Work/life balance through a critical 'gender lens': A cross-country comparison of parental leave provisions and take-up in Australia and Sweden

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This thesis is submitted in total fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

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Submitted in November 2007

ABSTRACT

Work/life balance researchers have documented the low take-up rates of corporate work/life balance policies at the same time as there are reports of persistent work/life pressures. This research aims to provide more comprehensive explanations of the phenomenon of low policy take-up than those currently available in the work/life balance literature which focus on organisational and individual factors.

The research project is based on a critical review of the work/life balance literature which focuses on organisational solutions and starts from the assumption that the organisational approach to researching and addressing work/life conflicts is inherently limited, mainly because it does not theorise gender as a social structure and does not take into consideration the social and political context in which work/life arrangements are negotiated but focuses, instead, on individual employees and organisations. I integrated my critical review of the organisational work/life balance literature with concepts in the feminist literature, most importantly the gendered public/private divide, to create an explicit 'gender lens' which guides the interpretations of my findings. I applied this gender lens to Habermas' model of societal evolution to operationalise it as an analytical tool for this research.

From this theoretical basis, I designed a comparative research project, using Australia and Sweden as country case studies, which compares the approaches to work/life balance in the two countries. The focus of the analysis is on parental leave as one important example of work/life balance policies. The data for this research includes the parental leave legislation, public documents released by governments and associated bodies as well as national surveys on the take-up of parental leave provisions in both countries. This material is analysed in the light of the conceptual framework.

The key contribution of the study is the development of a conceptual framework which allows for an integrated analysis of organisations, government interventions and gendered norms, assumptions and beliefs. This conceptual approach offers alternative explanations of low policy take-up and persistent work/life conflicts by placing work/life arrangements into their social and political context in two different countries. The study demonstrates the strong influence of government intervention as well as the wider social norms and beliefs about appropriate gender roles on the take-up of work/life balance policies. I argue that in interaction with each other, and with workplace organisations, they determine the work/life options available to parents as well as the costs of taking up those options and, thus, the level of take-up of work/life balance policies.

In a social and political context where the liberal idea of the gendered public/private divide is taken for granted and policy solutions rely on traditional gender ideals and guard employer prerogative, such as Australia, work/life balance policies create limited and costly work/life options for parents which reinforce traditional gender arrangements. In this context, the take-up of work/life balance policies is relatively low because the benefits to parents are limited while they need to take over virtually all of the costs of policy use.

In contrast, in a social and political context in which policy interventions are based on gender egalitarian ideals which challenge the gendered public/private divide and buffer against employer prerogative, such as Sweden, parents have access to various work/life options and the costs of leave taking are shared between women, men, employers and the state. In such a context, the take-up of policies is relatively high and work/life balance is facilitated.

STATEMENT OF AUTHORSHIP

I certify that this thesis entitled:

Work/life balance through a critical 'gender lens': A cross-country comparison of parental leave provisions and take-up in Australia and Sweden

submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy is the result of my own research.

Except where explicit reference is made in the text of the thesis, this thesis contains no material published elsewhere or extracted in whole or in part from a thesis by which I have qualified for or been awarded another degree or diploma. No other person's work has been relied upon or used without due acknowledgement in the main text and reference list of the thesis.

Full name of author: _____

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Go confidently in the direction of your dreams. Live the life you've imagined.
Thoreau

This quote has guided me over the past four years and given me the confidence to just keep going – into my direction. Many people have been part of this journey, have walked with me, offered alternative routes or pushed me back on the track when I went off on a tangent. It is those people who have supported me and challenged me, who have shaped the path and made the trip worthwhile. And then there are those people who made this expedition possible in the first place. I would like to thank you all. It's been a terrific time and a life changing experience.

There have been some very special people on this journey to whom I would like to extend an individual 'thank you'.

Dr Lorene Gottschalk, my principal supervisor, friend, mentor, role model and colleague. You have nurtured me and exposed me to ideas, people and challenges that have helped me grow into a confident woman, researcher and teacher. Thank you for your selfless support and unwavering belief in my project and my abilities which have carried me through this PhD candidature, especially the past 12 months.

Dr Glen Wood, my associate supervisor and critical voice who has taught me that there is a fine line between writing with confidence and writing with arrogance. Thank you for your patience and your consistent support for this rather unusual project which often did not proceed as structured and timely as we might have preferred; and for the peaceful days on the mountain.

Prof Julian Lowe, the financier, who believed in me and offered me a full scholarship which provided the possibility to return to Australia. Thank you for your generosity and your foresight which laid the ground for a thriving PhD program in the School from which I have benefited immensely.

Prof Jane Broadbent, who read my conceptual framework chapter and offered positive and constructive feedback on the piece. Thank you for giving me the confidence to present my work to a wider audience.

Dr Janice Newton and Dr Sara Charlesworth, members of my confirmation of candidature panel, who provided support and advice on multiple occasions.

Dr Jarrod Haar and David Lynch, SPSS pros, thank you for your assistance with the analysis of the PLA data.

The University of Ballarat for providing an infrastructure in which postgraduate researchers can grow and interact. A special 'thank you' to Assoc Prof Trevor Hastings and Di Clingin for the help and opportunities you have extended to me.

Dr Jaloni Pansiri and Talia Barrett for reading drafts of my thesis.

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INTRODUCTION

In Australia, the main responses to work/life pressures have so far focused on developing corporate work/life balance policies which usually include leave policies, changes to work arrangements, and various support policies both practical and in terms of information and training which are provided by employers (Buchanan & Thornthwaite, 2001; Evans, 2001; McDonald, Brown, & Bradley, 2005). The starting point of my PhD research was provided by the findings of my masters thesis (Zacharias, 2002) on the costs and benefits of implementing work/life balance policies in so called 'best practice' organisations. The phenomenon which emerged from the research was that even in those 'best practice' companies, which had implemented comprehensive work/life initiatives and featured organisational cultures apparently supportive of work/life balance, the take-up of policies was very low. These findings are supported by a number of studies which were conducted in English-speaking countries, including Australia, which found that organisational work/life policies are not taken up by significant numbers of employees and that their uptake is especially low among men and career-oriented women (Hochschild, 1997; Blair-Loy & Wharton, 2002; Bittman, Hoffmann, & Thompson, 2004; De Cieri, Holmes, Abbott, & Pettit, 2005; Drew & Murtagh, 2005; McDonald et al., 2005). Work/life researchers have tried to explain the phenomenon of low take-up over the past decade.

Common answers for the low take-up rate of work/life balance policies presented themselves quickly in the literature which focuses on organisational responses to work/life conflicts, much of which is positioned within the management discipline. The lack of senior management commitment, resistance from supervisors, hostility from colleagues, career fears, the perception to have 'no need' for work/life policies and the real or perceived

unavailability of policies were often cited as the reasons for low policy take-up (Klein, Berman, & Dickson, 2000; Secret, 2000; Barham, Gottlieb, & Kelloway, 2001; Thornthwaite, 2002; den Dulk & Ruijter, 2004; Roberts, 2004; McDonald et al., 2005). However, these answers were limited in their capacity to fully explain the phenomenon of low take-up rates and the work/life debate seemingly went around in circles.

There were a number of indicators which suggested that the answers provided by researchers who focused only on the organisational level of work/life conflicts were not getting to the heart of the issue. It had been argued that the current definition of the work/life balance concept was too narrow and did not address the underlying structural issues, such as the gender pay gap, the gendered division of labour and the gendered nature of workplaces and society in general, which impacted on the decision to take up work/life balance policies (Charlesworth, 2004b). Moreover, issues had been raised regarding the design of work/life balance policies in that they only requested an adaptation of existing workplaces to existing needs of working mothers. Connell (2005) maintained that instead of facilitating more gender egalitarian workplaces, current work/life policies had a negative effect on women's workplace situation. Work/life balance policies did not seem to be able to challenge basic organisational structures and cultures which were fundamentally unsupportive of work/life balance, in particular, the male norm of the 'ideal worker' (S. Lewis, 2001; Rapoport, Bailyn, Fletcher, & Pruitt, 2002). However, Rapoport et al. (2002) argued that the challenging of unsupportive organisational structures and cultures was important in order to address the underlying causes of work/life conflicts.

Much of the work/life balance literature appeared to be fundamentally limited in its current conceptualisation and needed to be broadened beyond the investigations which were being conducted at an organisational level (S. Lewis, Rapoport, & Gambles, 2003). Building on their insights from international studies, Lewis et al. (2003) and Haas, Hwang and Russell (2000a) proposed that to take the work/life balance debate any further, researchers needed to ask some fundamental, normative questions about the most appropriate ways to organise the work/life interface. They argued that the research agenda needed to incorporate gender relations and to recognise that work/life issues occurred within a social context which included, but was not limited to, workplace organisations. The work of these work/life researchers became the basis for my own study.

RESEARCH QUESTION AND AIMS OF THE STUDY

I start from the insight that the focus on the organisational level, which so far is the most common approach to investigating the low take-up of work/life balance policies, cannot provide complete answers for this phenomenon. Instead, a broader conceptual approach is needed which incorporates an understanding of gender as a social structure and takes into account the wider social and political context in which work/life negotiations take place. The research question which guides my study is:

> Why is there a low take-up of work/life balance policies in Australia in the
> face of persistent work/life pressures?

The aim of the research is to provide a more comprehensive explanation for the low take-up of work/life balance policies in Australia which goes beyond the focus on workplace organisations and the influence of organisational culture as the key explanation for low take-up. I aim to demonstrate that gendered norms and assumptions, government legislation and organisational approaches to work/life balance are interrelated and, thus, that work/life options and their take-up are shaped by more than just the organisational context.

To achieve these aims, I devised a methodology which can potentially integrate those suggestions which have been identified as necessary elements of a new research agenda to advance the work/life literature and the explanations of low take-up. My decision to pursue a rather unconventional methodological approach is supported by van Doorne-Huiskes, Peper and den Dulk (2006, p.324) who argued that it is important to design a research agenda for the future which can identify ways to achieve better integration of employment and private life:

> It is vital that the research agenda focuses on international comparative research emphasising interdisciplinary approaches and a combination of theories and research methods. It is best to avoid a monodisciplinary, purely national investigation of the way in which work and private life can best be integrated in the 21st century.

Moreover, Daly (2000) advised feminist analysts of the welfare state to keep an open mind towards research design. I will sketch my research approach briefly here and will elaborate on it in the methodology chapter.

SUMMARY OF THE RESEARCH DESIGN

My research is positioned in the tradition of constructionist analysis and builds on feminist theory as well as critical theory to make visible the influence of gender as a social structure on work/life issues and to challenge the current ways in which the work/life interface is organised. I will demonstrate that gender relations are not just one element in explaining the low take-up of work/life balance policies, as has been suggested by some researchers (e.g. McDonald et al., 2005), but are decisive in determining the work/life options which are available to employed carers and significantly influences the use of those options. This is why I adopt an explicitly feminist approach which is further detailed in Chapter Four.

As I will demonstrate in more detail in the review of the literature, work/life balance policies are not only provided by employers but also by the welfare state. A central aim of this study is to show that the broader legislative and policy framework of welfare states influences the provision and take-up of organisational policies. Focusing only on organisational policy seems to limit the potential explanations for low take-up rates as this research approach does not address the influence of the welfare state. This insight has resulted in two important methodological decisions. Firstly, the project is designed as a cross-country comparison, as recommended by van Doorne-Huiskes et al. (2006), using Australia and Sweden as case studies to make visible the influence of the wider social and political context on the issues associated with work/life balance. A country-level analysis was necessary to illustrate the influence of macro-level indicators, such as legislation, public policy and social norms, on what is often perceived as micro-level behaviours, i.e. the 'individual' decision (not) to take-up organisational work/life balance policies. Secondly, the study is cross-disciplinary in nature in order to address the limitations of the work/life literature which focuses on organisational policy solutions and to broaden the discussions around work/life balance. I have devised a conceptual framework which integrates three macro structures of society, namely social norms and attitudes, the welfare state and workplace organisations. This framework provides the analytic tool to guide my analysis of the complex interactions between those macro structures as well as their impact on the work/life interface and the take-up of work/life balance policies.

Finally, I focus on one common work/life policy, namely parental leave, in order to illustrate the interrelationships between gendered social structures, the design of the work/life policy

framework and the take-up of the provisions by parents. The term 'parental leave' is used in this thesis to refer to maternity, paternity and parental leave. However, it is important to point out that the three types of leave are theoretically and practically distinct. Maternity leave usually refers to the time immediately before and after child birth and is granted to enable the expecting mother to prepare for and recover from the birthing process. Paternity leave is granted to fathers at the time around child birth. In contrast, parental leave is granted to one or both parents for child rearing purposes. All three types of leave can be granted as paid or unpaid provisions. While I use the term 'parental leave' as a proxy for the three types of leave, I do not conceptualise 'parental leave' as being synonymous with 'maternity leave' which is often the case in the Australian debate.

In this thesis, I use parental leave as one example of work/life balance policies and illustrate the issues around policy take-up for the case of parental leave. The thesis does not focus on the historical development, policy making process and social consequences of parental leave, although it does refer to all of those, but highlights the issues related to policy take-up by means of the example of parental leave. Parental leave was chosen as the policy example because it is a common work/life balance policy in both Australia and Sweden, it is provided at both government and organisational policy levels and is very topical, although arguably more so in Australia. However, the argument I am presenting in the thesis could equally apply to other work/life balance policies, such as part-time work and tele-work. I am aware that the focus on parental leave positions the thesis more towards a work-family rather than a work/life approach, at least on the surface. I will address this issue in more detail in the definitions section in Chapter One and will show that I do not perceive the two approaches as mutually exclusive. Instead, work-family concerns remain an important subset of the broader work/life balance agenda.

SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

My study contributes to existing knowledge in various ways. Its main contribution is to the work/life balance area in that it provides a more comprehensive conceptual framework for analysing work/life issues including, but not limited to, the reasons for the low take-up of work/life balance policies. The strengths of my conceptual framework are the systematic integration of feminist theory and findings from different disciplines, feminist and

otherwise, especially in management, economics, sociology and public policy, into one coherent analytical tool. Its interdisciplinary nature implies that the conceptual framework not only adds to theory in the management discipline, but also contributes to feminist research and the broader discussions around the reconciliation of paid and care work conducted in disciplines other than management. The strengths of my research design lie in the insights offered by cross-cultural comparisons and in the methodological flexibility achieved by a case study approach which combines several data sources. Both contributions are significant because they open up new avenues to investigate the interrelationships between paid and care work as well as the multiple actors who shape these interrelationships.

In more empirical terms, and largely as a by-product, my investigation of parental leave provisions and take-up in Australia and Sweden contributes to the growing body of national and cross-country analyses of different parental leave regimes and offers insights for policy makers in the two countries as well as policy makers in other countries looking to modify their policy frameworks. Thus, there are conceptual as well as empirical contributions generated by this PhD study which may contribute to the work/life balance literature as well as feminist research and theory.

STRUCTURE OF THE THESIS

The thesis is presented in eight chapters. In Chapter One, I review the work/life balance literature which investigates the low take-up of organisational policies and outline five key limitations of that literature. I discuss the work of authors who argue that a broadening of the work/life balance debate is necessary in order to advance the work/life balance debate. Their criticism is used to propose that in order to uncover more comprehensive explanations of the low take-up of work/life policies, the investigations of the work/life interface need to be broadened beyond the focus on the organisational level.

In Chapter Two, I show that a broadening of the work/life debate can be achieved by systematically integrating feminist research and theorising into the investigation of work/life issues. I review feminist critiques of social institutions which maintain the inequality between women and men and link feminist discussions of the gendered public/private divide to the

concept of work/life balance. I aim to show that the two concepts are inherently related and that the concept of work/life balance has a radical core which demands a more gender egalitarian sharing of paid and unpaid work.

Chapter Three synthesises the insights gained from the critical review of the work/life balance literature and its integration with feminist scholarship into a conceptual framework for the analysis of the work/life interface. My conceptual framework builds on the core concepts of Habermas' *Theory of communicative action* but extends his work by a 'gender lens' to allow for a gender-sensitive analysis of social structures and their influence on work/life options as well as on the take-up of those options. This framework guides my analysis of the country case studies and I utilise Habermas' terminology of Lifeworld (norms, beliefs and lived experiences), Steering Media (government via the welfare state) and Systems (public and private organisations) throughout the thesis.

