s really pretty.

[Martin laughs]

L: I think. And it couldn’t fit here. I could see that myself. (...) But I wasn’t here so much in the moving process due to work or something else, so Martin and my mom just said ‘we can’t have it here’.

M: Yeah, ‘we can fit it in here, it’s just in the way’.

L: So they took the sofa and not it’s at my granddad’s up north.

(...)

L: So it’s not allowed to be here.

M: No, I just don’t see where it should be without looking a bit ridiculous.

L: No, it can’t be here – it was more ‘now we just take the decision’ and then they took it.” (B:6).

The situation is quite interesting because other parties were mixed into the situation – actually without making it into a negotiation since they just made the decision for Laura. But it also becomes interesting because between stuff ‘surviving’ and not ‘surviving’ are the stuff that the young couples put other places than their home – for probably later on to place them in their homes

again, when they get bigger homes. Patrick also mentions a desk he left in this parents' home together with some bookcases (A:5).

Christian got rid of most of his stuff when he and Mia moved into their common home in Aalborg, besides his TV, games and computer.

“C: (...) I still have some of my stuff here, but it's actually mostly Mia's things here now, so some of my stuff were sold or some were recycled.

I: But was it okay to get rid of some of your stuff?

C: Yes, I also felt like some of the stuff I had was just to have something – mostly cheap stuff – so when you are looking for common stuff it's different.” (D:1).

What Christian talked about was also very much in line with the type of relationship and the type of home he and Mia wanted. In this way, you can sort of compare the 'temporary' furniture with the 'temporary' home, whereas Mia's more selective search for her furniture correlates with the more constant and steady home. This explains why Christian had no trouble getting rid of most of his stuff.

The three couples all mentioned certain things, while the fourth couple did not mention many specific things they argued about. Besides the computer area for gaming and the sofa for overnight guests, Peter and Louise did not talk much about any negotiations. As they told me, their different stuff 'matched' when they moved in together; she had a table, some chairs, a TV furniture and he had a sofa table and a TV. All they bought together were chairs (which they bought from a person in the dorm) a sofa and a small dresser. I asked them how they made the decision of the sofa:

“P: It was probably you, who took the decision.

L: Yes, well, we thought that one of us should buy it, and I wanted to buy it. I wanted a sofa where you also could sleep on it, but it should still look like a sofa. So, we were out looking for one or looked on the Internet.

P: Yes, the Internet. Then we went out to IKEA.

L: Yes, we looked at it to see if it would fit with our other furniture. So we bought it together and also bought a small dresser, it is grey and match the sofa, and we needed something in the corner there. Because we have not really bought that much together – that was probably it.” (C:2).

In this couple’s case, the decision of the sofa was not so much a common decision as it was something Louise decided on, since she had some demands for it, according to its dual functions and maybe also according to its colour. Peter did not really care and also mentioned that they both considered themselves as “*pretty large*” (B:4) – so that they found room for each other’s wants and desires in the home – and did not care about how the bookshelf’s inside looked like (it had glass doors) (B:4). This is especially in contrast to how Martin and Laura bought their lamp, how Christian and Mia found their closet and how Patrick and Marie got their bench – which were all stories told in details with many peculiar and interesting reflections.

Peter and Louise were then the couple with the fewest ‘stories’ to tell about negotiations. They did not experience many negotiations about their stuff, but this might also reflect how they feel their home is a ‘temporary’ home, whereas both of them do not care strongly about the things. Louise mentioned how she wants to be more selective when they move into something bigger and more permanently, and where it does not “cost a lot to make holes in the walls” (C:4). Her practical sense is then bigger than her aesthetic sense.

9.3.3 Different identities and types of ‘we’

The third theme, which was noticeable, is the types of identities the different couples expressed, and also if the ‘we’ differs from couple to couple. Again, I did not directly ask them about questions regarding this, but this was a theme I detected in the overall readings of the transcriptions.

First of all I want to describe what the different couples indicated when they talked about their stuff and how they moved in together, as I actually detected two ‘types’ – the clear individualists, and the not so clear individualists, which I will explain first.

Then I will give some examples from the interviews, where the young people actually said ‘I’ and ‘we’ in certain statements, to show when they wanted to speak for themselves as a ‘we’ or when they wanted to speak for themselves as an ‘I’. Lastly, I will focus a bit on different types of ‘we’ detected in the relationships.

The clear individualists I noticed were Christian and Mia, and Martin and Laura. In the interview with Christian and Mia, it was easier for me to get to know them as individuals and not only as the social unit they are. What also indicated their ‘strong’ personalities was their approach towards the cooking in the kitchen, where they both would become bossy (D:3). They both had a feeling of “*knowing what is best*” and would be annoyed if the other one corrected them in the kitchen. Their experiences through the past eight years on and off might have taught them to cope with being two individuals, and might also have ‘forced’ them to be strong in times when they were not together.

I will also call Martin and Laura clear individualists. Both having experienced to live on their own, they came as two clear individualists in the moving process into their common home.

Laura said: “*But yes, we actually sorted. It was my stuff that was there when he moved into my place, so first now that we have moved in together we both can decide.*” (B:1). Even though the sentence was followed by laughter, she still meant it. The process of mixing their two homes was a more difficult process than for instance Patrick and Marie’s process or Peter and Louise’s, since Martin and Laura came as the two clear individuals they are. As a matter of fact, she expressed her worries about moving in together as a divorce-like situation:

“*It was not as hard as first assumed. I spent a lot of time saying ‘wow, this phase we’re going into now, it’s going to be tough’, and of course there were some minor things, but it was nothing against, like, it was almost like a divorce because I thought ‘this is going to be a tough fight’.*” (Laura, B:3).

The same worries Martin told me about in the interview:

“*We had a storage room at the other dorm – we have that here too – but then we had to look at it and sort it, and then we thought, if we can’t even sort in these things, what will happen when we move into the next apartment, what scenario will that be, but I think that went really well. (...) then you just sorted the best out and the other stuff you would give away or throw out.*” (Martin, B:3).

Both of them expressed worries that were far bigger in their minds than in the actual move – since the actual move went quite peacefully, like Laura also said. Thus, in the end, both of their I’s were not bigger than their desire to create a ‘we’.

On the other side, the couples who did not come with such clear individualists were Peter and Louise, who both said how “large” they considered themselves.

In the middle of the two types, I want to highlight Patrick and Marie. Even though they told me about many different negotiations they experienced when they moved in together, they did not talk about any strong worries or everyday life situations which often took place at their home, like the other couples.

I shortly want to highlight some places from the interviews, where the young people either answered with an “I” even though I asked how *they* felt about a situation, or when they during the sentence switched from one to the other, because it was more ‘correct’.

The first example is the one from above:

“We had a storage room at the other dorm (...) if we can’t even sort in these things, what will happen when we move into the next apartment, what scenario will that be, but I think that went really well.” (Martin, B:3).

When Martin talked about the process, he said “we” and not “I” which might indicate that the worries Martin expressed were not so much his own as they were Laura’s worries. But since Martin expressed it, he must have had some of the worries he described, even though he may have been affected by Laura. Nevertheless, what he expressed was how he experienced the situation, and he thought it “*went really well*” at the end.

Martin also ‘corrected’ himself when talking about the TV:

“Yeah. The one that he had... we thought, or I thought, I better say, it was the to get something bigger, that was the opinion I had, that I could not live with a very tiny TV, I needed something proper. (...)” (Martin, B:2).

Additionally, Patrick also switched a bit between “she” (you) and “we”, when they talked about which things the home should contain.

“M: (...) I also want some things that are personal.

P: And here I also think that Marie is good at, well we see a lot on Instagram, but it is our interpretation of it.” (A:5).

Firstly, he implies that Marie is the one looking on Instagram (for homemaking pictures, as she also mentioned earlier in the interview) by saying that ‘she’ is good at it, but afterwards he switches to “we”, maybe because he also wants to take credit for it.

The next example is when Louise talked about *her* desire for new chairs:

“I: What is your latest purchase to the home, or are there some things you consider buying?

L: I would like some new dining table chairs, and a new sofa table or get our sofa table painted.

I: And what do you think about that, Peter?

P: The chairs I don’t care about, the sofa table I can see needs a bit of paint. I’m thinking about what our latest purchase was?

L: I don’t know. Yes, your chair.

P: Right, that’s right.

L: It’s not us who bought it, but it’s still something that is in the apartment.” (B:3).

Two things are interesting in what Peter and Louise said. When I asked both of them about the question concerning their common home and their common thoughts, Louise’s answer was from her own view, where she said “I” and not that *they* had talked about. The other thing was how she further mentions “your” chair, and again emphasises that the chair is not their common chair, but still, it is in the apartment. One of the reasons why the interview with Peter and Louise was the shortest one and the one with fewest stories could be because of the lack of ‘discussions’ between them, since she some times spoke from her own viewpoint.

Now I want to focus on different types of ‘we’ in the couples. The process of combining two homes into one, Peter and Louise, and Patrick and Marie experienced easier than the two remaining couples. This can be due to the other couples – Christian and Mia, and Martin and Laura – all are clear individualists, but can also be because of their different notions of what ‘we’ means. I found some indications for different we’s in these two couples, but they both expressed that they were

very fond of the 'we' and both were looking for a 'we', however the reasons for wanting a 'we' differed. While Martin and Laura both were looking for someone to share everything with in the everyday life, the reason for Christian and Mia was to find someone who would 'provoke' or challenge them, since he said that they were probably always discussions *something*, and clearly did not mind. The reason for the different we's could be because of the four individuals' different types of I's: Martin and Laura were very different in the way the home should look like and which things the home should contain, while Christian and Mia both wanted to decide (decide whose turn it was to vacuum or decide when the home it 'clean and neat'). The different we's therefore indicate the different values they wanted in a relation, and are all grounded in the way the home is organised as well.