In Chapter Four, I discuss my methodology and theoretical perspective, in particular, my understanding of feminism as a research paradigm. Moreover, the chapter details my research design and provides the rationale for choosing a comparative case study approach, outlines the reasons for selecting Australia and Sweden as country case studies and describes the sources of data which were drawn on for the analysis. In addition, I elaborate on my choice of parental leave as the work/life policy example used in this study.

Australia and Sweden are introduced in Chapter Five, as the case studies which form the basis of my analysis. I demonstrate that the two countries are comparable in that they are both wealthy, developed, highly industrialised western countries with well established welfare states. However, they have established very different approaches to addressing issues around work/life balance which I relate largely to their welfare state philosophies. Moreover, I provide a brief overview of the history of parental leave in both countries and a summary of the current provisions.

Chapters Six and Seven report on the analysis of the case studies which are presented by country, starting with Australia. I use my conceptual framework to structure the analysis of the parental leave legislation in both countries and the chapters are organised into two distinct parts. The first part analyses the interactions between the parental leave legislation and social norms and beliefs, i.e. the Steering Media and the Lifeworld in the terminology of

my conceptual framework. In the second part, the interactions between the legislation and workplace organisations is evaluated, i.e. the relationships between Steering Media and Systems.

Due to the structure of my analysis chapters, there is an element of repetition in the way the material is presented. However, because I want to demonstrate the interrelationships between the three concepts, Lifeworld, Steering Media and Systems, some repetition was unavoidable. The analysis will demonstrate that the options which are available to employed carers are not only determined by their organisational context but also by the wider social context, namely government intervention via legislation and the norms and beliefs which underpin this legislation.

Chapter Eight presents the comparison between the two countries and outlines the key differences in the parental leave regimes as well as their outcomes in terms of take-up. The findings of my analysis are discussed in the light of existing literature under three main themes: gendered ideals, the role of employers and gendered trajectories. While the data presented throughout this chapter overlaps in parts, it is used to make different points in the three sections. Finally, in the Conclusion, I illustrate how my research contributes to the explanations of low take-up of work/life balance policies in Australia and provide recommendations for future research.

CHAPTER ONE

A CRITICAL REVIEW OF THE WORK/LIFE BALANCE DEBATE

The concept of 'work/life balance' currently represents an important tool for allowing discussions about the everyday struggles of reconciling paid work and private life experienced by many individuals in Western societies to enter media and political debate (Connell, 2004). However, in countries such as Australia and the United States (US), the work/life agenda has often focused on large corporations. Studies in both Australia (e.g. Bardoel & Moss, 1999; Whitehouse & Zetlin, 1999; Charlesworth, 2004a) and the US (e.g. Galinsky & Stein, 1990; Siegwarth Meyer, Mukerjee, & Sestero, 2001; Lambert & Haley-Lock, 2004) found that employees in large organisations are most likely to have access to work/life balance policies. The corporate work/life balance agenda represents an important approach to addressing work/life conflicts in both the US and Australia. For the US context, Friedman and Johnson (1997, p.194) stated that an "entire work-family industry" had been developing with a new functional title in HR management, a new consulting area, and a new academic focus. This academic focus on organisational work/life balance policies presents organisational policies as the major solution to work/life conflicts and has produced a large body of literature, much of which is positioned within the management discipline. This ever increasing body of literature is under critical review in this chapter.

It appears that the current focus on work/life balance originated in a resurgent growth of corporate support policies. This growth started in the late 1980s when, especially, the American labour market was classified as a sellers' market and there was a need to attract and retain skilled staff (Friedman, 1990). While corporate support policies are not a novel management tool and have existed since the industrial revolution, their occurrence has been cyclical and varied with economic prosperity (Bowen, 1988). Thus, contemporary work/life balance research which focuses on organisational policies originated in the US and much research is still US based. However, significant corporate, academic, political and popular interest has been generated in the Australia, the United Kingdom (UK), Canada and, increasingly, in continental Europe and developing countries, especially India and Eastern Europe (Gambles, Lewis, & Rapoport, 2006). Currently, there is a strong focus on the organisational work/life agenda. However, work/life issues are also investigated in disciplines other than management and from perspectives which do not only focus on the organisational level. This literature will be discussed in Chapter Two.

The organisational approach to work/life balance appears to be problematic for several reasons. On a practical level, there seems to be a gap between rhetoric and reality when it comes to work/life balance policies. While companies seem to be happy to promote the existence of work/life programs on their corporate websites, studies evaluating the success and effectiveness of work/life policies found that the existence of policies did not guarantee their take-up and that the policies were, in fact, inaccessible for many employees despite the positive rhetoric espoused by senior and HR managers (Whitehouse & Zetlin, 1999; Frame & Hartog, 2003; Wise & Bond, 2003; Waters & Bardoel, 2006). The low take-up of work/life balance policies seems to indicate the limited effectiveness of corporate solutions to addressing work/life issues.

Moreover, I outlined in the Introduction to my thesis three criticisms which identify the conceptualisation of work/life balance issues and solutions as a management problem as deeply flawed. These are, firstly, the sole focus on the workplace level; secondly, the limited number of researchers who recognise the link between work/life issues and gender relations and, finally, the lack of conceptualising the influence of government intervention as well as social norms and beliefs on the provision and use of work/life balance policies. My review of the work/life balance literature will integrate the criticisms towards these three fundamental characteristics of the organisational work/life balance literature which have

been present from the very start and arguably have increasingly turned into liabilities. I will demonstrate that, firstly, there has been little conceptual precision in the terminology used to define 'work/life balance' issues and solutions. Secondly, there has been an exclusive focus on the organisational dimension of work/life issues and little consideration given to political solutions or the broader social causes which appear to underlie work/life issues. Finally, the historical, social and political context of the US has largely been taken for granted as the context in which work/life conflicts and solutions are based. I aim to show that all three elements of the organisational approach to the issues around reconciling paid work and private life added to the limited success of the corporate policy solutions to work/life balance and, ultimately, to the low take-up of work/life policies. The chapter is organised around these three themes, starting with a discussion of the strengths and weaknesses of the various terms that have been proposed to describe the attempts to facilitate a better combination of employment and 'the rest of life'.

DEFINITIONS: FROM 'FAMILY-FRIENDLY' TO 'WORK/LIFE BALANCE' AND BEYOND

There is significant discussion over the terminology used to capture the issues related to the ability of finding a satisfying combination of paid work and private life. Initially, the terms 'family responsive workplace' and 'family-friendly policies' were used. Lewis (1997) argued that the term 'family-friendly' is problematic because it does not acknowledge the nature and complexity of the 'family'. Moreover, she pointed out that the term 'friendly' could be interpreted as a favour on the part of the company rather than an entitlement to the employee. Partly in response to the perceived problems of the term 'family-friendly', 'work-family' policies became the accepted term in America in the late 1990s (Friedman & Johnson, 1997).

However, this framing of the issues was soon perceived as problematic as well because of the gendered connotations it implied. Rapoport et al. (2002) explained that defining concerns about the combination of paid work and private life as 'family' issues implied that they were women's issues which resulted in a marginalisation of work-family initiatives and created gender inequalities in the workplace. Friedman and Johnson (1997) also state that concerns about equity and backlash from employees without family responsibilities

associated with the term 'work-family' led to the adoption of a 'work/life' terminology to include single people and those not in 'traditional' families and, thus, represented a broader approach to conceptualising work/life issues. 'Work/life balance' can be regarded as the dominant term used by researchers, practitioners and other stakeholders since the late 1990s, although all other terms are still used to a lesser degree.

Yet, moving towards a 'work/life' terminology did not resolve the gendered notions implied in the concept. Smithson and Stokoe (2005, p.147) argue that the gender-neutral term 'work/life balance', does not, in fact, change the highly gendered assumptions and categories underpinning it, such as the "generic female parent". On the contrary, the authors maintain that the use of gender-neutral terms suggests that organisations have become 'level playing fields' for women and men and that positive discrimination or 'difference' policies are no longer needed. It appears that the term 'work-family' overemphasised the responsibility of women for care work with negative consequences for gender equity while the term 'work/life' renders invisible the real gender inequities that persist in workplaces and families.

Neither the term 'work-family' nor the term 'work/life' resolves the inherently gendered connotations and the association of both 'family' and 'life' with women. Moreover, they do not appear to be mutually exclusive terms but complementary. Pocock (2005a) maintains that issues of 'work and family' are a major subset of 'work/life' issues and arise from women's ongoing main responsibility for family care. My choice of parental leave as the work/life policy under investigation appears to align more closely with a 'work-family' rather than a 'work/life' approach. However, because I conceptualise parental leave as representative of other work/life policies and 'work-family' issues are a major part of the broader 'work/life' agenda, I use the term 'work/life' rather than 'work-family' in this thesis.

In addition to the ongoing tensions between the terms 'work-family' and 'work/life', the term 'balance' has also come under criticism recently. Rapoport and colleagues in three related publications (Rapoport et al., 2002; S. Lewis et al., 2003; Gambles, Lewis, & Rapoport, 2004) argue that there are significant problems with the term 'work/life balance' because it implies that work is not part of 'life', that it ignores the distinction between paid and unpaid work, and that everyone's time should be split equally between 'work' and 'life'. In their view, 'work/life balance' suggests that 'work' and 'the rest of life' are somehow mutually exclusive and, therefore, fails to capture the skills transfer between the different

aspects of life. Rapoport et al. (2002) propose the term 'work-personal life integration' to reflect the synergies and connections between the different parts of life and the ways in which they feed into each other. By using the term 'integration' they aim to stress that the two parts of life are interconnected and that they are "not in conflict or separate and in need of balance, but *integrated*" (Rapoport et al., 2002, p.17). Yet, in a later paper, the authors explain that they eventually changed the term to 'work-personal life harmonisation' because of resistance to the use of 'integration'. They state: "In the context of ever blurring boundaries, some prefer to experience work and personal life in more separate or segregated ways" (Gambles et al., 2004, p.3). The question remains whether 'work/life balance' is the best term to capture the relations between the economy, the household and personal life and whether 'work-personal harmonisation' offers a feasible alternative. So far, 'work/life balance' continues to be the dominant term.

This term 'work-personal life integration' also reflected the attempt to overcome the strict separation between the spheres of employment and private life. Rapoport et al. (2002) argued that gendered assumptions and stereotypes which are based in the separation of employment and the home constrain the choices of both women and men. They formulate a vision of gender equity which aims to relax these social norms so that individuals can experience both parts of life as integrated rather than as separate domains that need to be 'balanced'. They state: "This terminology expresses the belief in the need to diminish the separation between these two spheres of life in ways that will change both, rather than merely reallocating – or 'balancing' – time between them as they currently exist" (Rapoport et al., 2002, p.18). While I do not adopt their terminology, the vision of gender equity outlined by Rapoport et al. as well as their idea that social norms and the strict division between employment and the home need to be changed to achieve gender equity will be at the heart of my alternative perspective to investigate work/life issues. I will draw heavily on the findings of their landmark study which was conducted in the mid 1990s for the Ford Foundation and published in a report (Rapoport & Bailyn, 1996) and, successively, in a book (Rapoport et al., 2002). Their study was designed as an action research project involving three major US corporations and aimed to address issues of work design under the banner of a 'Dual Agenda', i.e. to find ways to address work/life and gender equity issues by restructuring workplaces to allow for a better integration of employment and private life while simultaneously improving business processes.

The 'Dual Agenda' project offered a new perspective on defining and addressing work/life issues. Bailyn and Harrington (2004), with Bailyn also having been a part of this action research project, used the term 'work-family integration' to express that paid work can be arranged in such a way that employees can be productive while at the same time being able to deal with their family responsibilities. Bailyn and Harrington stressed that such restructuring of paid work can and must be done in a way that is equitable for men and women. The benefit of such a definition was that it defied accepted wisdom that conceptualise attention to work and attention to family as a black or white decision, as representing a 'balance' in which if one goes up the other must necessarily come down. While I appreciate their approach and agree with their vision, I will demonstrate in the next chapter that the spheres of paid and unpaid work have indeed been institutionalised as separate and opposing spheres but that this ideological and structural separation has come under increased pressures because a growing number of people are trying to bridge the divide between 'work' and 'life' and, thus, to achieve work/life balance. However, at this stage, I propose that 'integration' remains the vision and the struggle to 'balance' conflicting spheres is the reality.

In recognition of this unchanged reality, I use the term 'work/life balance' for this study. I define 'work' as paid employment and 'life' as 'private life', i.e. all activities which happen outside of the public realm of paid employment. In doing so, I appreciate the concerns of Lewis et al. (2003) in part, but reject their suggestion of the term 'personal life' as well as 'harmonisation'. The dichotomy of private (life outside of paid work in workplace organisations) and public (life in workplace organisations) seems to be a better choice than the cloudy term 'personal'. It also aligns with the concept of the public/private divide which, as I will demonstrate in the next chapter, is at the heart of work/life conflicts. Moreover, if the term 'integration' was rejected on the basis that people felt a need to draw clearer boundaries between their paid work and private life, then the term 'harmonisation' does not appear to resolve Lewis et al.'s issues with the term 'balance'. That is, 'harmonisation' still implies a perceived antithetical relationship between the two spheres of private life and employment in the public sphere and does not allow for capturing the interrelationships and synergies between them. Therefore, in this study I use the original term 'balance' instead of introducing a new term that contains the same problems.

Besides the disagreement over terminology, there are other, more conceptual issues with the definition of what constitutes 'work/life balance' and the initiatives designed to achieve it. In 1990, Kingston critically noted that researchers in the field were rarely looking for conceptual precision, but that a 'rough consensus' had emerged between analysts and practitioners as to what set of policies defined a 'family responsive workplace'. He argued that this operational definition did not reflect the complexity of factors impacting on employees in their attempt to reconcile their employment and family lives. He proposed that an operational definition might even lead to overlooking structural barriers to work/life balance and, thus, "fundamental ways in which business policies are unresponsive to families" (Kingston, 1990, p. 442). In addition, Campbell Clark pointed out that often the term 'work-life balance' is further limited to only one of its facets (role conflict), which creates the effect of mutual exclusiveness in that it "presupposes that work and family necessarily clash and that balance simply means the absence of conflict" (Campbell Clark, 2001, p. 349). Her criticism mirrors that of Rapoport et al. (2002) outlined above.

Moreover, Blair-Loy and Wharton found that work/life initiatives were perceived as a contested set of organisational policies and that the take-up of different work/life policies depended on the extent to which they were perceived as contested in a given organisation or workplace setting. Both Lewis (1997) and Drew and Murtagh (2005) found that the eligibility criteria for work/life policies were ambiguous and there were no clear guidelines for the implementation and application of policies given to supervisors. Thus, the conceptualisation of 'work/life balance' policies as operational management tools to be applied in workplace organisations leaves ample room for ambiguities, misinterpretations and misunderstandings on the part of academics, employers and employees alike about what constitutes work/life balance and what can be done to achieve it.

In recent years, more comprehensive definitions of what constitutes work/life balance have emerged. One of them has been proposed by the UK based employer association 'Employers for Work-Life Balance' (Employers for work-life balance, 2007). On their website, they define 'work-life balance' as being

> […] about people having a measure of control over when, where and how they work. It is achieved when an individual's right to a fulfilled life inside and outside paid work is accepted and respected as the norm to the mutual benefit of the individual, business and society.

Pocock (2005a) argues that this is a useful definition because it implies that there are several stakeholders in 'work-life balance': individuals, businesses and larger society. The need for 'control' in order to be able to achieve work/life balance is of central importance and this has been demonstrated in empirical studies (Tausig & Fenwick, 2001; Bailey & Kurland, 2002).

In summary, the lack of conceptual clarity and agreed terminology coupled with the failure to theorise gender seems to have contributed to the limited success of organisational policy solutions. In the following section, I aim to demonstrate that a second factor behind the low take-up of policies and the multiple barriers which persist to achieving improved work/life balance, is the conceptualisation of 'work/life balance' as organisational issues which can be solved with organisational policies. I will sketch the achievements of the management oriented work/life literature before outlining what I consider are three fundamental limitations: the lack of theorising gender, the focus on the individual and the limitations caused by business case considerations.

WORK/LIFE BALANCE AS AN ORGANISATIONAL ISSUE

During the 1990s, much of the work/life balance debate focussed on whether organisations have work/life policies and programs in place to support their employees' attempts to achieve a better reconciliation of employment and private life. Empirical research investigated the extent to which individual policies had been implemented, with a focus on flexible working time and child care provision, and researchers attempted to prove links between those policies and organisational bottom-line benefits in terms of reduced absenteeism, increased morale and higher productivity (Christensen & Stains, 1990; Dalton & Mesch, 1990; Goff & Mount, 1991; Kossek & Nichol, 1992). These studies formed the basis for researchers committed to proving a business case for strategic work/life balance programs and to establish those programs as 'best practice' Human Resource Management activities (such as Johnson, 1995; Abbott, De Cieri, & Iverson, 1997; Bardoel, Moss, & Tharenou, 1997; Siegwarth Meyer et al., 2001; Zacharias, 2002). Other studies were concerned with the evolution of work/life balance policies in organisations, that is their transformation from isolated policies into comprehensive work/life balance programs with a strategic outlook (Christensen & Stains, 1990; Galinsky & Stein, 1990; Galinsky, Friedman,

& Hernandez, 1991; Osterman, 1995; Cutcher-Gershenfeld & Kossek, 1997; Glass & Estes, 1997; Johnson, 1999). The existence of work/life policies and programs in an organisation was taken to be synonymous with the company's 'family-friendliness'.

Researchers at the time developed conceptual frameworks to demonstrate the various stages of evolution of work/life initiatives in individual organisations and a variety of criteria were offered to evaluate the level of integration of work/life initiatives into a specific company. The most comprehensive model was the three-stage 'Family-Friendly Index' developed by Galinsky and associates in the Families and Work Institute in 1991. In Stage 1, work/life initiatives in a company are mostly separate efforts. The major task is to identify the problems caused by work/life conflict for employees and to find the most effective solution for those issues (Galinsky & Stein, 1990). In Stage 2, the company has already adopted a wide range of programs and policies, but is still experimenting to find the most appropriate solutions for its particular context. Also, the integration of work/life programs and policies into the overall business strategy, its systems and culture, is at an early stage and often driven by a senior figure. A company at Stage 3 is characterized by comprehensive and multifaceted programs and policies that are fully integrated into the company's strategy, structure and culture. In this stage, work/life initiatives are considered to be a legitimate issue of the organisation and are relevant to its mission and strategy. Different functional areas are considered together, as an overall effort, and supportive policies are seen as essential in the recruitment and retention of employees. They have the support of a powerful internal figure. A position may be created to be in charge of work/life efforts and to assess and review programs and policies regularly. There is an emphasis on flexibility. Employees are judged by what they produce, not by the hours they put in, and they are given greater control over their work environments and hours. Organisational culture is recognised as being central to work/life solutions, and work/life related issues are included in management training (Galinsky & Stein, 1990).

While the Family-Friendly Index conceptualised a third stage and promoted it as the most supportive environment for work/life balance, it soon became evident that few organisations moved beyond Stages 1 or 2 (Cutcher-Gershenfeld & Kossek, 1997). This lack of evolution of work/life initiatives within companies to Stage 3 had severe consequences for those employees who wanted to use work/life policies. Friedman and Johnson (1997) argued that in companies in Stages 1 and 2, work/life policies created benefits for employers

rather than employees because the adjustments were made to the work schedules of only some individuals, who were subsequently marginalised in the organisation. Moreover, work/life policies in those companies were *ad hoc* and did not alter the overall practice of 'doing business'. Friedman and Johnson pointed out that in the vast majority of organisations work/life balance policies had not been integrated as an integral part of the corporate strategy but were perceived as case-by-case adjustments of the work conditions of selected employees. They argued that the work/life initiatives of companies in Stages 1 and 2 created flexibility and benefits to the employer and not to the employee. Their analysis of the tools which are used to evaluate the effectiveness of corporate initiatives demonstrates that the research focus on the provision of work/life policies has severe limitations in that it said little about the actual success of the policies in terms of increased work/life balance. However, in the late 1990s, work/life researchers moved away from the focus on the provision of work/life policies and towards an investigation of the impact of organisational culture on the take-up of work/life initiatives.

Explanations of the low take-up of work/life balance policies

While initially, the phenomenon of low take-up rates was studied by focusing on individual employees, such as the characteristics of people who used the policies (e.g. Galinsky & Stein, 1990; Duxbury, Higgins, & Lee, 1994; Goodstein, 1994; Bardoel & Moss, 1999) as well as changing preferences and attitudes among employees (e.g. Goff & Mount, 1991; Kossek & Nichol, 1992), the focus now changed to studying the influence of organisational culture on the take-up of work/life policies.

It soon became obvious to researchers and employed carers alike that, instead of delivering benefits to employees, work/life policies in Stage 1 and 2 companies effectively extracted more from those individuals who used them rather than freed up their time for private life activities. Friedman and Johnson (1997, p.205) state that this occurred because the aim of the policies was not to facilitate greater work/life balance:

> The intent of corporate work-family policies and practices is to make employees more available for work, absent less often, less distracted and less conflicted by family demands. By design, these policies exact more hours from employees and greater productivity for the company.

Friedman and Johnson (1997) argued that effective solutions called for fundamental changes in how employees were valued, assessed, managed, trained and promoted. They proposed that the research focus needed to shift to trying to understand the work environment, cultural norms, managerial practices and work processes. They stated: "Perhaps it is time to redefine the problem so that we can arrive at different solutions" (Friedman & Johnson, 1997, p.207). The realisation that cultural and structural changes were needed in organisations to bring about increased work/life balance marked a turning point in researching work/life issues in that the focus was firmly placed on organisational cultures and, to a lesser extent, organisational structures. This shift from the provision of policies to the supportiveness of organisational cultures and processes of work/life policies highlighted the fact that the take-up of work/life initiatives had remained surprisingly low.

This academic shift in focus put the low take-up of work/life policies into the spotlight of inquiry and there is now substantial evidence that organisational culture is one of the main factors that influence an employee's decision to take-up work/life balance policies. Empirical research has identified the support and attitudes of senior managers, direct supervisors and co-workers as being essential for evaluating the supportiveness of organisational culture towards work/life policies (Galinsky & Stein, 1990; Warren & Johnson, 1995; Rapoport & Bailyn, 1996; Cutcher-Gershenfeld & Kossek, 1997; Blair-Loy & Wharton, 2002). Other characteristics of a supportive work/life culture are the integration of work/life balance initiatives into corporate strategy, mission and every-day business (Cutcher-Gershenfeld & Kossek, 1997; Glass & Estes, 1997) as well as the communication of the offers available (Ostermann, 1995). There are several studies which illustrate the importance of organisational culture on the take-up of work/life balance policies.

The workplace context and power relationships within organisations were identified by Blair-Loy and Wharton (2002) who found in their study of policy take-up among managers and professionals in a financial company that policy use was shaped by more than individual need and personal characteristics. Further, they discovered that work/life policies were perceived as contested and ambiguous, often having symbolic rather than substantive effects. Their findings showed that, instead, group-level factors, especially the workplace power of co-workers and supervisors, were important in determining the take-up of work/life policies. Moreover, they found that the more a work/life policy was perceived as ambiguous and controversial, the stronger was the effect of group-level factors on take-up.

In their organisation, 'flexibility' policies were significantly more controversial and ambiguous than care-policies. These findings suggest that employees have become very aware of the costs associated with the take-up of policies and that the provision of such policies by organisations does not guarantee their use.

The perception of work/life policies as symbolic provisions and the mixed messages to employees have implications for the take-up of the policies. Siegwarth Meyer et al. (2001) state that a company whose culture discourages the use of work/life balance initiatives can profitably offer a wide variety of programs, as the cost of an unused service is expected to be small. Indeed, very few employees actually participate in programs offered by those companies to avoid the risk of being labelled as disloyal or non-career oriented. In fact, Blair-Loy and Wharton (2002) point out the possibility that companies, which provide work/life balance policies, may gain external legitimacy as desirable employers while at the same time discouraging employees – intentionally or unintentionally – from ever using these benefits. This suggests that companies gain from providing work/life initiatives while they may be virtually inaccessible to employees at the same time.

The study by Drew and Murtagh (2005) of senior managers in an Irish company confirmed the significance of organisational culture and the notion of work/life policies as contested workplace benefits. They found that working reduced hours and taking extended parental leave periods was perceived as having the greatest negative impact on career prospects. This confirms Blair-Loy and Wharton's (2002) argument that flexibility policies are contested. Drew and Murtagh's participants identified as the main barriers to the take-up of work/life balance policies the equation of long hours and 'presenteeism' with high productivity, performance and commitment which was exacerbated by the invasive use of information technology. This points to the 'politics of time' which have been well demonstrated in other studies (Hochschild, 1997; Fried, 1998; Bittman, 1999; Tausig & Fenwick, 2001; Moen, 2003; Jacobs & Gerson, 2004; Lyon & Woodward, 2004; Sheridan, 2004; Brannen, 2005; Wise, 2005). While the 'time squeeze' affects both women and men there are distinct gender differences in the ways the time politics play out in everyday interactions.

Time use and, hence, work/life arrangements have a distinct gender dimension. Drew and Murtagh (2005) found that work/life conflicts were more 'real' for women managers while men struggled more with the burden of commuting and heavy workloads. Both male and

female senior managers felt that the take-up of work/life policies was effectively prohibited in their current position and that hardly any senior manager currently used flexible work arrangements. However, the solutions for changing this situation proposed by women and men differed sharply. Men's suggestions for change focussed on individual solutions which would benefit them directly in terms of their own career. Most important were professional/personal development plans and mobility policies. Women, on the other hand, perceived symbolic measures as much more important and stressed the need for highly visible and powerful role models, such as the appointment of women directors and the take-up of work/life policies by senior managers. In their conclusion, Drew and Murtagh (2005) stress the importance of organisational culture on the accessibility of work/life policies, but at the same time point to structural barriers to take-up which are gendered: "There is a paucity of role models willing to display any contrary behaviour and a fear of alternative working patterns. Furthermore it is evident that this model of working is only sustainable where managers can rely upon a dependent partner as full-time care-provider at home" (Drew & Murtagh, 2005, p.275). Their findings are representative of the barriers to the take-up of organisational policies which are reported in the work/life literature.

The current explanations of barriers to the take-up of corporate work/life policies, which are related to organisational culture, have been worked into a conceptual "construct" by McDonald et al. (2005, p.49). They propose the construct of an 'organisational work-life culture' consisting of five conceptually distinct dimensions: manager support, co-worker support, career consequences, time expectations and gendered perceptions as an explanation for what they call the 'provision-utilisation gap'. McDonald et al. argue that the 'organisational work-life culture' encourages or discourages employees in their decision to take-up work/life policies. Their conceptual framework is in line with contemporary empirical research in the work/life area and, consequently, may become a valid tool for further empirical analysis. However, I will show in the following section that their approach, too, has conceptual limitations with regard to explaining the low take-up of work/life balance policies. I will demonstrate that these conceptual limitations reflect the weaknesses of the organisational work/life balance literature which have been identified by work/life researchers who are critical of this approach.

Limitations of the current explanations: A critical discussion of the construct of 'organisational work-life culture'

The construct offered by McDonald et al. (2005) represents a comprehensive summary of the approach which investigates the phenomenon of low take-up of work/life policies only from an organisational perspective and, thus, incorporates all of the strengths as well as the main limitations of that approach. Using the construct of 'organisational work-life culture' developed by McDonald et al. (2005) as representative of the wider work/life debate, I aim to show that the explanatory power of the current explanations of low take-up are limited for three important reasons. Firstly, the model suggests that the five dimensions (manager support, career consequences, time expectations, gendered perceptions and co-worker support) are distinct from each other, that there are no interrelations between them and that they are equally important in the formation of a work/life culture. Yet, based on the criticisms identified especially by Lewis, Gambles and Rapoport in two related papers (S. Lewis et al., 2003; Gambles et al., 2006) as well as Connell (2005), Charlesworth (2005) and Pocock (2005b), the 'gender dimension' is not just one variable in the equation as suggested by McDonald et al. (2005), but a determining feature underlying and shaping all of the other dimensions. It is not only 'gendered perceptions' that impact on the conceptualisation and take-up of work/life balance policies. More important is the idea of gender as a social structure (Risman, 1998; Martin, 2004) which shapes all of the other four dimensions and, therefore, has to be regarded as the key dimension in explaining the lack of take-up.

Secondly, the focus on organisational culture also upholds the perception that work/life balance is an individual issue and a matter of 'personal choice'. In such an individualised framework, the structural issues which cause work/life conflicts are rendered invisible (Rapoport et al., 2002). Thus, instead of changing current work practices attitudes about those practices which are incompatible with other aspects of life, such as the long-hours culture, work/life balance policies in their current form re-enforce traditional role norms and behaviours that ignore the realities of a changing workforce (Roberts, 2004; Connell, 2005). Organisational work/life policies thus maintain rather than challenge the assumptions which cause work/life conflicts in the first place.

Finally, the construct developed by McDonald et al. (2005) establishes work/life balance and the corresponding policies firmly within an organisational context. Such an approach ignores

that work/life conflicts are social issues within a gendered context which require society level solutions (S. Lewis et al., 2003). In summary, the aim of my critical engagement with the construct is to demonstrate that work/life balance policies in their current format are unable to initiate any substantial changes to the structures of workplaces and families because in practice they merely request the adaptation of conventional employment arrangements to the needs of care-giving mothers, even if much of the rhetoric suggests otherwise. 'Real' changes require the challenging of the gendered assumptions which underlie the design of workplaces and families. I will demonstrate this by outlining in some detail the findings by the project team of the 'Dual Agenda' study, headed by Rhona Rapoport and Lotte Bailyn, which I described earlier. I will discuss the three criticisms in turn.

1. The role of 'gender'

Work/life balance issues have a legacy of being regarded as women's issues. Although the definition of work/life issues has been broadened to include men and employees without child care responsibilities, as I have demonstrated earlier, and is supposedly gender-neutral (Smithson & Stokoe, 2005), Roberts (2004) argues that the topic is still largely researched from a work-family perspective with a focus on mothers of young children. Roberts points out that the central theme is one of overcoming barriers to workplace equality for parents and other primary carers which concentrates on the provision of short-term solutions offered by companies. She argues that such an approach legitimises the take-up of work/life balance policies by mothers who care for young children, but effectively excludes all employees who do not have primary child caring responsibilities from taking up work/life balance policies.

Framing the problems as women's issues and, more specifically, of those women who care for young children, results in a very narrow approach to addressing work/life conflicts. Work/life issues clearly have a gender dimension in that the issues related to reconciling paid and care work are very different for women and men. However, this gender dimension is not explicitly theorised in much of the empirical research and has only been conceptualised as one of five explanations in McDonald et al.'s (2005) model. Connell (2005, p.378) suggests that in its most common form 'work/life balance' represents a First World,

middle-class, female version of balance that might not be important or desirable to everyone:

> There is a men's work/life problem and a women's work/life problem. Dropping dead from career-driven stress, or shrivelling emotionally from never seeing one's children, is a different issue from exhaustion because of the double shift, or not getting promotion because of career interruptions.

There is evidence which suggests that the concepts of 'work/life balance' and 'work/life conflict' differ significantly for other groups of employees (for example, men or single parents) and that they face different problems in the attempt to achieve a 'work/life balance' (e.g. Duxbury et al., 1994; Bardoel & Moss, 1999; Barham et al., 2001; Lee, 2001; Blair-Loy & Wharton, 2002; Haas, Allard, & Hwang, 2002; Rostgaard, 2002; Roberts, 2004). Thus, there is a need to systematically unpack the work/life balance debate by gender. The failure to recognise the different meaning of work/life balance to women and men and the influence of gender as a social structure on work/life balance appears to be one of the main shortcomings of current work/life balance research and theorising.

Once the gender dimension is put at the centre of explanations of low take-up and persistent work/life conflicts rather than being regarded as only one reason among many others, i.e. once a conscious 'gender lens' is adopted, new explanations of the uneven take-up between women and men as well as the reluctance of career-oriented women to take up work/life policies become visible. For example, the lack of managerial support does not affect men and women in the same way. In their study to evaluate variables affecting managers' willingness to grant alternative work arrangements, Barham, Gottlieb and Kelloway (2001) found that managers in their sample were most likely to allow female, non-managerial employees who needed more time to care for their children to reduce their working hours. They were least likely to grant more flexible work arrangements to male employees holding management positions to care for older parents. Thus, gendered assumptions and norms held by managers influence the accessibility and, ultimately, the take-up of work/life policies.