9.4 Does gender play a part?

The two subthemes here overlap a bit, since the first theme I want to highlight is the couples' answers when I asked them about their opinions towards their home as more masculine or feminine. Since these answers do not cover all of the gender perspectives in this thesis and its empirical data, the second theme will describe other places in the interviews, where the couples mentioned or indirectly indicated a gender 'issue' or gender awareness in the home.

9.4.1 Is the home gendered?

I asked the couples to say whether their home was most masculine or feminine to understand their notions of gender, gender norms and reflections. In all of the interviews they were very quiet before saying something or answering the question, since they thought it was hard to decide.

In order to answer the question, some of the young people compared with others. They compared their home with others they knew, which either represented something they found very masculine or very feminine. Their collective identity played a part in this, since they needed to explain themselves using other social beings. Christian compared their home to some of his single friends' homes, which he thought looked a bit empty compared to their common home, especially on the walls, there they did not care about posters or other things. In his opinion masculinity is about not

having a lot of stuff in his apartment, and black and white colours, however Mia disagreed and told about her male friends:

“M: Well, I don’t know about that. I know a lot of boys from my school and their home it nothing like what Christian is telling, so I have a picture – I can’t really say what’s masculine or feminine, or yes I can, but I think my borders are a bit more liquid than yours. I’ve visited many who had a lot of stuff, and all kinds of colourful pictures that I myself also could have had, so it’s very different.” (Mia, D:5).

Thus, Mia thinks that the lines are more liquid, as she stated that it was difficult for her to say what is masculine and what is feminine. But at the same time, she described how her own home looked, and also how a masculine could be like; she tried to draw the contrast from living alone to living with Christian now. She mentioned how she had embroidered cloths, furniture with curlicues and small things with no function, which she tried to get rid of when they moved in together, as she thought they were very feminine. On the other hand, she described masculine as very squared and black (D:4-5). Also Patrick talked about his own place before, when Marie moved into his home: *“And it was a real boys-home with a big leather sofa and some furniture I had found cheap, and they were effective (...)”* (A:1). Additionally, Laura mentioned the sofa she and Martin had in the home as *“not a typical man-sofa”* (B:5), to which I asked her what a typical masculine sofa was, and she answered a big leather sofa. Thus, some of the cultural notions of what seems masculine were common for some of them.

When I asked the question about a masculine or feminine home to Peter and Louise I needed to add that they should choose one or the other, as they found it very hard. Louise thought that their home was quite masculine apart from the tablecloth with a lot of colour and flowers. Peter could not give a final answer, and he stated: *“I have never really thought about it, I think it is a modern home, colour-wise and with the furniture. I don’t think it’s either one thing or the other. With grey, black and wooden colours and white.”* (C:4). In his opinion the borders are very liquid between what is considered masculine and feminine, which is common for most of the couples.

The specific stuff, the couples talked about as examples to define either masculine or feminine things in their home was fascinatingly much the same stuff throughout the interviews: Vases,

plants, flowers, tablecloths, candles, trinkets and colours like pink and purple all over were feminine, while in defining a masculine home was a place with very little, but practical, furniture, a big leather sofa and very squared with dark colours. In general, these things can be divided into decorating objects and practical objects. Important is it to mention that the examples of what is feminine were not only given by the men, and vice versa, but by both genders.

In three of the four homes, the men were the first ones to answer my question about the gendered home:

“Hmm. I don’t know, it’s probably a bit girly.” (Patrick, A:7).

“Well, it really is a bit feminine with the flowers and vases...” (Martin, B:5).

“It’s probably more somewhat feminine, rather than masculine, I wouldn’t say it’s masculine.” (Christian D:5).

The three young men all found their homes a bit feminine, and their partners did not disagree. Only one of the couples, the woman, Louise, answered first and said: *“I’m thinking it’s okay masculine, but then you look at this tablecloth, it is quite girly [cloth with many flowers in colours]”* (C:4). I find it rather interesting that whenever the men answered they said feminine, and when Louise answered masculine, she still does not really mean it. In the middle of it all, Peter would not decide, and would not label their apartment as one thing or the other.

From my view, from what I observed in the apartments, none of the homes looked completely masculine or completely feminine. Of course, I must underline, that is my own judgement and from my own notions of what is masculine and feminine.

9.4.2 Common negotiations between the genders

In other parts of the interviews the couples themselves mentioned, or indirectly indicated, some other interesting perspectives about gender in relation to their homes.

This was for instance Mia who stated how she probably would not have had a TV or a very small one, if she did not live with Christian (D:5). Interestingly, other couples talk about the negotiations about the TV.