The strong influence of gender in management support was also obvious in Blair-Loy and Wharton's (2002) research. Women with children who had male supervisors and worked in predominantly male workgroups were most likely to take up work/life balance policies. This suggests that male managers and colleagues had the power to 'buffer' leave taking employees against unsupportive organisational cultures whereas female managers and colleagues did

not. The authors stated that men generally have greater workplace power than women, but did not explicitly link this empirical fact to feminist concepts of gender as a social structure which subordinates women to men. I will provide such a link in the next chapter.

Both studies confirm the argument of Roberts (2004) that work/life policies are embedded and reinforced in an organisation's culture in ways that reflect and reinforce existing societal norms and, especially, traditional gender roles. She argues that current organisational practice favours individuals conforming to traditional, stereotypical expectations and excludes other groups from being granted flexibility which marginalises rather than normalises alternative work practices. Connell (2005) adds to the argument by maintaining that in their current form corporate work/life policies cement the association of women with child birth and care giving. This supports the point I made earlier that work/life balance policies in their current form reinforce traditional role norms and behaviours that ignore the realities of a changing workforce.

Placing gendered assumptions and the resulting gendered structures at the heart of the work/life balance debate offers a new perspective on the culture and structure of organisations and of employees with care responsibilities within these organisations. There is increasing recognition in the work/life literature of genderd factors which are deeply embedded in organisational cultures and which, actively or passively, undermine work/life policies. This has led to some work/life researchers designing gender sensitive studies. The studies by Lewis (2001) and Rapoport et al. (1996; 2002) are important examples.

Building on the findings of a case study, Lewis (2001) argued that the male model of work is entrenched in assumptions and values which underlie organisational cultures. She proposed that the most fundamental ones are gendered assumptions about the separation of workplace and home and the gendered division of labour which result in the greater valuing of male workers or those without active family commitments. She argued that these gendered assumptions underpin other norms and values which perpetuate androcentric expectations in the workplace including the ideologies of time, i.e. the persistence of a long hours' culture and the perception of visibility in the workplace as a proxy for commitment and productivity. Lewis (2001) argues that the construction of people with care responsibilities as problematic in employment, implies a specific construction of employing

organisations which is based on the assumed separation between work and family domains and reflects traditional gendered division of labour.

Lewis (2001) also supports the idea of a work/life culture, however, her conceptualisation of such a culture differs significantly from that proposed by McDonald et al. (2005). Lewis sees gendered assumptions at the core of work/life issues and the unsupportiveness of organisational cultures, not as just one dimension among many others. In doing so, she departs in an important way from the conceptualisation of work/life policies as 'gender neutral' policies.

The idea that issues of gender and work/life balance are integrally related was also at the heart of the study by Rapoport et al. (Rapoport & Bailyn, 1996; Rapoport et al., 2002). In their project, they tackled important structural issues which have been identified in the work/life balance literature as major barriers to the take-up of work/life balance policies and to the achievement of work/life balance more generally. These included the challenging of the 'ideal worker' norm and women's assumed exclusive responsibility for care, the dissonance between policy and practice (rhetoric versus reality), the unmasking of a long hours culture as poor work habits and time management skills, the questioning of excessive manager control over work conditions, and problematising the operation in continual crisis mode as highly ineffective.

Their approach delivered unique insights into the gendered structures of organisations and the barriers which need to be overcome in order to create workplaces which actively support work/life balance and gender equity. Their emphasis was on work practices, work structures, and work culture. Rapoport et al. (1996) argued that contemporary assumptions about paid work and the 'ideal worker' have little connection to reality and, instead of increasing productivity, undermine innovation and creativity in the workplace and maintain gender inequalities. Their findings revealed that work/life experiences of women and men differ dramatically because of gender roles and societal expectations. Requests for short-term flexibility, usually made by men, were not having severe career implications, whereas requests for long-term flexibility, traditionally made by women, did. They also found that absences for community board and civic meetings were perceived as unproblematic, whereas absences for care-related reasons were perceived as problematic. Again, this dimension is clearly gendered.

They concluded that the ideological and structural separation of work and family along gendered lines unfairly hindered the success of women in the workplace while purporting to support them. At the same time, however, the limited definition of a 'work-family need' failed to legitimate men's care giving concerns while maintaining the myth of their 'ideal worker' status. "The inequity is in the way work-family accommodations are tied to gender even though, on paper at least, work-family benefits are available to all" (Rapoport & Bailyn, 1996, p.17). In the light of these findings, the need for work/life researchers to systematically incorporate a 'gender lens' in their study designs and analyses becomes apparent because work/life conflicts, needs and outcomes are vastly different for women and men.

Yet, challenging established gender norms at an organisational level proved to be difficult. Rapoport et al. (1996) acknowledged that their approach was risky and that it was no surprise that they encountered resistance as the questioning of gendered assumptions and the centrality of work addresses fundamental aspects of identity in most individuals. They put it as follows: "The process of relinking work to family creates resistance because it touches core beliefs about society, success, gender roles, and the place of work and family in our lives" (Rapoport & Bailyn, 1996, p.36). They describe this way of surfacing and constructively reworking the underlying gendered patterns as "one of the surest – though also one of the most challenging – routes to making some of the changes that have so far eluded work-family initiatives" (Rapoport et al., 2002, p.9). While their approach has been taken up by some companies, as illustrated by the case study of a legal services firm investigated by Bailyn and Harrington (2004), there is no evidence that companies have engaged in this promising change agenda in any substantial numbers.

The systematic integration of a conscious 'gender lens' into a major work/life project was very successful in making visible the gendered assumptions, norms and expectations which create work/life conflicts and which prevent employees from taking up work/life policies. Yet, despite these achievements, there are two fundamental issues with their research agenda which limit the explanatory power as well as the potential success of their recommendations: The first limitation refers to the willingness of organisations to participate in a change process which is perceived as 'revolutionary' and which requires intense and sustained intervention in their business operations; the other refers to the willingness of individuals in organisations (and outside of organisations) to engage in the process of reflecting on and

questioning fundamental assumptions which are at the core of their identity and on which they have constructed significant parts of their lives. In a post-structuralist age, most people do not perceive ingrained gendered assumptions as social norms, but as individual choices as Rapoport and Bailyn (2002) point out themselves. I will demonstrate that the current work/life literature reinforces the focus on the individual and the perception that the take-up of work/life policies is a matter of 'personal choice'. The following section will, therefore, deal with the second problem of the work/life balance literature which is reflected in McDonald et al.'s (2005) model: the construction of work/life issues as problems of some individuals, especially of mothers with young children, in a specific organisational context.

2. Individualised issues

There is a strong perception among practitioners, academics, employers and employees that work/life issues are the private concerns of some individuals which need to be addressed on a case-by-case rather than a systemic basis. Gambles et al. (2006, p.4) state: "Many people regard the ways in which work can be harmonised with other parts of life as individual concerns and as a small, rather self-indulgent problem in today's world". Blair-Loy and Wharton (2002, p.814) stated that explanations of the take-up of work/life policies so far had focused on preferences and characteristics of "atomized" individuals rather than on social context and relations in organisations as causal explanations. The conceptual framework by McDonald et al. (2005) suggests that the decision to take up work/life policies rests with the individual who needs to negotiate their preference for such policies in the light of a more or less supportive organisational structure. I demonstrate in this section that the conceptualisation of the take-up of work/life policies as individual decisions and as 'free choices' places the responsibility for that decision firmly on the individual who takes up the policy and the cost that the take-up incurs is carried entirely by those individuals.

The research by Rapoport and Bailyn (2002) illustrated that individuals are largely required to deal with work/life problems on their own. Their study showed that while individual accommodations in the form of work/life policies were important and helped ease work/life conflicts for some individuals, they had little effect on the underlying work culture and, thus, people's ability to integrate paid work and private life. This finding is confirmed by Lewis' (2001) study which found some evidence that work/life policies helped some individual

employees to lower work/life stresses by enhancing their sense of control over work and family demands. However, like Rapoport et al. (2002), Lewis (2001) questioned the ability of work/life policies to bring about structural changes:

> […] whether such policies actually alter organizational cultures, particularly the broader values and assumptions which both determine and reflect what is the socially constructed 'ideal worker', and consequently affect the take-up of initiatives as well as the ways in which those who do make use of them are perceived within the organization. (S. Lewis, 2001, p.23)

Instead she suggested that the lack of take-up, particularly by men and career-oriented women, implied that work/life policies were perceived as enabling employed carers to work at the margins, but did not challenge traditional patterns of work as the norm and ideal.

Yet, it may not only be employees who are currently disadvantaged by the persistence of traditional gender patterns and the marginalisation of employed carers, it may be that employers are also losing out, at least in the long run. Rapoport et al. (2002) stressed the need to question the underlying norms and ideals of current workplace structures in designing their Dual Agenda. They argue that the individualised approach to work/life balance policies is not only detrimental to the individual employee who carries the direct cost of using the policies, but also to the employing company in that it reduces the flexibility of the organisation overall. They state (Rapoport et al., 2002, p.11):

> The important point here is that it is problematic when work-family issues are viewed as individual concerns to be addressed only through flexible work practices, sensitive managers, and individual accommodations. This approach often fails the individuals involved, and it may lead to negative career repercussions. But the most compelling business reason for revising this individualistic approach is that it hampers the company's ability to use work-family issues as a catalyst for creative, core innovations in work practices. Rather than spark change, flexibility at the margins actually undermines flexibility at the core.

Rapoport et al. (2002) conclude that a systemic approach to changing corporate structures and cultures is necessary to bring about more flexibility for the organisation and the employees within it.

Rapoport et al. (1996) argue that such a systemic approach to change has to challenge the gendered concepts of commitment and competence rather than presenting them as gender-neutral standards which individuals can 'choose' to accept or reject. As mentioned before,

their action research project aimed to challenge the gendered assumptions underlying the male definition of, for example, long hours as proxies for commitment and competence via workplace interventions, which facilitated a reflection and out-of-the-box thinking and led to a reconceptualisation of work/life issues as systemic rather than individual issues:

> We reframe work-family issues as concerns that are inherent to the particular corporate culture or work processes – and that, as a result, require systemic solutions - rather than as separate concerns associated with individual employees and requiring individual accommodation. (Rapoport & Bailyn, 1996, p.15)

The current conceptualisation of work/life conflicts as the problems of individuals renders invisible the impact of gendered structures on the constrained options of employed carers and, therefore, blocks out an important set of explanations for the low take-up of work/life policies. Charlesworth (2004b) argues that the current approach to work/life solutions is too narrow and does not address the underlying structural issues that impacted on the decision of an individual to take up work/life policies, such as the gender pay gap, the division of labour in the home, job segregation, organisational cultures, structures and practices. She points out that these social structures are products of the gendered nature of workplaces and society in general. Thus, maintaining the construction of work/life issues as individual problems which can be addressed in individual organisations makes the strong social and cultural factors which influence the decisions of women and men to take up work/life policies invisible.

The criticisms by Charlesworth (2004), in particular, point to the problematic belief that work/life issues can be adequately addressed in an organisational context which underlies much of the work/life literature, including the study by Rapoport et al. (1996; 2002) and the conceptual framework of McDonald et al. (2005). Charlesworth outlined the significant effects of non-organisational factors on the behaviour of individuals with regard to their work/life arrangements. The following section will elaborate on this criticism and unmask the exclusive focus on the organisational level as the only locus of intervention as inadequate.

3. The business case rationale

The framing of work/life balance issues as an exclusively organisational issue has several important limitations. Most importantly, conceptualising work/life policies as a strategic management tool requires compliance with the 'business case', i.e. the need to demonstrate monetary 'bottom line' benefits of work/life policies to an organisation (Zacharias, 2006b). Lewis (2001) pointed out that the 'business case' argument had traditionally focused on the recruitment and retention of middle class employees in times of skills shortages as well as the reduction of absenteeism. It has proven impossible to make a solid 'business case' in terms of employee recruitment, retention, and performance by focussing on individual policies (for the popular policy of 'flexitime' see Christensen & Stains, 1990; Dalton & Mesch, 1990) or even 'bundles' of work/life balance policies (Perry-Smith & Blum, 2000; Baughman, DiNardi, & Holtz-Eakin, 2003; Clifton & Shepard, 2004). These studies were unable to demonstrate direct monetary gains to the corporate bottom line. Cascio (1999) explained that the difficulty of linking figures that are generated at a corporate level, such as measures of productivity and labour efficiency, to individual policy initiatives, such as work/life balance policies, is that the policies under investigation are only one determinant of employee behaviour together with many other potential influences that cannot be completely controlled for. Furthermore, it is often difficult to measure and evaluate the financial impact of work/life policies as the desired results themselves, such as morale, commitment, quality of life and public relations, are hard to quantify and measure (Glass & Estes, 1997; Siegwarth Meyer et al., 2001). The bottom line of these studies is that there is no 'hard evidence' for the much proclaimed 'business case for work/life policies'. On the contrary, there have been recent, non-academic, studies, such as the *What workers want* survey (FDS International, 2007), which question the importance of work/life balance to employees which may undermine efforts to prove a business case. Although these studies are not academic, the willingness of corporate decision makers to accept the anecdotal ambiguous evidence in favour of a business case for work/life balance may well be waning in the light of such studies. Yet, the business case argument remains prominent and has been used extensively by work/life advocates.

Secondly, the business case argument has also been misused by employers and politicians exclusively for their own, and not for mutual, benefits. Lewis (2001) argued that the work/life balance discourse in Britain had been linked to the 'Welfare to Work' debates in keeping with political priorities. Lewis showed that in Britain, the linking of work/life balance and welfare

to work debates were couched in a language of partnership which suggested that the needs of businesses and lone parents for flexibility were complementary. However, she argued that far from being complementary this current approach by the British government reinforced the focus on women and encouraged marginalisation rather than 'mainstreaming' of work/life initiatives. Lewis demonstrated that the 'flexibility' which is created in this situation benefits employers by shifting employment risks and uncertainty to employees. This type of flexibility presents a clear business case to employers in terms of decreased risks and fixed costs, but regularly exacerbates work/life conflicts for employees.

Using work/life balance policies to create employer flexibility may have severe consequences for those most affected by work/life conflicts. Lewis (2001) argued that the shift in risk and uncertainty towards employees created a peripheral/contingent workforce which was often not eligible for work/life policies. Instead, the policies were mostly developed for a core workforce which an organisation wished to retain and motivate at a given point in time. She concluded:

> Insofar as family-friendly or work-family policies focus on women rather than becoming part of central strategic policy, are regarded as perks rather than entitlements and are accorded only to core and not peripheral workers, they remain marginalised policies with limited impact on fundamental organisation values and assumptions. (S. Lewis, 2001, p.22)

Ironically, a 'business case' for work/life policy can be made for those employers who make the policies available to only a select group of their staff. This is likely to increase inequalities between different groups of employees and to reinforce rather than challenge gendered assumptions, such as the 'ideal worker' norm. Lewis' findings confirm the argument by Friedman and Johnson (1997) that companies in Stages 1 and 2, in which work/life initiatives are not perceived as strategic policies, can benefit from implementing these policies by extracting more from their employees, who are able to put more into their jobs because they are less 'conflicted' by their private lives, while proclaiming to be concerned about their work/life balance.

Thirdly, in their current format of being a strategic Human Resources Management tool, work/life policies, by definition, take the current ways of organising workplaces and private lives for granted. I mentioned in my discussion on definitions that family-friendly policies were a modest attempt at addressing only some of the issues relating to paid work and

family life and that they did not intend to substantially alter current practice (Kingston, 1990). Solutions so far have often been superficial, quick fixes and left basic organisational structures, cultures and practices unchallenged (S. Lewis et al., 2003). However, some researchers have worked towards addressing this limitation of corporate work/life policies.

In a significant break with tradition, Rapoport et al. (1996; 2002) set out to address the shortcomings of conventional work/life policies and developed their Dual Agenda as a program for structural workplace change. I have explained earlier that their action research agenda was based on the finding that only the challenging of entrenched organisational norms would make visible the ways in which those norms undermined attempts to bring about greater gender equity in the workplace. Their focus on workplace intervention was deliberate. Rapoport et al. argued that legislative and policy solutions, while necessary, had proven to be insufficient and had caused disillusionment and anger in many people. Thus, with their action research project, they aimed to bring about concrete and realistic changes in the public sphere of paid work. They believed that "in today's global economy, the workplace offers the most potential – and is the ripest – for change" (Rapoport et al., 2002, p.38). There is no documentation of other workplace interventions which were as successful in challenging entrenched workplace norms and practices and in bringing about structural changes than their action research project.

Yet, I indicated earlier that their approach was not without problems. The necessary shift from conceptualising work/life issues as the problems of individual employees to framing them as a problem of organisational cultures and structures, which are based on outdated norms and assumptions, is a challenging one and implies real losses for those people who benefit from existing arrangements. Rapoport et al. (2002, p.168) themselves acknowledge this:

> Change at the level of work practices is difficult because it challenges the importance of work in people's lives. It requires dealing with mind-sets and feelings about commitment and competence that support established ways of working as well as the prominence of paid work in life. Such entrenched beliefs are particularly hard to deal with – even to talk about in work groups – because they touch on men's and women's sense of identity and self-esteem.

While I agree with their observation, it appears to be incomplete. I demonstrate in Chapter Two that the difficulties of challenging and changing deeply internalised norms and beliefs

do not only apply in workplaces, but also in families. It is not only the protection of the male 'ideal worker' norm in organisations which exacerbates work/life conflicts and which needs to be scrutinised, it is also the persistence of the 'good mother' ideology in the home. By focusing exclusively on the workplace, this second dimension of the underlying problems is systematically ignored.

I noted that the success of the Dual Agenda project depended on the willingness of individuals to reflect on and challenge their personal norms, values and beliefs. However, there is no evidence that companies are currently engaging in deep reflection and workplace redesign to any significant extent, with some notable exceptions (Bailyn & Harrington, 2004). This is related to the fact that changing entrenched workplace cultures and structures requires intensive and sustained intervention as the action research project conducted by Rapoport et al. (1996) demonstrated. Many corporate leaders may be unwilling to commit to such a workplace restructure but there is no external authority which currently holds employers accountable for engaging in workplace restructure to facilitate working conditions which are more supportive of work/life balance. I propose that the impossibility of holding employers accountable for providing more supportive workplace conditions can be regard as an important limitation of the current work/life balance agenda with its exclusive focus on organisations to bring about systemic changes.

The decision to engage with the Dual Agenda, or any other change project which aims to bring about sustained structural change in the name of more gender equity and better work/life balance, ultimately rests with the individual company or, even more precisely, with an enlightened corporate leader. Friedman and Johnson (1997), who also worked on the Dual Agenda project, argued that to bring about work redesign in an individual organisation, a number of conditions had to be met:

> It takes an enlightened leader, a compelling business case, and healthy relationships between employees and managers for movement to occur. In individual companies, the evolution of work-family efforts as described here is a highly individualized problem-solving and discovery process. While research can alert decision makers to the major issues and options, and while competitive benchmarking can provide the incentive for broadening work-family effort, in the end it is the business needs of companies that drive the change. (Friedman & Johnson, 1997, p.206)

The problem is that currently, in the US and in Australia, there is no formal requirement or responsibility for corporate leaders to take such action. Rapoport and colleagues asked

rightly: "How can we generate sufficient 'pull' from the workplace to spark really widespread change?" (Rapoport et al., 2002, p.174). The issue with an exclusive focus on workplace change is that even if work/life policies are presented as a social issue which is placed in a gendered context, as was achieved by the action research team around Rapoport, they are still a management tool bound to business case considerations. As such, work/life policies are merely subject to an economic cost-benefit assessment and cannot be enforced by an external authority.

In such a purely economic view, work/life balance is a cost-benefit calculation on the side of employers as well as on the side of employees. When solutions to work/life issues are conceptualised as an exclusively organisational concern, their potential to bring about systemic changes of the work/life interface are severely limited because work/life advocates and the changes they propose are forced to comply with the organisational rules of profit maximisation, i.e. the business case. Even if at times the imperatives for profit maximisation and work redesign for gender equity reasons can be brought in alignment, as has been demonstrated by the Dual Agenda project, it cannot be assumed that this is universally the case. Senior management, supervisors and individual employees may not engage in work/life initiatives because they do not expect sufficient business or personal benefits.

With an exclusive focus on workplace organisations in a liberal capitalist economy, the decision of corporate leaders to reject workplace redesign cannot be criticised and the implementation of the Dual Agenda cannot be enforced. Similarly, it is not possible to criticise individual employees who are refusing to take up work/life options because their decision is seen as purely a matter of personal choice. As Connell (2004, p.18) puts it:

> Within the market framework, gender equity cannot exist as a universal ethical obligation. It can only exist as one of the goals an organisation, group or individual might choose to have. The costs of gender equity are not a tragic necessity; they are items in a cost-benefit calculation which might lead to the organisation, group or individual choosing not to pursue this goal. Indeed we have seen families which decide not to pursue the idea of equal participation in housework and child care, finding the costs (economic or inter-personal) too high. […] This decision is, in the neo-liberal framework, incorrigible; no-one is entitled to criticize it categorically. At best one can criticize the arithmetic, say the sums come out differently.

If work/life issues are conceptualised as issues that are created by organisations, only affect people in organisations and, thus, need to be solved by organisations, the result is the creation of a closed system which causes a stalling of the entire debate. Lewis et al. (2003) have convincingly argued that the work/life balance debate can no longer focus exclusively on the organisational level, but needs to be broadened to a multi-level analysis. I propose that several changes to the concept of work/life balance are necessary to allow for a more comprehensive picture. Firstly, there is a need to scrutinise not only the organisation of workplaces, but also that of families which are currently invisible in much of the work/life balance debate which focuses on the organisational level. Secondly, the debate needs to include those social actors who are powerful enough to create a 'pull' for workplace redesign, above all national governments, but also organised groups within broader society. Rapoport et al. (2002) said of legislative interventions that they are necessary, but insufficient to bring about systemic changes to the work/life interface. Yet, the same is true for workplace intervention: in itself, it is necessary, but not sufficient. A core argument of my PhD is that sustained change needs to occur on three interrelated levels: organisations, governments, and individuals who make up families and society as a whole. Change initiatives that address one level in isolation or even two of the three are unable to bring about systemic change because their efforts will be undermined by actors on the other level(s). I demonstrated in this section that the work/life balance field has limited itself by focusing on the organisational level. The literature presented in the next section suggests that this focus was largely caused by a conceptual framework which took the US context, with its liberal market and welfare state frameworks, largely for granted.

THE INVISIBLE SOCIAL CONTEXT

The projects conducted within the conceptual framework of the Dual Agenda showed that it is possible to challenge the deeply internalised gendered norms which underpin workplace organisations. While work/life balance researchers have shown that workplaces are built around the 'ideal worker' norm in virtually every country that has been studied so far (Pocock (2003) for Australia, Lewis (2001) for the UK; Brandthh and Kvande (2002) for Norway; Gambles et al. (2006) for India, Japan, the Netherlands, Norway, South Africa, the UK and the USA), the exclusive focus on organisational solutions is mainly perpetuated by US research. However, it is shared by researchers in other countries that operate in a liberal welfare state paradigm (a classification developed by Esping-Andersen (1990) which will be

elaborated on in the Introduction to the case studies), notably the UK and Australia. The reluctance by national governments that follow a liberal welfare state paradigm to provide political solutions to work/life issues (Lohkamp-Himmighofen & Dienel, 2000) results in a national work/care regime, to use Pocock's (2005) terminology, which focuses on market solutions provided by private businesses. In contrast, the work/care regime is characterised by a reliance on public services in social-democratic and on families in corporative-conservative welfare states. Most work/life balance research is carried out in countries with liberal welfare state philosophies which take their particular historical, social and political context largely for granted. It seems that the result of the dominance of Anglo-American research in the work/life field has led to an ethnocentric approach which assumes that a market driven approach is the only solution to work/life balance issues. Cross-country comparisons are a fairly recent phenomenon in the work/life balance field (den Dulk, 2001; Thornthwaite, 2002; Gornick & Meyers, 2003; Hill, Yang, Hawkins, & Ferris, 2004; Crompton, Brockmann, & Lyonette, 2005; OECD, 2005; Wharton & Blair-Loy, 2006).

However, once the taken-for-granted context is questioned and unmasked as a (neo-) liberal political philosophy and approach, new perspectives on work/life balance solutions become available. To illustrate this argument I compare two studies on the take-up of work/life policies in Norway (Brandth & Kvande, 2001), which uses the example of parental leave, and the US (Blair-Loy & Wharton, 2002).

The two studies suggest that the causes of work/life conflicts seem to be very similar in Norway and the US. However, the context in which parents negotiate work/life arrangements differs dramatically between the two countries in that the state intervenes as an active agent in Norway, a social-democratic welfare state, but not in the US, a liberal welfare state. In their study investigating the take-up of parental and paternity leave by men, Brandth and Kvande (2001) found that Norwegian parents, similar to their US counterparts, were caught between two increasingly greedy institutions which made demands on their time: the family and workplace organisations. Yet, they point out that the context in which Norwegian parents in couple families negotiate the sharing of time is very different to the context of American parents. In the US, the negotiations take place between the mother, the father and the employer (mother + father + company). In Norway, the welfare state enters these negotiations and "becomes an actor in the time discourse" (Brandth & Kvande, 2001, p.254) which creates the following equation: mother + father + company + welfare state.

Brandth and Kvande state that there is a long tradition of the Norwegian state defining rules, regulations and norms for the behaviour of individuals which are intended to have a levelling and equalising effect on social relations. This intervention of the welfare state into the 'time discourse' and negotiations of Norwegian parents has important implications for the take-up of work/life balance policies as illustrated by Brandth and Kvande (2001) with the example of paternity and parental leave.

The role of the welfare state in the negotiation process around work/life arrangements influences the take-up of work/life policies. Brandth and Kvande (2001) found that welfare state intervention shifts the power balance between women and men in individual couples as well as between parents and their employers. There was a significant increase in the take-up of leave by fathers after the non-transferable 'paternity quota' was introduced in 1993. The percentages of fathers using some share of their entitlement jumped from 2.3 per cent in 1992 to 80 per cent in 1998. Brandth and Kvande argued that these dramatic increases were partly due to the fact that the welfare state had taken over from mothers the work involved in convincing fathers to take leave. In addition, the welfare state intervention buffered parents, and particularly fathers, against their employers' time demands because employers must accept the leave provisions prescribed for fathers by the state: "The father is not on his own negotiating with the employer" (Brandth & Kvande, 2001, p.260). This idea of 'buffering the individual against the employer' is an important one and it is here that the Norwegian and US approaches show vastly different outcomes for employed parents.

The comparison between the two studies shows that while universal legislation 'buffers' employed parents in Norway against negative consequences of leave taking, the work group, and thus their organisational social context, plays a large role in the decision of US parents to take up work/life policies. In their US study on the take-up of work/life policies, Blair-Loy and Wharton (2002) found that using the policies was perceived as a 'countercultural step' by employees and that it required a supervisor and/or co-workers who were strong enough to buffer against the existing culture in order to protect the worker against negative career consequences. Their results showed that women with children who had male supervisors and worked in male-dominated work groups were most likely to take up work/life policies. Haas, Allert and Hwang (2002) found in their study of Swedish fathers, who have similar entitlements to those offered in Norway, that while organisational culture remained important in the fathers' decision to take up parental leave, individual and family

variables explained a much larger share of the variance in leave taking between fathers. In both Nordic countries, the take-up of parental leave of fathers was high. In contrast, Blair-Loy and Wharton found that the US approach led to a situation in which those employees with the highest need of supportive policies, namely employed parents, may be those least likely to be in a position to access them. Thus, the absence of legislation in the US creates inequalities between different groups of parents and undermines corporate efforts towards improved work/life balance.

Brandth and Kvande (2001) found that the welfare state intervention had a strongly normative element and aimed to challenge traditional gender norms. They state that the paternity quota was introduced to change the behaviour of fathers. However, the authors state that the state intervention did not cause objection among fathers, as could have been concluded from Anglo-American literature which focuses on parental choice, but instead corresponded with their preferences and was seen as a 'new opportunity' for greater father involvement. They found that the paternity quota was perceived by their respondents as a 'right', "almost as if they had received a gift they could not refuse" (Brandth & Kvande, 2001, p.260) and the take-up of parental leave had been established as a majority practice. The Norwegian example shows that sustained changes towards increased work/life balance can be brought about by government intervention which explicitly aims to institutionalise more gender egalitarian norms and is, at the same time, based on gender egalitarian norms.

Thus, government intervention resulted in behavioural change that enhanced work/life balance for Norwegian fathers and brought about more gender egalitarian arrangements. The example of the Norwegian legislation shows that the intervention of social-democratic welfare states is critical for achieving work/life balance. For my study, I chose Sweden as the comparison case study because, similar to Norway, it is a country which is categorised as a social-democratic welfare state but was the first country to implement parental leave provisions and, thus, has an even longer tradition of legislation which is based on the goal of gender equality. Because of its pioneering role, Sweden has long been regarded as an international role model in supporting both work/life balance and gender equality (Datta Gupta, Smith, & Verner, 2006).

Not all government intervention, however, has the potential to alter the gendered division of labour between couples. Contrary to the successes of compulsory leave periods, Brandth

and Kvande (2001) demonstrated that behavioural changes towards a more gender egalitarian sharing of paid and unpaid work were not brought about by government policies which allowed for parental choice. In addition to the compulsory 'paternity quota', the Norwegian government introduced a time-account scheme in 1994 which was presented as a 'revolution' in that it was meant to "create a holistic and flexible care scheme which could be optimally adapted to the wishes and needs of individual families" (Brandth & Kvande, 2001, p.256). They explain that the time account scheme allows parents to combine parental benefits with reduced working hours which means that the parental leave period can be stretched over a longer period of time. However, the paternal quota cannot be taken in reduced hours. The decision to access their entitlements in full or part-time rests with the parents.

The introduction of this scheme reflects the 'choice' rhetoric which is also characteristic of work/life debates in the US and other liberal welfare states, including Australia. According to Brandth and Kvande (2001), this supposedly 'ultra-flexible' time account did not repeat the success of the paternity quota largely because it failed to lay down specific normative guidelines for the sharing of parental leave. "It is up to the parents themselves to find their way, and to discover the limits and consequences of flexibility" (Brandth & Kvande, 2001, p.263). They state that instead of a change in fathers' behaviours, a new norm emerged which prescribed that "good mothers take a year's leave" (Brandth & Kvande, 2001, p.261). This shows that if the state does not explicitly define new norms, as happened in the Norwegian case with the paternity quota, but leaves room for ambiguity, as it did with the time account scheme, parents fall back on established social norms which are traditional and aim to maintain the gendered status quo. If in doubt about the normative expectations, it seems that couples resort to a traditional solution in that mothers take long leave and fathers take none.

The comparison of the Norwegian findings to those of the US study is revealing of the great influence the welfare state has on people's ability to achieve work/life balance and to access work/life balance policies. Blair-Loy and Wharton (2002) found that while work/life balance policies in general were perceived as a contested set of policies, some offers were perceived as more contested than others. There were significant differences in the use of 'family-care' policies compared to 'flexibility' policies. The take-up of family-care policies was largely driven by family need and only modestly affected by work group characteristics. In contrast,

the use of flexibility polices was only minimally impacted on by individual characteristics and strongly impacted by work group-level factors. The researchers suggested that the level of ambiguity of the policy may be a powerful explanation of that difference. They proposed that the greater the degree of consensus at the organisational or societal level over who may use a specific policy and for what purposes, the less severe was the impact of local, work group characteristics. They state:

> While work-family policies in general may be ambiguous and contested, family-care policies may be less so than those relating to flexibility. Family-care policies are to be used specifically to care for a dependent or relative. In addition, these policies and their uses have been shaped by federal legislation, such as the Family and Medical Leave Act […] Flexibility policies, on the other hand, have not been the target of national legislation, and their purposes are less clearly defined. (Blair-Loy & Wharton, 2002, p.837)

This confirms the findings by Brandth and Kvande (2001) that the state can act as a strong normative party in establishing parents' rights to access work/life policies. They argued: "Because the state intervenes and establishes a norm for how the paternity quota is to be organised, it also provides the necessary legitimacy for taking leave from work" (Brandth & Kvande, 2001, pp.264/65). This implies that federal legislation can increase the social and organisational consensus over who can legitimately use work/life policies and for what purposes without facing negative career implications. In that sense, legislation can drive change in organisations and society overall and increase the level of take-up by reducing the costs carried by the individual employee.