“L: (...) For instance, I had a very small TV, it was not so important for me with all of this hardware, but I can see, especially the TV and all, it’s nice to have it and it doesn’t bother me that much.

M: Yeah. The one that he had... we thought, or I thought, I better say, it was the to get something bigger, that was the opinion I had, that I could not live with a very tiny TV, I needed something proper. (...)” (B:2).

So, the TV that Laura characterised as “*very small*”, Martin called “*very tiny*” and not a “proper TV”, since he needed something else than that TV. They obviously have different ideas about what a TV should do and be like, which could be a result of gender roles playing a part of who actually uses the TV more or what seems like a “proper TV”. It also shows their different priorities, since, as earlier established, Martin was unemployed and liked to play games on his PlayStation – and for this, you need a “proper TV”.

In some of the couples’ daily routines, I also detected some signs of the degendering in society. In the kitchen at Christian and Mia’s, they both became a bit bossy, so they took turns at cooking dinner. Here, Mia stated how she was used to her mother being the one who did the cooking, while Christian was used to her father doing the cooking, whereas, as Mia said, “*they both knew it the best*” (D:3).

In few situations, the couples’ homes still possessed some more ‘traditional’ gender norms, which were more present earlier. This was particularly showed in the cleaning at Patrick and Marie’s apartment. Patrick had just explained how the office was “*his room*” and I asked:

“I: Yes. So what about the cleaning-up at the office, is it then something you do as well, Patrick?”

P: Hmm. Yeah... probably, mostly I just move the things, and then Marie comes once in a while and clean up.

[Both laughing]

P: Well, isn't it true?

M: Yes!

P: But I systematise the things. (...)” (A:3).

The cultural settings still emboss the expectations to the individual people in this case, since Marie genuinely does not mind cleaning a room that she actually does not use in the home. The societal context still creates a picture of the ideal family as the women being the household's cleaner – but this example could also merely be because Marie simply did not mind cleaning in general, or because Patrick then did other household activities in their home, such as grocery shopping or cooking – or “*systematise things*”, as he pointed out.

Another example is Christian and Mia's cleaning plan, which is a good example of the cultural notions in use, when wanting to define the relation between the genders. Being the independent individuals that both Christian and Mia are, they emphasised that the cleaning should be both of their responsibility. Christian made this clear when he talked about his male friend, whose girlfriend does all the housework (D:4), and when he said it, he was clearly astonished by the lack of responsibility from his friend.

“C: Yeah, I was home at a friend's home here in Aalborg, and he is apparently not someone who cleans, so she does it all. (...) I just really can't imagine not doing that – I mean, it's not always nice to clean, but you still can do it... (...) Of course he also has a company where he drives around a lot, so he is not home that much (...)” (Christian, D:4).

Christian then ‘justifies’ his friends' actions due to the friend's working hours, which is a rather old way of thinking, and does not leave any room for a degendering of society, which leaves Christian in the middle of it all.

Common for some of the couples, they mentioned how decisions regarding the home often began as a suggestion from the woman, who then more or less ‘persuaded’ the man into liking the idea (A:7; B:4; D:2). Some of the men justified this by saying that the woman cares more about it than he does, whereas he has no trouble leaving it to her. In the interview with Martin and Laura, they talked about their reflections on buying wooden legs for their sideboard. Here, it was clear that

Martin's words actually were Laura's words, since she admitted it was her idea buying the legs in the first place: "(...) *Because we don't know whether or not this model will be removed from stock, so it's that's why we better react on it.*" (B:4).

I also asked Patrick and Marie who is deciding in the home and more often gets it his or her way:

"P: Well, that's... [both laughing]. What do you think?"

M: Well, I probably know that it's me sometimes.

P: Yes but that's also because Marie has the better taste. If we're in IKEA and I suggest...

M: Well, I care more about it.

P: Care more about it, yes.

M: It's not necessarily because you're bad at it.

P: Marie just had strong emotions towards it (...)" (A:7).

After this, Peter added: "*It's not only Marie who's deciding. It's maybe 80-20. That's my view.*" (A:7). Marie still wanted to let me know that Patrick also decides, since he made it sound like she was the only one deciding: "*It's not because I have the final word about where it hangs.*" (Marie, A:6).

Likewise, I asked Martin and Laura who 'won' the decision of the lamps, where Laura said: "*Well, I probably won, but we also did agree on them.*" (B:2). Additionally, Martin had the old robe, which he only threw away when Laura questioned it. But when Laura questioned it, even though he realised that it was too worn out to keep, he still mentioned it in the interviews, since it was a violation of his stuff – and since it was not part of 'their' stuff.

What actually is happening in all of the examples is silent negotiations which end out to be agreements. The more often agreements happen as such; the more often it becomes 'the way we do things here'. Therefore, when the men expressed their dislikes for certain stuff in the home, the negotiations seemed stronger, as it actually *were* negotiations that took place. This had Martin experienced with the robe, and Louise experienced, when Peter did not want the alarm clock in the bedroom, even though he was the one who bought it for her, but since he thought it was too 'noisy', it was placed in the kitchen and not the bedroom (C:4-5), as well as Laura with her red sofa (B:6).

Thus, in this discussion of gendered homes, the negotiations were not ‘real’ until the men started to care about something, which then turned them into actual negotiations.

10 Theoretical analysis and discussion

In order to interpret the interviews I will discuss my theoretical framework in relation to my empirical analysis, which was data-driven. In this theoretical discussion of the concepts I will besides the main foci *relations*, *identity* and *gender* discuss how the construction of the home from the data-driven analysis can be understood in the Danish societal, cultural and historical context the interviews were (and are) in.

First, I will make use of the concepts *moral economy*, *throwntogetherness*, *solidarity*, *sharing* and *fairness* to understand how the young couples construct their homes. Second, I will understand the relation the couples described. This will be with the use of the concepts *cultural third* and *togetherness*. Third, I want to understand how, and if, the home is part of their identity-creation, which also involves discussing things as *extended selves*. In this section I also discuss the general term on *social* or *collective identity* as well as understanding the different types of *we* in the relations. Fourth, I will discuss whether or not *gender pluralism* and *degendering* are terms that are relevant to use in the Danish society, when wanting to understand gender through the couples’ construction of the home.

10.1 Home and homemaking

The young couples are all largely happy about living together and are very pleased with their situation. But in the home, many different interests exist, which can be conflicting with each other, so how does it all co-exist? The different negotiations include everything from what is on the TV to which sofa to buy. As I explained with the use of Löfgren, the moral economy of the home is one way of looking at it, when you ask how every single interest or longing can co-exist in the home. This moral economy is summed up to a throwntogetherness, which slowly becomes ‘the way we do it here’. The young, Danish couples I interviewed were actually all in the process of finding out ‘how’ they do it. Some of the couples had tried to make use of specific cultural thirds – the tools – to help them ‘get through’ the everyday life routines, but some also admitted that these cultural thirds were not working as well as planned. As approached by Löfgren, this in-house order of

patterns, systems and morals are silent routines slowly made to make it all work inside the home. Even the couple that had been together for the longest period of time (without any break-ups) still have no 'final moral economy'. It takes time to develop the moral economy, and I believe that all of the couples are good examples of that. Furthermore, this does not only exist in relationships consisting of young people, but I would reckon that age does not matter in this sense. The reason why the couples still need to create their moral economy could be, that none of the couples had children, who often set the routines pretty strictly, and maybe also because none of the couples lived in houses with gardens or alike to take care of.

Another point I would like to make in relation to the one above, deals with the cultural notions explained by Kjær. The cultural notions are culturally, socially and historically determined norms or 'rules' about what is 'good' and 'bad' (for instance in the case of a relationship or a home). As I explained earlier, two people can create a situation where they are free from these notions. When they do so, it is because they want to promote or define something. So, keeping this in mind and connecting it to the point above, some of the negotiations or discussions about the routines in the home could be because the couples wanted to make a point about something else than the 'actual' discussion. Some of the couples I talked with told me about negotiations going on between them when they wanted to place a decoration bird, when they fought about the cooking or when they discussed if the alarm clock should be in the kitchen or not. The 'real' reasons for doing, I argue through the use of Kjær, is because they wanted to make a point about for instance gender or their identity.

Just shortly to answer the question I stated in the beginning, about how it all co-exists, I consider many of the discussions the couples had to be a 'natural' part of being in a relationship. No other person is exactly like you, whereas you should not expect to find anyone who agrees with everything you do, think or mean. Kjær's cultural thirds are also not only tools for couples to use, but all relations in society, since they are 'needed' in any context where people do not agree – which can happen all the time, everywhere, and is not only part of the Danish context with these young couples.

In the interviews with the young couples they all told me – few or many – interesting stories about the time when they moved in together in their new, common home. Even though they all had these stories, and that these in some of the interviews actually took up most of the time, all of the couples implied how understanding, sympathy and connectedness were important elements in the move. In

some of the cases, I noticed how these words mostly came from the woman in the couple. Since the cultural notions 'dictates' that the good relationship is the one, where both parts are equal, some of the women in the couple could have felt, that they did not express equality after they told me which things actually survived the move. The cultural notions also (still) includes that the women should not be the 'boss' of the relationship, whereas some of the women might felt like they were unfeminine when expressing that they 'won' or decided the most. However, in the field of homemaking, in the Danish (Scandinavian, Western) society, the women *still* are more present than the men – which some of the couples also used to justify their 'uneven' power structure. This they did by telling me how 'she cares more about it' and 'she is better at it'. In general I experienced that the women actually did care more about the homemaking.