The lack of clear guidelines provided by the state as a normative third party leaves more room for negotiation not only between mothers and fathers, but also between parents and their employer. In the case of the time account scheme, parents have to negotiate with their employers on an individual basis. Brandth and Kvande (2001) found that this created similar dilemmas for Norwegian fathers as it did for American parents as a father's use of his time account might be interpreted as a signal of low commitment. This effect was in contrast to the paternity quota where the decision is not perceived as the fathers', but as the state's which had decided that fathers had an obligation to be at home for some time with their young children. In that context, the leave taking of fathers who used the paternity quota became an unquestioned assumption and was established as the new norm and majority practice, whereas the time account which was perceived as 'individual choice' did not have the same effect. Brandth and Kvande (2001, p.265) put it like this:

> As long as [take-up] is based on individual choice, it is difficult for the individual employee to set the limits for work and to mark the borders between work and home/leave. In other words, what we find, is that if leave is collectively granted and collectively taken, the risks associated with taking it, are perceived to disappear and fathers are able to act on their wish to be more involved with their children.

This means that if leave taking is perceived by parents and employers as an 'individual choice' which goes against current organisational and familial practice, employees face individual, negative consequences and risk being marginalised. However, if the leave taking is seen as an established social practice which is beyond the immediate control of the individual, the use of the work/life policy does not have the same punishing effects. This finding stresses again the severe limitations implied in framing work/life issues as individual problems.

Moreover, the study highlighted the problems with relying on organisational solutions to bring about work/life balance and gender equity. It is interesting to note that while the employers who were interviewed for the Norwegian study had positive attitudes towards the time-account scheme, no employer actively encouraged employees to use it or any other type of leave (Brandth & Kvande, 2001, p.263). Building on this finding, Brandth and Kvande stressed the importance of government intervention in establishing new social norms:

> This illustrates the importance of state legislation where the welfare state and not the company is the most important agency in both promoting and establishing extensive leave rights for parents. One might say that the state acts as the normative third party for parents in their negotiations with the company.

It is very obvious that the Norwegian state has an important role to play in buffering parents against the demands and expectations of their employers as I will show later for Sweden. Their study demonstrated the normative dimension which the welfare state adds to work/life negotiations within couples and between employers and employees, and the power it has to provide the 'pull' for driving change in societal and organisational norms and practice. It is here that the limitations of the American approach which conceptualises work/life solutions exclusively as an organisational issue become most obvious. As was shown by the action research project of Rapoport et al. (1996; 2002) it was difficult to create the demand for structural workplace change such as the Dual Agenda. I aim to illustrate with my research that legislation and broad social dialogue are needed in addition to

workplace intervention because sufficient 'pull' is unlikely to be generated within organisations themselves. Structural changes may be perceived by corporate leaders as too threatening, too hard, too unattractive and there is no clear line of sight to a convincing business case.

Brandth and Kvande (2001) concluded that in the light of increasingly 'greedy institutions', especially mounting workplace pressures, that the compulsory parts of the leave system represented a better solution to work/life problems of parents. This is mainly because the state intervenes as a social actor which established new norms. Legislation with optional character, such as the time-account scheme, did not have the same power to alter traditional norms and practice. They state: "Options freely to chose [sic] your own model of leave, becomes an option not to choose it" (Brandth & Kvande, 2001, p.264). Optional models do not have the power to affect normative and behavioural changes in organisations and individuals.

CHAPTER CONCLUSION

In this chapter, I integrated three common criticisms towards the work/life debate which focuses on organisational level issues and solutions with regard to work/life balance. I demonstrated that this approach to addressing work/life issues and explaining the low take-up of organisational work/life balance policies is fundamentally limited because of five interrelated reasons: the disagreement about terminology and the lack of conceptual precision in defining work/life balance; the exclusive focus on organisational causes of and solutions to work/life issues which have resulted in an approach that fails to systematically theorise gender, focuses on the individual rather than their context and is bound to business case considerations; and the taking for granted of the liberal welfare state context, especially that of the US, as the social and political context of the work/life balance debate.

I demonstrated that work/life researchers have addressed one or several of these limitations in their research designs. However, to date there is no conceptual framework which addresses all of those limitations. Building on the literature reviewed in this chapter, I maintain that a more comprehensive framework for the work/life fields needs to have the following characteristics:

1. Conceptual clarity as to what constitutes work/life balance;

2. A focus which goes beyond the organisational context in order to

    a. Systematically theorise gender,

    b. Include a structural and cultural analysis of the context in which work/life decisions are made by individuals, and to

    c. Free the debate of its restrictions imposed by the need for a business case;

3. The ability to analyse the social, historical and political context in which work/life decisions take place.

I will propose such a framework in Chapter Three. To be able to address the multiple criticisms, however, it is necessary to integrate insights from researchers who do not focus on the organisational level in order to broaden the conceptual base of the work/life balance debate. This chapter stresses the importance of gender in explaining phenomena related to work/life balance and my study takes an explicitly feminist approach to investigating the low take-up of work/life balance policies and the persistence of work/life conflicts. In the next chapter, I draw on feminist literature in sociology, economics and public policy to enrich the current work/life balance debate and to offer a new perspective on the phenomenon of low take-up of work/life policies which go beyond organisational and individual factors.

CHAPTER TWO

WORK/LIFE BALANCE AND GENDER

In order to craft a new perspective to research work/life balance issues, I propose that it is necessary to integrate the findings by feminist researchers into the current work/life balance debate which, as I have demonstrated in the previous chapter, often focuses only on the organisational level of the problems. Feminist researchers have investigated and discussed the problems of reconciling employment and private life for decades, but not under the term 'work/life balance'. At the same time, work/life balance researchers have largely ignored the findings and theoretical perspective of feminist research and, instead, based their work on a perspective in which business imperatives are central. Feminist literature suggests that there are more complex causes of the conflicts between employment and private life than is currently acknowledged in the work/life balance literature, and that solutions other than organisational policies are necessary to overcome the current conflicts between the two life spheres.

I aim to demonstrate in this chapter that the work/life debate has much to gain from a systematic interpretation of work/life issues in the light of feminist theories and empirical

research, especially the concept of the public/private divide. The public/private divide describes the rigid separation and hierarchical opposition of the public sphere (economy/state) and the private sphere (domestic, conjugal and intimate life) in liberal-patriarchal theory and practice (Pateman, 1989; Lister, 2003). I contend that the empirical and conceptual dilemmas currently faced by work/life balance researchers in explaining the low take-up of work/life balance policies in the face of persistent work/life pressures, can be overcome by incorporating a systematic 'gender lens' into research perspectives, conceptual frameworks and methodologies. At the same time, the rich data generated in work/life balance research has the potential to extend feminist knowledge regarding the changing relationship of the interface between the public and the private, employment and private life, paid and care work.

In the first part of this chapter, I will discuss the interrelationships between the feminist critiques of the public/private divide and the work/life balance debate. In the second part, I will review the literature on gender as a social structure and briefly outline feminist critiques of the social institutions most central to the concept of the public/private divide: the family, the welfare state and the capitalist firm. This review is necessary in order to craft a 'gender lens' which is central to my methodology. I will build on the review of the gender literature in Chapter Three where I develop a gender-sensitive conceptual framework which has the potential to address the current limitations of much of the work/life balance literature I outlined in Chapter One. First, however, I will give a brief definition of the term 'gender' and the key concepts involved in the analysis of gender relations

GENDER: A DEFINITION

It is generally accepted that gender relations are a social construct and, although they are influenced by biological sex, are not determined by it (Connell, 2005). However, there has been significant debate regarding a definition of gender and its distinctions from sex as social categories. Crompton and Lyonette (2005) have shown that there has been a resurgence of essentialist claims, i.e. the belief that social differences between women and men are of an intrinsic nature, which may undermine progress made by feminist activists and researchers.

The term 'sex' is "generally used to refer to the biological characteristics that distinguish males and females" (J. A. Howard & Hollander, 1997, p. 9), such as anatomy, reproductive organs, hormones and chromosomes (Kimmel, 2004). There is a widely held cultural belief that there are two, and only two, sexes (J. A. Howard & Hollander, 1997). This dualistic view of 'sex' forms the basis for definitions of gender.

The term 'gender' is more problematic. Authors who hold an essentialist perspective on gender (e.g. Reik, 1942; Money, 1963; LeVay, 1993; Zucker & Bradley, 1995) use the terms 'sex' and 'gender' interchangeably and perceive gender as being based on a person's sex and, thus, being innate and unchanging. In contrast, theorists who take a social constructionist approach to gender (e.g. Goffman, 1977; Berk, 1985; Connell, 1987; West & Zimmerman, 1987; Bem, 1993; Gherardi, 1995; J. A. Howard & Hollander, 1997; Coltrane, 2000; Connell, 2002) use the term to refer to the culturally and socially determined activities and personality characteristics that are related to biological sex, but are not automatically determined by it. Connell (1987, p.140) illustrates the point:

> Social relations of gender are not determined by biological difference but deal with it; there is a practical engagement rather than a reduction. It is this engagement that defines gender at the social level, demarcating gender-structured practice from other practice. 'Gender' means practice organized in terms of, or in relation to, the reproductive division of people into male and female.

Connell (1987) stresses that gender is in its current practice a system of unequal power relations between women and men that are not static or unanimous. I base my understanding of gender on the work of constructionist theorists and regard it as a social construct which is time and place specific and is constantly being renegotiated.

The dichotomous approach to gender, based on the dichotomous approach to sex, has created several problems for researchers in the field. The main issue is that studies have tended to focus on differences between women and men and often ignored the much greater similarities between them (Maccoby & Jacklin, 1975; e.g. Fairweather, 1976; Rosenberg, 1982; Halpern & LaMay, 2000; Eagly, 2005). Even when differences could be detected, the explanations of these differences often ignored the power relationships between women and men and their position in the social structure as well as the fact that behaviour is specific to situations and that even a laboratory does not comprise a 'neutral'

situation (J. A. Howard & Hollander, 1997, pp. 13-14). Overall, the evidence for significant essential sex differences in ability, intellect and character remains unconvincing.

The focus on sex difference and the resulting dichotomous approach to gender is reflected in the liberal-patriarchal concept of the public/private dichotomy as the bedrock principle for organising social life in Western countries (Pateman, 1989). I demonstrate in this chapter that the feminist critique of the public/private divide and current efforts to bridge work/life conflicts are rooted in the same problems, struggle with the same dilemmas, and have both come to the conclusion that the strict separation between the spheres has to be overcome if gender equality, or work/life balance, are to be achieved. A systematic inclusion of feminist literature into the work/life balance literature provides a strong theoretical grounding for an area of inquiry which, according to McDonald et al. (2005), suffers a lack of theoretical constructs and allows for work/life research to draw on decades of research and theory. My key argument is that the work/life balance project is essentially a feminist one and is fundamentally concerned with gender equality. As such, I propose, it faces many of the barriers and resistance experienced by feminist scholars and activists and can learn from the successes and pitfalls of the feminist project. In the next section, I present literature which shows that the most important insights with regard to the work/life debate can be gained from feminist critiques of the public/private dichotomy.

'IDEAL WORKERS' AND 'GOOD MOTHERS': THE PUBLIC/PRIVATE DICHOTOMY AS THE ROOT CAUSE OF WORK/LIFE CONFLICTS

The concept of the public/private dichotomy, or public/private divide, is a key concept in feminist analysis. "The dichotomy between the private and the public is central to almost two centuries of feminist writing and political struggle; it is, ultimately, what the feminist movement is about" (Pateman, 1989, p.119). Connell (2005) demonstrated that the emergence of the public and private spheres was a historical event, the product of quite recent changes, and well documented in historical studies of the late 18th and early 19th century. Connell showed that these changes were physical as well as ideological and created a division between the home and the workplace which had not existed previously. Connell argued that the division was characterised by two different sets of social logic which governed the public and the private, the structural subordination of the private to the public

and a gendering of the spheres, with the public being conceptualised as the sphere of men and the private as the realm of women. Pateman (1989, p.119) demonstrated that the current division between public and private spheres is fundamental to liberal theory and practice:

> The liberal contrast between private and public is more than a distinction between two kinds of social activities. The public sphere, and the principles that govern it, are seen as separate from, or independent of, the relationship in the private sphere.

Pateman showed that while feminism and liberalism have common roots, in that they both rely on the assumption of individualism as the basis for organising social life, their advocates have often been opposed to each other. She maintains that feminists raise the problem of the patriarchal character of liberalism and she unmasks the concept of the 'citizen' as a fundamentally masculine one. This male model of citizenship has real consequences for the position of women in society.

Feminist critiques of the public/private divide have shown that the separation of women and men into separate spheres disadvantages women because far from being equally important and valued, the male sphere of paid work is considered more important and valued than the female sphere of care work despite the rhetoric to the contrary. Pateman (1989) illustrated that the liberal argument of the 'separate spheres' as different, but equally important and valuable, is often used against structural changes to the public/private dichotomy in an attempt to achieve gender equality. She states that the main feminist criticism of the 'separate spheres' doctrine is that it obscures the social structures of inequality which underlie a patriarchal reality. Pateman argues that the location of men in the public and women in the private world is based on the belief that due to their 'nature' women's proper place is in the domestic sphere and that they are rightly subordinated to men. Because of this underlying belief of innate differences between women and men which justify different social roles, the public/private divide has become a major tool in sustaining gender inequality.

Many work/life researchers are caught in the liberal argument of 'different but equal spheres', and their solutions to work/life conflicts are limited because of this theoretical approach. Gerson's (2004) paper illustrates the dilemma. She presented a convincing case for including the concept of gender as a social institution in work/life balance research and demonstrated the power of gender relations in shaping work/life outcomes. However, she

seems to have remained within the liberal assumption of 'different but equal spheres' and recommended solutions which do not recognise or address the value and power differences between paid and care work. She states:

> Genuine resolutions to new work-family dilemmas depend on providing equal opportunities to integrate work and family life. Policies that protect the rights of parents, offer more flexible workplaces, and create more child-supportive neighbourhoods and communities will ease work-family conflicts for everyone. (Gerson, 2004, p. 172)

With this conclusion, Gerson takes the debate back to where she started, seeing work/life balance issues without the 'gender lens' that incorporates the different value and social status attributed to the public and private spheres or the gendered value and belief systems which underpin the divide.

Most advocates of work/life policies rely on the assumption of separate spheres which remain opposed and gendered, but which are made slightly more compatible by use of workplace policies. Several work/life researchers (e.g. Rapoport et al., 2002; S. Lewis et al., 2003; Pocock, 2003; Charlesworth, 2005; Gambles et al., 2006) have criticised this approach and argued that work/life policies in their current form are merely an adaptation of women's care giving needs. According to those authors, the policies are based on the taken-for-granted assumption of women's responsibility for the private sphere and request only an adaptation of women's needs to existing workplace structures, which are essentially male in character. Organisational work/life policies do not challenge the underlying status quo of the structures of workplaces and families which in their current form are fundamentally unsupportive of work/life balance (S. Lewis, 2001). I aim to show with my study that, in taking the public/private divide largely for granted, work/life balance advocates overlook some fundamental barriers to the take-up of corporate work/life policies. My argument is that these barriers are rooted in the strict divide between the public and the private sphere as well as the gendered archetypes of the 'ideal worker' and the 'good mother' which underpin the two spheres.

The establishment of the two spheres was integrally linked to the ideal types who are attributed to the public and the private realm. Pateman (1989) states that the ideal of the economically dependent housewife, for middle class women, was established in the mid-nineteenth century. She illustrates that while women have never been totally excluded from public life, their access to the public sphere was based on patriarchal beliefs and practices.