Nevertheless, all of the couples were in general sharing their common home on equal terms and stressed how fairness had been an important element when they moved in and talked about which stuff from 'me' and 'you' should become 'ours'. It shows a strong longing to become the 'we' in 'our' home that Löfgren notes. One of the reasons why I think they all expressed this was also due to the reflexive and dynamic character of the society, where they are in need of something and *someone* stabile. As I began this thesis with, even though the home is not steady either (due to the conflicting aims in it and its mobile character), it still creates a space for relaxation, which is much needed, and a space where two people can talk about anything from small to larger subjects. Therefore, the young couples' needs for creating a 'we' becomes larger than creating an 'I' or making a point about their identity or gender.

In a time with degradation of traditions, and where change and development is everywhere, the young couples need something steady, which they mentally get when they are sharing their life with someone. In sharing something, the couples stand stronger than they do alone, and they also expressed to me that they want to share more or less everything together, again, from small subjects to sharing a heritage and a life story.

10.2 The relation

I did not expect to detect so many cultural thirds as I did in the interviews with the young couples. However, most of the cultural thirds, the couples told me about, were mostly tools they used to make everything 'slide' better in their everyday life. None of the couples had any 'real' issues except maybe the couple who had in fact experienced several break-ups in their relationship. In

general I must conclude, that the cultural thirds are much needed in the relationships, where the timing and match happened ‘untraditionally’. That is, where the timing and match did not follow the ‘romantic’ and culturally and socially ‘right’ norm about how and when couples meet. To make a broader point about the use of cultural thirds, I will not only take this as a ‘real’ cultural third, but all the tools that all the couples spoke of.

The reason why this concept is interesting and relevant in this study is that the cultural thirds are used as a way of understanding how the everyday life routines work as a condition for the relation, and also how a cultural third is being used as a part of the relation’s form of social interaction. Through the use of this concept I wanted to understand how the relation was shaped through the cultural meanings of the surroundings (the tools).

As noted in the empirical analysis, the couples that mostly used cultural thirds were the couples in which the clearest individualists were. I argue that the reason for this is because the clear individualist already has created silent routines within him or herself, and these are very fixed. The ‘new’ routines (which the cultural thirds bring) are therefore needed, since it ensures that the relation’s social interaction work. The meaning of the cleaning plan, the weekly dinner plan or the grocery list on the phone creates a common way of ‘doing things here’, where the purpose is that it slowly becomes silent routines.

I was very pleased that I chose the home to study the relations, identities and gender. As the young couples expressed, the home is a place for creating a togetherness between them, but the home is also a place to study modernity and the society we live in. These two things are well connected, since the couples implied togetherness in a larger context of society. Togetherness is living together and making it work, but living together is more than just the things the couples do to make it work – living together is a social relation in the social world, as I pointed out with the use of Winther. Therefore, I can conclude different things about the way young people construct togetherness in their relationships: Togetherness is important but only up to a certain point, which one of the couples was a clear example of. If the everyday life routines do not match the relation and its needs, the relation fails. Additionally, the young, Danish couples do not *have* to endure if the togetherness cannot exist in the relation, since modernity’s dynamic character will provide them with other opportunities. Nevertheless, the young couples *are* in search for togetherness with another person, even if it sometimes is hard and involves several break-ups.

10.3 The identity

The couples like to speak in 'we' form when they talk about their lives. Why that could be I will suggest in the end of this section, but another reason I also will argue for now. The Danish, young couples indicate to very happy with their situation and all of them like to do almost everything together. They are so much a part of each others' lives, so 'what she or he thinks is also what I think', which could be a sign of insecurity (as approached in the end of the section), but also that they want to create a 'we' in everything that means.

Only one of the couples answered almost all my questions with 'I', but that did not mean that their I's were bigger than the 'we'. This exact couple is a great example of the precautions people take as a result of the dynamic and on-going pace of modernity, where nothing is certain – not even the relation. What eight years of on and offs have taught them is to take care of themselves, which might also be the reason for the offs – in a vicious circle also characterised in society today, where a lot of people are singles who, willingly or unwillingly, live alone.

The young couples speak of their homes and the homes mean a lot to them, as it is a place to be who they truly are and a place where they can be themselves. But rather than having a home that is a part of their identity creation, the home is a place to *show* the public who the couples would like to be seen as. This is visible in the ways the young people speak of their home as not in need to be 'super clean', as long as it is cosy – however, all the homes I visited were *super clean*, which I reckon was not a coincidence. The home as an identity-creator, as Löfgren and other speak of, is rather doubtful, since the home express who they would like the public to think they are, as I also stated with Jenkins. Some of the men in the couples really cared about how the home looked, which also is a change from earlier times. This could simply be because the man also knows that he is being measured on how his home looks.

Whether or not the stuff they have or consume is part of their identity is difficult to say. This stuff can for the sake of it be divided into the things with meaning and the things without. Meaning is a 'fluffy' term, but describes it rather well, as the young people in general did not have any problem getting rid of things, that 'had a purpose' (without meaning) when they moved in together. Examples they mentioned were chairs, TVs, bookshelves, tables and things alike, that served a purpose in their old home. The things 'without purpose' (with meaning) were heirlooms from previous generations, personal things hung on the wall and decoration things like vases.

What this says about the young couples is that they are willing to get rid of the stuff that is not unique and does not show who they are, which therefore questions if the home actually *is* an identity-creator. In this discussion I would rather conclude that the home is a showroom where ‘handpicked’ stuff are on display – stuff, that they want to *identify* with, which one of the young men also expressed when he said that he would not have heirlooms in the home, if they were ugly. In line this point, I want to mention the couples’ storage rooms, which contained stuff ‘they did not use in their everyday life’. One might question if the things in the storage rooms then are not a part of who they are? With this in mind, and Belk’s note about how the objects need to come alive in order to be a part of a person, I reckon that the stuff in the storage room is a great indicator for how modernity’s society has created a need in people – a need for having more stuff than they actually use: *Mess*, as Löfgren calls it.

One thing I also noticed was that the young, Danish couples indicated to find a lot of comfort in talking and referring to others they know when talking about themselves. The social identity means a lot. Comparing yourself to other people is a tool in modernity used when missing confidence about your own situation. Especially the Millennials, as all the young people in the couples are, are in possession of having a lot of choices in their lives, and in a time where people are very ‘individualised’ it might be hard to know what to choose, and whether the choice is ‘right’. The social, common unit they create with their partner is therefore an indication of needing togetherness with someone who can ‘confirm’ that who they are is ‘good enough’ and ‘right’. In this social unit it is easy for the couples to define who their ‘I’ is since the ‘we’ confirms it through the boundaries the couples create in the ‘us’ that is different from ‘them’.

10.4 The thing about gender

The gender pluralism and the degendering of society addressed earlier on is a way of broadening the gender categorisation about what is or seems masculine and feminine and thus, making the spectrum more fluid.

The young couples make use of the gender roles in other ways than earlier, and these gender roles are not the same as they were sixty years ago. As I used Lorber to express it, the young couples use gender as a way of systematising or coordinating their lives: “*As a social institution, gender is one of the major ways that human beings organize their lives.*”. This was no surprise to me, actually,

since I expected to find that the normative conceptions still are culturally bound. Much can be said about how we have changed our notions of gender in the Danish society, but as the couples indicated in the interviews, gender still matters. Nevertheless, this does not mean that the couples keep up the rhetorical idealisation of the gender roles in the family (the couples), but only that gender is being used to make a point. The young, Danish couples have a hard time answering what is masculine or feminine – but this does not mean that they, in their minds, cannot say what *they* see as masculine or feminine, it only means that they do not want to be a part of ‘dictating’ what is one thing or the other, and why that is I will get to now. The cultural notions in society are not only set by historical settings, but also social and cultural, as already established. That means that the young couples are *part* of determining what is masculine or feminine, how the home should be divided, who cleans the house, who picks up the children, and so on. That is also why the young men are not in need of any ‘mancaves’ in the home just for them, since they think that a home involves creating a ‘we’ and a ‘ours’, but also because having a room that is the man’s only is not in sync with contemporary, Danish society – or Scandinavian or Western, for that matter. Adding another critical reflection to this point is that the theoretical concept about the mancave came from another Western study, whereas it not necessarily is something that a Danish or Scandinavian study would find – as I this study.

I want to end the theoretical analysis by stating a quote that Löfgren emphasised in some of his work about the home and homemaking. The quote will stress why some of the points above were made and will lead me to my findings in this study. *“The table setting turns into a moral battleground where hierarchies are established or challenged and questions of class, gender and generation hide under the cover of meal routines and are seldom made conscious.”* (Wilk in Löfgren 2014:15). What the couples talked about in the interviews were more than practical explanations about how they moved in, but indications about the underlying constructions of identities of I and we, relations and genders, which I have shown.

11 Findings

This thesis set out to explore the research question *“How do young, Danish couples negotiate about the things that constitute their common home and how can it be seen as an expression of*

negotiations between the identities as 'I' and 'we', the relation and the genders?" Thus, the aim for the thesis was to understand identities, relations and genders in the light of the construction of the home. What I found will follow now.

The generation of young couples I talked to in the interviews are very clear about which values from their childhood homes they do not want in their own homes. The couples referred to the childhood homes like messy and with a lot of useless stuff, they themselves do not want to spend money on. The generation of young people I talked to is very different than previous generations since the things in the homes seem to be handpicked more 'selectively'.