For example, Pateman (1989) states that women were allowed into the education system so that they would make better mothers. Both arguments are confirmed by Ferree (1990). She demonstrates that the ideals of 'motherhood' and 'masculinity' which underpin the domestic sphere and the workplace were constructed in the early 19th century. In her view, the ideal roles for women and men were complementary in that the 'self-made man' who was established as the new cultural ideal could only be realised with the support and unpaid labour of mothers and wives. This means that the 'male provider', i.e. the social construction of men as employees who spend a significant portion of the day away from home to earn a wage that could support a non-employed family, is only a phenomenon of the late industrial area and Ferree (1990) concludes that the social association of masculinity with the role of a sole provider is relatively 'new' instead of 'traditional'. In Australia, the ideal of the breadwinner husband and stay-at-home wife was established in the notion of the 'family wage' which was institutionalised by the Harvester judgement (Whitehouse, 2004). This judgement established a female wage significantly lower than the male wage because, it was said, she would be supported first by her father and then her husband. Although such a gendered basic wage is not a reality any more (Pocock & Charlesworth, 2006), the work/life balance literature shows the persistence of 'ideal roles' in contemporary workplaces.

In the interviews conducted in their sample organisations Rapoport et al. (1996) found that gendered beliefs of 'ideal workers' and 'good mothers' exerted strong influences on corporate decision makers and employees. The following quotes illustrate the point:

> The belief that society works best when women stay at home and men go to work creates real problems for people who step out of prescribed gender roles. Women who focus primarily on work, for example, often suffer negative career consequences. (Rapoport & Bailyn, 1996, p.17)

> This struggle to have both a good family life (or personal life) and a good career arises from a dominant societal image of the ideal worker as 'career-primary', the person who is able and willing to put work first and for whom work time is infinitely expandable. (Rapoport & Bailyn, 1996, p.16)

> A number of men told us they do not even try to plead their case because, in reality, flexible arrangements are available only to women. As one technical supervisor noted, 'Men here are seen as wimps by senior management if they talk about their desire to spend time with their families'. (Rapoport & Bailyn, 1996, p.17)

This suggests that work/life policies maintain the ideal types which cause work/life conflicts in the first place. Thus, instead of allowing for an integration of the two spheres,

conventional work/life policies reinforce the divide and the ideal gender archetypes in public and private spheres. This stresses the point I made in the previous chapter that organisational solutions in themselves are unable to bring about systemic changes to the work/life interface. However, in the face of major social changes which have occurred over past decades, the concept and the ensuing reality of the public/private dichotomy has increasingly come under pressure (Lister, 2003). My argument is that the sustained efforts to achieve better work/life balance is one expression of these mounting pressures against the public/private divide along gendered lines.

Feminist researchers have unmasked the idea of separate spheres as theoretically untenable because the two spheres cannot be conceptualised as independent of each other. Building on the work of John Stuart Mill, Pateman (1989) argued that the liberal-patriarchal separation of public and private spheres has become a political problem. This is because the spheres are integrally related, both theoretically and in practice, and that women's equality in the public sphere rests fundamentally on changes to the private sphere. Ferree (1990) came to the same conclusions and demonstrated that waged work and care work in the household form a single, interlocking system. She argued in line with Pateman's criticism of the liberal doctrine of the public/private dichotomy that the gendering of this work/family system creates obstacles to equality between women and men because of "the historically constructed structural and ideological incompatibilities between home and workplace that limit women's efforts to gain equality" (Ferree, 1990, p.129). Work/life researchers have documented the inseparability of the home and the workplace in the lives of working mothers and other employed carers. Hochschild's publications *The second shift* (1989) and *The time bind* (1997) are well-known examples. Thus, the work/life balance literature confirms that the public/private divide is also practically unsustainable.

Yet, the separation of the two spheres is still a reality in contemporary societies. Some work/life researchers refer to the family and the workplace as two 'greedy institutions' which pull individuals in opposite directions and, thus, cause work/life conflicts (Brandth & Kvande, 2001). Once the notion of the 'greedy institutions' is interpreted in the light of the public/private dichotomy it becomes clear that the 'family' and the 'workplace have been designed as separate and opposing institutions by their male creators who adhered to liberal ideologies (Pateman (1989) names John Locke as an example). This suggests that due to the

liberal and patriarchal worldview of their creators, modern families and workplaces were *by design* never intended to be combined, balanced or even integrated.

This denial of the interconnectedness of paid and care work in liberal theory and institutions is in direct contrast to the everyday experiences of employed carers. Pateman (1989) argues that the feminist slogan 'the personal is political' has had a major role in unmasking the ideological character of the liberal public/private doctrine. She concludes that domestic life is at the heart of civil society and does not exist apart or separate from it. Yet, she maintains that the relationship between the public/private dichotomy and women's reality is complex because women's everyday experience confirms the separation between the two spheres while at the same time affirming their integral connections. She states: "The separation of the private and public is both part of our actual lives and an ideological mystification of liberal-patriarchal reality" (Pateman, 1989, p.131). Put differently, this means that while employed carers experience the separation of the two spheres daily, especially in terms of conflicting time demands, the level of work/life conflicts is directly determined by the interplay, i.e. the integral connections, of employment and private life spheres. This disparity between liberal theory and institutions and the lived reality of employed carers is at the heart of contemporary work/life conflicts.

I propose that the emergence and persistence of work/life conflicts experienced as a mass phenomenon by women and some men in virtually all developed countries are the contemporary expression of the political, theoretical and practical problems described by feminist scholars. With the increasing influx of women and particularly mothers into the paid workforce, it has become obvious to individuals who are trying to juggle paid and care work that the spheres of employment and the home are integrally related. I maintain that work/life conflicts arise because of the liberal conceptualisation of the public and the private as separate and opposed spheres which ignores the interrelationships between paid and care work. Lister's (2003) observation about the gendered division of labour *and* time is an important one and well documented in the work/life balance literature (Hochschild, 1997; Jacobs & Gerson, 2004), especially with regard to leave policies (Gornick & Meyers, 2003). Individuals who are trying to achieve a 'balance' between the two spheres may be able to 'bridge' them temporarily, but a permanent reconciliation seems impossible in the current liberal conceptualisation of the public/private dichotomy because of their ideological and

structural separation and opposition which has been institutionalised in current workplaces and families.

The public/private divide along gendered lines acts as a fundamental social division between women and men which sustains gender inequality and needs to be overcome if gender equality is to be achieved. In 1989, Pateman formulated a feminist vision that aimed for the transgression of the public/private dichotomy, which only allows for the conceptualisation of conflict or harmony between the spheres, and proposed the development of a third alternative. She argued that such an alternative would need to allow for a distinction of biological differences without conceptualising women and men as separated or opposed species, but instead as equal creatures. Pateman (1989) argued that a truly general theory needed to integrate private and public spheres instead of setting them against each other.

In 2003, Lister formulated a similar approach in her comprehensive evaluation of the public/private divide as an integral part of developing a feminist theory of citizenship. She argued that current attempts to achieve gender equality by stressing women's differences *from men*, or by asserting women's equality *with men*, both uphold the male standard and establish differences in binary instead of pluralistic terms. She maintained that these either/or choices did not advance gender equality and that a solution needed to be found in a process of critical synthesis of the two approaches. She stated:

> In place of the male standard, masquerading as universalism, citizenship will then embody a differentiated universalism that gives equal status to women and men in their diversity. […] The *rearticulation of this public-private divide* thus provides one of the keys to challenging women's exclusion at the level of both theory and praxis. This involves the disruption of its gendered meaning; recognition of the ways in which it is socially and politically constructed and therefore fluid rather than fixed; and acknowledgement of how in practice each side impacts on the other. (emphasis in original) (Lister, 2003, p.197)

Clearly, feminist researchers have suggested that the way forward is to overcome the separation and opposition of public and private spheres and to redefine the public/private interface so that it takes into account their integral connections. While there seems to be agreement regarding the feminist vision of a rearticulation of the public/private dichotomy, the fundamental problem appears to be how a radical social transformation of the liberal-patriarchal opposition of public and private spheres can be achieved in theory and in practice. Both Pateman (1989) and Ferree (1990) argue that there is a need to change the underlying assumptions as well as the macro and micro structures on which the

public/private divide is built. Pateman stresses that the practical implications of such an approach are that men must share equally the work and responsibilities associated with the private sphere if women are to be equal in all aspects of social life. Ferree (1990, p. 129) concurs:

> Rather than defining the agenda as giving women the opportunity to add more roles and enrich their lives (to the point of exhaustion), the gender perspective views both macro and micro structures of the work-family system as in need of reform.

Ferree's comment of adding roles to women's lives to 'the point of exhaustion' has been well demonstrated in work/life research (Pocock, 2003). In fact, the similarities between the visions formulated by feminist and work/life balance researchers as well as the problems experienced in the process of achieving their vision are striking.

In much the same way as feminist theorists, the action research project by Rapoport et al. (1996; 2002) described in Chapter One aimed to deconstruct the view of organisations and families as opposed institutions and to develop new ways of organising the work/life interface. Rapoport et al. (2002, p.9) assert that challenging the deeply held assumptions about organising workplaces and families along gendered lines is the way forward:

> A central message of this book is that the greatest opportunity for change at this point in time lies in going to those deeper issues of how people perceive men's and women's roles in both the work and domestic spheres. Those perceptions largely determine what is possible in each, in part because they are embedded in established structures, relationships, influence over people's sense of identity and self-esteem.

They argue that the potential outcomes of a deconstruction of the current dichotomies and the integration of paid work and private life can be powerful because they break down the image of the 'ideal' worker and his match the 'ideal' mother as care taker: "With greater integration, the appropriateness of behaviour would no longer be linked to idealized gender images but rather to the requirements of the job and the tasks at hand" (Rapoport & Bailyn, 1996). They define their vision of the Dual Agenda as follows:

> We view gender equity as more than just a women's issue. Men's over-identification with work and occupation as a source of self-esteem, for example, feeds gender inequity just as it does the presumption that women alone are responsible for family and community. In our view, an equitable society is one in which each sex depends for its sense of worth and identity on both the professional and private spheres; where people and families

view the distribution of rewards, opportunities, responsibilities, and constraints as fair; and where social institutions value and support both economic and domestic enterprise. (Rapoport & Bailyn, 1996, p.6)

Rapoport et al. criticise the current approach to work/life balance policies in which paid work and private life are conceptualised as separate life spheres which are inherently in competition with one another. In such a view, they argue, companies have to do something about the private sphere to ensure that their employees will contribute their all to the work for which they are paid. Rapoport et al. (1996) state that 'special policies', which are implemented at the margins of business, do not change the underlying gendered assumptions which cause work/life conflicts in the first place. Thus, in its current form, work/life theory and practice have not managed to challenge existing micro and macro structures or their underlying assumptions but instead facilitated an 'adding on' of employment to care work in women's lives.

Yet, the efforts of feminists to achieve more gender equality and of work/life advocates to achieve improved work/life balance have resulted in very slow changes. Ferree (1990) points to an important barrier to the feminist project of transgressing the public/private divide: The reaction of men to the intended structural changes. She states:

> Because men's jobs and career paths are gendered and built upon a structure of family support that is also gendered, changes for women necessarily also imply changes for men, and men's reactions to change should be understood in these terms. (Ferree, 1990, p.129)

Feminist as well as work/life balance research has demonstrated how little progress has been made in increasing men's participation in housework and active care for children (Coltrane & Ishii-Kuntz, 1992; Bittman, 1999; Sundstroem & Duvander, 2002; Connell, 2005) and it has been suggested that change in the existing gender order may not be in the interest of men. To put it in the words of Messner (1997, pp. 12-13):

> This profeminist belief – that it is in men's interest as human beings to organise in order to undermine their own narrowly defined economic, political, and interpersonal power over women – has not proved to have a very wide appeal to many men.

The lack of involvement of and by men can be seen as one of the crucial issues in the attempt to transgress the public/private divide.

Another sticking point of the change agenda is that, in practice, the gender roles which encourage gender specific behaviour are rarely challenged. As Rapoport et al. (Rapoport & Bailyn, 1996, pp.17-18) point out:

> Although both men and women spoke poignantly about the pain and unfairness of being forced to choose between work and family, we found that most people do not challenge the gender roles that encourage men to put careers first and women to focus first on family. These roles tend to be internalized at very deep, often unconscious levels. One successful young man said he wished to spend more time with his young children but feared that to be a good provider he had to make the same, work-driven choices his father did. And one young woman who had just passed up a promotion remarked how 'unreasonable' it was of her to even think of taking the job.

However, Rapoport et al. (1996) showed that it is possible to challenge the deeply internalised gendered assumptions about organising paid work which was the main focus of their action research project. They explained that with their project they aimed to engage employees in a process of reflection in order to make a link between individual experiences and systemic issues, such as how work is structured, how time is spent, and how employees demonstrate commitment and competence. This reflects Lister's (2003) argument that the division of time and labour is crucial in determining the public/private divide between women and men. The declared aim of the process was to challenge assumptions about 'unchangeable' conditions and encourage out-of-the-box thinking. They state: "These interviews and, indeed, the entire data collection process offered us opportunities to engage and challenge people's assumptions about the roles of men and women and the unspoken rules of the workplace" (Rapoport & Bailyn, 1996, p.29). To achieve such deep reflection and change, the researchers decided to link changes in work culture and practices to a salient business need which a particular group was facing so as to establish a mutual agenda that could potentially benefit both parties. This was the essence of their 'Dual Agenda' which achieved practical changes on an organisational level.

However, the process of bringing about ideological and structural change was not easy. Rapoport et al. (1996) encountered mixed reactions to their intervention:

> Managers' reactions to these challenges varied. Some were intrigued, some skeptical, and some puzzled. However, many recognized the deeply held cultural assumptions that drive this kind of organizational response. As one noted, 'What you are talking about here is really revolutionary and will require re-educating us all'. (Rapoport & Bailyn, 1996, p.21)

> Despite the potential benefits to the company, we found that making the link between work and work-family issues in today's business environment is, to say the least, not easy. Significant organizational barriers — for example, assumptions about what makes a good worker, how productivity is achieved, and how rewards are distributed — militate against such linkage. (Rapoport & Bailyn, 1996, p.19)

Several researchers have demonstrated that the gendered ideologies that underlie the organisation of workplaces and private relationships, i.e. the 'ideal' male, unencumbered worker and the 'good' mother in the home, are the hardest to overcome or even challenge (Crompton & Sanderson, 1990; Hochschild, 1997; Risman, 1998; Haas, Hwang, & Russell, 2000b; Williams, 2000; Bailyn & Harrington, 2004; Gerson, 2004). Without the deep engagement with entrenched norms and ideals, however, as was the explicit focus in the Dual Agenda project, work/life balance policies in their current form will continue to marginalise workers with caring responsibilities and the people most in need of support will continue to carry the greatest burden of their 'choice' to pursue a combination of employment and family life. As long as the focus is on the individual employee struggling to negotiate the interface between paid employment and private life and not on the organisation of workplaces and families, these structural barriers to change will remain invisible.

In addition, there is a practical and a theoretical dimension to changing the work/life interface. Rapoport et al. (1996) argued that theory and abstract reasoning could not accomplish the necessary changes and that action research was needed. While I agree with their approach in principle, I would add that such a major change project needs a solid grounding in theory. I have demonstrated in this section that a systematic integration of feminist theory into the work/life balance debate can provide such grounding. Moreover, interpreting work/life issues from a feminist perspective gives an insight into the magnitude of the challenge towards structural change. It is not only workplace organisations that need to change as proposed by Rapoport et al. (2002). It is the whole 'gender system' that needs to change. It finds an important expression in the work/life interface, but this is certainly not the only dimension of the current gender order.

Feminist theorists have demonstrated how deeply gendered dichotomies have been institutionalised in all aspects of social life. To use Walby's (1990) approach, change not only has to include paid and unpaid work but also the state, male violence, sexuality and culture. Gender has been institutionalised as an almost ubiquitous category of organising social life

(West & Zimmerman, 1987) and although the expression of gendered behaviour might have changed over time, the belief that women and men are ultimately different holds firm in the 21st century. This essentialist belief creates inequalities between women and men. Work/life conflicts and the gendered take-up of work/life policies can be interpreted as one manifestation of those gender inequalities. To understand how gender as a social structure creates male privilege and female disadvantage, it is important to understand how gendered assumptions and beliefs have been ingrained in national cultures, have been translated into social norms and form the basis for gendered behaviours of individuals. This process of institutionalising gender is outlined in the following section.