The home is a safe base, and the home is important to the young people, as it is a place to show who they truly are. Even though they have no trouble saying what their homes mean to them, they rarely discuss it with others. This was visible in the way that they found some of the questions hard to answer, which show that their homes are perhaps are taken for granted, as they find it 'obvious' to have a home.

They show understanding, fairness and solidarity for their partner and the partner's stuff, when they move in together, as they want to create 'our' instead of 'you' and 'I'. Some things mean a lot to them, if they are unique with a historic meaning to them, while they do not care about getting rid of other stuff that was not 'handpicked' by them. Especially the stuff with historic meaning, the partner always appreciates, since they deeply want to create a common narrative and life together as a 'we'.

The individuals in the couples do not need space in the home just for them as long as they have the needed tools to make it work, but they also really want togetherness, and they want to share the daily activities as well as share the common space; 'our' space instead of 'my' or 'your'. The shared space in the common home becomes shared opinions, as they overall talk through a 'we' more than through an 'I'.

Since they are part of (re)creating the cultural notions in society, they make sure that they talk about the gendered home like it does not exist – but nevertheless, they have no trouble in mentioning what seems masculine or feminine to them, or justify situations with the use of gender. But when they do it, they also mention that the boundaries are more liquid now, and since they live as a modern relation in a modern home both physically and mentally, it is difficult for them to characterise their home as one thing or the other.

They feel as if they are being measured in how their homes look, which results in neat and clean homes, since the public opinion means a lot to them. This also shows the insecurity of the generation, and that is why they want to live up to the cultural notions in society of what is 'good'. Thus, they want to *do* what is 'good', and some of them also want to *have* what is 'good' in the homes, and they *say* what is 'good' in the relationships.

Whenever they cannot do what is considered 'good' they make use of cultural thirds, as tools for making it work. This is only a natural response, since it also in society is what other relations make use of.

The young, Danish couples want to create 'our' and 'we' instead of 'mine' and 'I', and their desire to create a we is stronger than their desires to create an I. This is a result of having a lot of choices in a society where people become more and more individualised in the way they for instance work. However, they also want to emphasise individualism, but individualism in the social unit of the couple. To the outside world, they want to show that they 'belong', somewhere, in the case of belonging to a social unit, but also when belonging to this group, they belong in the group who are in a couple and who are not single. When they belong to a certain group or category, it makes it easier for them to determine who they themselves are, which is also the case in some of the couples' relationships, where they found partners who in some way challenged the person they are, which only made the I stronger.

Since the young couples have this urge to belong to somewhere or something, they fight for keeping it alive, even though they also know that they have other options, but these involves many emotional matters of ending the relation, dealing with it and starting a new one, with new negotiations involved.

The relationship between two individuals is the smallest social unit in society, but nevertheless, it is also one of the most powerful. It is so because it consists of two people who have chosen to spend their lives together. Unlike family, the relation is actually a choice made upon who they want to spend their time together with. The young, Danish couples make choices of not wanting to spend the life alone, but together with someone, and want to do everything together – also if it means 'settling' with a things in the home that not exactly are what they like.

The cultural notions of what seems masculine or feminine are very fluid and are not easily determined by the young, Danish couples. The couples are indirectly aware that they also create the

cultural notions in society, and they all want to broaden the gender perspective of what is what, since they do not want to label one thing or the other. This they generally show through their actions in the home, where they create cultural thirds that dictates that both genders should take care of the household activities. They also show it in the way that no room should belong to one of them and all the space in the home should be 'our' space.

The home is thereby so much more than just a place to stay, as it also is a place to create and recreate opinions and meanings alone or in negotiations with others.

The study is a result of the paradigm, methods and theories chosen. This means that the findings are a result of my own interpretations, which included my own preconceptions and preunderstandings as the individual I am, but also as the literature I have read for this thesis.

The study is also a result of the theoretical concepts in use. Some of the theoretical concepts have been more applicable than others in the thesis, but all of them have helped in the way that they have broadened the understandings of the topic and the interpretations. The concepts of togetherness, moral economy, cultural third, degendering including we and I have all contributed a lot on interpreting the empirical data.

At last I shortly want to discuss the Hirschman concepts as approached in 5.4 *Quality of the data*. Transferability is assured in this thesis since I have been aware of the Danish context and the cultural and historical settings. This was emphasised in the interview guide; thus, the questions asked in the interviews were put into the relevant context. The demand for dependability I also reckon is fulfilled after reading relevant literature before beginning the data collection. At last, comfirmability is assured since I, as the researcher, have been involved in the study and the interpretations made in it, by the use of my understandings, preconceptions and preunderstandings.

12 Appendix overview

Appendix 1: Interview guide

Appendix 2: Transcription of interview with couple A: “Patrick” and “Marie”

Appendix 3: Transcription of interview with couple B: “Martin” and “Laura”

Appendix 4: Transcription of interview with couple C: “Peter” and “Louise”

Appendix 5: Transcription of interview with couple D: “Christian” and “Mia”

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