INSTITUTIONALISING GENDER: THE THREE LENSES OF GENDER

In the following section, I discuss the ways in which gender has been institutionalised in Western societies by using Bem's (1993) structure presented in her book "The lenses of gender": biological essentialism, androcentrism and gender polarisation. I then turn to the three social institutions which are most important in maintaining or transforming the public/private divide: families, workplace organisations and welfare states (Walby, 1990; Folbre, 1994; Crompton, 1999; Pfau-Effinger, 2004). I present literature which shows that these three social institutions interact in complex ways which are time and place specific and which need to be constantly reproduced or renegotiated by social interaction.

Biological essentialism as the accepted 'truth'

Traditionally, sex difference has been regarded as being fundamental, rooted in biological 'facts' and, thus, has legitimately formed the absolute basis of organising gender and sexuality in Western societies. This view of biological essentialism has been expressed and justified by generations of scholars, as Bem (1993) and Connell (1987) demonstrate in their extensive reviews. I have pointed out earlier that while the constructionist approach to gender has been largely accepted in most areas of scholarship (Connell, 2005) there has been a resurgence of essentialist beliefs in some disciplines (Crompton & Lyonette, 2005). Despite its limited explanatory power of the social differences between women and men, the idea that biology, i.e. the 'natural sex difference', determines behaviour and, ultimately, social

structures has been powerful in research, but also in individuals' value and belief systems and has underpinned the fabric of Western societies (e.g. Connell, 1987; Bem, 1993). "It is seen as a knock-out argument by many opponents of feminism" (Connell, 1987, p. 66). Constructionist researchers have tried to challenge essentialist beliefs. Rubin's quote is a compelling illustration of the argument:

> Men and women are, of course, different. But they are not as different as day and night, earth and sky, yin and yang, life and death. In fact, from the standpoint of nature, men and women are closer to each other than either is to anything else – for instance, mountains, kangaroos, or coconut palms. Far from being an expression of natural differences, exclusive gender identity is the suppression of natural similarities. (Rubin, 1975, p. 179-180)

The argument developed by constructionist researchers against biological essentialism is that, while innate differences between women and men cannot be ruled out entirely, such differences that may exist are too weak an explanation for the large structural differentiation in society to distinguish between males and females and to create the gender categories of women and men. As Bem (1993, p. 29) puts it: "[T]he importance of the individual's situational context is massively underestimated, and the importance of the individual's biology is massively overestimated". In contrast to the essentialist standpoint, which maintains that all or most gender difference is caused by biological differences between the sexes, constructionist theorists argue that differences in the behaviour of women and men as well as their assumptions and preferences are socially constructed. Gherardi (1995, p. 64) maintains: "Gendered social experiences, and the system of social inequalities that rests upon them, are the products of history". From a constructionist perspective, gender relations are the result of social interaction and not (only) of biological characteristics.

I propose that the insight that gender relations are a social construct is an important one because if they were in fact biologically determined, changes to the public/private divide and, thus, the work/life interface would be inconceivable. Gender relations are an active process in any society, are time and place specific and need to be understood as such (Crompton, 1999; Pocock, 2005b). Pocock (2005b) argues that the socially and historically constructed gender order is embodied in work/care regimes and that individual action is shaped by the work/care regime as well as the institutions and cultures which underpin and reproduce it.

Bem (1993) demonstrates that the gendered division of labour is based on biological differences between women and men and that this division has been so strongly institutionalised that even the change from a non-technological to a high-tech environment could not eradicate this difference. She argues that, for the first time in history, there are very few jobs that women and men cannot perform equally well, but that several institutions create extreme difficulties for those persons who want to act out both roles, who want to be provider *and* carer: "[T]hese institutions include the lack of pregnancy leave, the absence of day-care-facilities, the mismatch between the school day and the workday, the unavailability of part-time work, and the geographical separation between the workplace and the home" (Bem, 1993, pp. 32-33). This illustrates that the public/private divide is underpinned by essentialist beliefs and that even significant changes to the external environment have not been able to change that. Instead, social institutions which reinforce gender essentialist beliefs maintain the strict separation between the spheres.

The concept of biological essentialism is at the heart of the liberal idea of the public/private divide. The very separation of the home as the private, where reproductive work is undertaken, and workplace organisations as the public that comprises productive and paid work, rests on this concept (Connell, 2004, p. 10). Work/life research shows that while many women (and some men) try to break up the strict separation between work and home, the social institutions themselves remain geared towards this separation (e.g. Acker, 1990; Bem, 1993; Charlesworth, 2004b). Workplaces are still perceived as male arenas where 'special arrangements' need to be made for women's needs (Swanberg, 2004). Hence, the perception of work/life conflict as 'women and children's issues'. At the same time, the contribution of men in the household is far from equal (Bittman et al., 2004; Connell, 2005). I suggested earlier that a redefinition of the work/life interface needs to move away from essentialist beliefs and instead embrace the evidence of the great similarities between women and men. A change in the most fundamental beliefs regarding the abilities and characteristics of women and men is needed to make this transition. However, essentialist beliefs still form the accepted 'truth' in most Western societies and translate into social norms which are fundamentally androcentric in character, as I will demonstrate in the next section.

Androcentrism as the dominant social norm

Androcentrism literally translates into male-centeredness. MacKinnon's (1987, p.36) quote illustrates this concept quite clearly:

> Virtually every quality that distinguishes men from women is […] affirmatively compensated in this society. Men's physiology defines most sports, their needs define auto and health insurance coverage, their socially designed biographies define workplace expectations and successful career patterns, their perspectives and concerns define quality in scholarship, their experiences and obsessions define merit, their objectification of life defines art, their military service defines citizenship, their presence defines family, their inability to get along with each other – their wars and rulership – defines history, their image defines god, and their genitals define sex. For each of their differences from women, what amounts to an affirmative action plan is in effect, otherwise known as the structure and values of American society.

Virtually every category in American society, and in fact all Western societies, has been defined with the male 'ideal' in mind and from a consistently male perspective. Work/life balance literature in the US, Australia and the UK (Rapoport et al., 2002; Pocock, 2003; Gambles et al., 2006) demonstrates that, with regard to workplace expectations, MacKinnon's quote is still as valid as it was when it was first published. Bem (1993, p. 46) defines androcentrism as "the privileging of males, male experience, and the male perspective, which leads to defining woman as the other". She argues that the concept of androcentrism is superior to the concept of patriarchy because it does not only tell who holds the power in a society, but allows researchers to examine how this power is culturally and psychologically reproduced and institutionalised. Bem (1993) explains that the discourse about sexual inequality needs to be reframed from addressing male-female biological differences to how androcentric social institutions transform male-female difference into female disadvantage. At the heart of using the concept of androcentrism as a means of social analysis is the possibility to expose standards, practices, institutions, etc. that are perceived as 'normal', 'natural' or 'neutral', as fundamentally masculine constructs (Bem, 1993). The concept of androcentrism is integral to my research because I want to investigate the impact of gender on social practices, such as the sharing of paid and unpaid work between couples, social policies, especially work/life policies, and social institutions, especially workplaces and welfare state legislation.

Feminist theorists have argued that essentialist beliefs are used to define androcentric social norms which create differences between the sexes and to establish men as the norm. Bem

(1993) demonstrates that various 'tools', such as religion, biology and psychology, have been used in human history to create differences between women and men and to "rationalize and legitimize the sexual status quo" (Bem, 1993, p.6). Risman (1998, p. 25) adds an explosive argument regarding the need to produce gender differences: "Gender is so ubiquitous because unless we see difference, we cannot justify inequality". From this perspective, the efforts that men have put forward in the name of religion or science can be interpreted as serving one main purpose: the creation of difference between the sexes grounded in religious 'belief' or biological 'fact' that is used to justify social realities which sustain androcentrism as the male power base. All this work is necessary to uphold the subordination of women as a group to men as a group because, to use Connell's (1987) words, sex differences are too small to justify the omnipresent social distinctions which are made between women and men. Connell has argued more recently that work/life balance policies have also become a tool to reproduce gender difference. The argument is that work/life policies facilitate an adjustment of working conditions to women's care giving needs. Connell (2005, p.379) argues that contemporary work/life policies "become part of the re-inscription of maternity on women's bodies as the defining feature of womanhood" and, at the same time, reinforce men's ideal worker status.

It appears to be problematic that the very policies which were designed to facilitate better work/life balance, i.e. the reconciliation of paid and care work, in fact support their separation and the gendered stereotypes which underpin the concept of the separate spheres. If the goal of work/life balance initiatives were the transgression of the public/private divide and a redefinition of the work/life interface, the roles of women and men would need to become more similar. Both women and men would need to participate in employment and care work to a significant extent. However, current work/life policies are largely geared towards individual women and do not alter the gendered standards which underpin workplaces and families. If social norms remain geared towards producing gender difference, women and men who want to achieve better work/life balance are forced to behave in ways which are non-conformative with dominant norms. This creates barriers to take up of work/life policies, especially for men, as has been demonstrated by Michael Bittman and colleagues (Bittman et al., 2004) as well as by Rapoport et al. (1996; 2002) in the Dual Agenda project. In contrast, when social norms are broadened to include activities previously assigned to the other sex as legitimate and desired behaviours of men and women, individuals adjust their behaviour to conform to the new norms. In practice this

means that women become full members of the labour force and men actively participate in care work. The latter effect was demonstrated by Brandth and Kvande (2001) in their evaluation of the Norwegian parental leave reforms. The importance of dominant gender norms and their level of androcentrism appear to be crucial in explaining the take-up of work/life policies and the ability of individuals in different countries to achieve better work/life balance.

However, it is not only important to investigate the gender norms with regard to employment and care work but also to investigate the work which is involved in 'producing gender difference' at an individual level which is implicated in the concept of gender polarisation.

Gender polarisation

As I have outlined above, feminist authors argue that the categories of 'masculinity' and 'feminity' are socially constructed and based on social norms and beliefs. Yet, norms and beliefs in themselves cannot maintain the sophisticated gender order of male privilege. As Ferree (1990, p.124) puts it:

> The fundamental question is how the illusion of a gender dichotomy is constructed and maintained in the face of between-sex similarity and with-sex difference, and the answer is found in the constant and contentious process of en-gendering behavior as separate and unequal.

It is here that the idea of gender polarisation is critically important.

Gender polarisation incorporates an individual as well as a social perspective. It is defined by Bem as the "ubiquitous organisation of social life around the distinction between male and female" (1993, p. 80). The idea that social power shapes everyday individual practice has been transformed by feminist scholars into the concept of 'doing gender'. I have mentioned earlier that constructionist researchers define gender as a social construct, as an activity, 'doing gender', rather than a static condition, 'having gender' (Connell, 1987). West and Zimmerman (1987) were among the first to spell out the idea of 'doing gender' and propose a "distinctively sociological […] understanding of gender as a routine, methodical, and recurring accomplishment. […] Doing gender involves a complex of socially guided

perceptual, interactional, and micropolitical activities that cast particular pursuits as expressions of masculine and feminine 'natures'" (West & Zimmerman, 1987, p. 126). Put more simply, they argue that 'doing gender' means producing differences between the two sexes that are not natural, essential or biological but social.

I propose that it is important to understand the processes of 'doing gender' in order to understand the persistent work/life conflicts experienced by individuals in many Western societies and the low take-up of work/life policies because it is the actions of women and men on a day-to-day level which maintain or challenge stereotypical norms and beliefs of 'good mothers' and 'ideal worker' men. Feminist researchers have demonstrated that it is the compliance of individual women and men with gendered expectations in everyday situations which reproduce the existing gender order and, thus, acts to reinforce the 'essentialness' and 'naturalness' of gender. Connell (1987) argued that social power is present in our most intimate, everyday actions. It operates close up, as personal and real practice, not as a distant structure that is imposed on the individual. Moreover, Ferree (1990) maintained that 'doing gender' becomes a lifelong dialectic of engendering identity and that the only way of altering this perpetual process is to separate the gender given to specific roles from the sex of the individuals who occupy them. Howard and Hollander (1997) proposed that in order to separate the gender of a role from the gender of the occupant of that role, it was necessary to unpack the taken-for-granted assumptions about gender, to reveal how much of the current scientific discourse naturalises inequalities and perpetuates gender differences and to show how the unquestioned values about gender affect how people see the world and act accordingly.

It has already been argued that the 'unpacking' of taken-for-granted assumptions is particularly necessary to advance the work/life balance debate (Pitt-Catsouphes & Christensen, 2004). I add that unless the struggle for work/life balance is taken out of the restrictive organisational context and put into a social context which is sensitive to gender as a social structure, the work/life balance debate will be unable to advance beyond its current achievements. That is, more comprehensive explanations of persistent work/life conflicts and the development of more effective solutions will be impossible unless researchers include levels of analysis in addition to the workplace level and investigate work/life issues through a conscious gender lens.

GENDERED STRUCTURES AND AGENTS IN THE REPRODUCTION OF GENDER

The discussion of the three lenses of gender in the form of gendered assumptions and beliefs, gendered norms and gender-specific behaviour has illustrated the extent to which the public/private divide is deeply ingrained in Western societies. The distinction of public and private spheres rests on the assumption of biological essentialism and the belief that men and women are fundamentally different creatures because of their biological differences. The two spheres are not only separate, but in androcentric societies there is also a power difference between them. Because men have traditionally been perceived as inherently superior to women the private sphere has been subordinated to the public. Finally, the gender-specific behaviours of women and men reflect the gender differentiated beliefs and norms of androcentric societies. At the same time, the conformity of women and men with these beliefs and norms reinforces and perpetuates them. Giddens (2001) has theorised the interrelationships between social structures and individual agency in his concept of the 'duality of structure' which I will briefly outline because it is central to my study.

Giddens has proposed the concept of the 'duality of structure' which maintains that structure and action, or agency, are integrally related to each other. He asks: "What is a 'society' […] if it is not the composite of many individual actions?" (Giddens, 2001, pp.667-68). Giddens maintains that societies only have structures as long as they are reproduced by individuals who behave in regular and predictable ways, i.e. structure assumes actions. At the same time, action is only possible because individuals have a vast knowledge of socially structured knowledge, i.e. all social actions assume the existence of social structure. This means that if social structures change, individuals are likely to adapt their behaviour gradually. At the same time, the 'duality of structure' implies that once a majority of individuals stop acting within established social structures, these structures will eventually dissolve.

Connell (1987) explains that while social structures shape the actions of individuals, they are at the same time shaped by these actions. Crompton (1999) uses the term 'analytical dualism' to refer to a theoretical position which acknowledges the impact of social structures on individual behaviour and, simultaneously, recognises the capacity of individuals to change these structures. Howard and Hollander (1997) argue that social institutions create the

context for 'doing gender' and define constraints to actions, in the form of social structures, as well as power relations present in the situation.

Applied to work/life balance issues, the 'duality of structure' implies that rather than having 'free choice' over their work/life arrangements and choosing the arrangement which best reflects their preferences, as argued by those who follow Hakim's preference theory (Hakim, 1995, 2004a, 2004b), women and men face a set of work/life options which is shaped by their social context. While Hakim maintains that women 'choose' a certain work/life arrangement as a matter of personal preference, the literature reviewed in this chapter so far suggests that social context matters in the decision making process of crafting work/life arrangements and that this context is very different for women and men. The 'choice' of work/life arrangement then needs to be regarded as a decision for one work/life option which is available and is not necessarily a reflection of the preferences of the individual or the couple. I will demonstrate in my analysis of the case studies that work/life options available to individual employees can vary significantly by country, gender and labour market status.

Individual women and men may actually have only limited agency in their decisions regarding employment and private life arrangements. I follow Howard and Hollander (1997) who suggest that, in addition to the social constructionist approach, a structural approach to gender is necessary to analyse the gendered distribution of resources in social institutions (e.g. families and organisations) and to demonstrate how the distribution of resources shapes gendered behaviours. In combining the social constructionist and structural approaches to gender, Howard and Hollander propose that it is possible to analyse how women and men enact gender in a specific situation. At the same time, the context of the situation which shapes the behaviour of individuals can be taken into account. Howard and Hollander contend that this context is created by structural constraints and possibilities as well as the power relations between the actors. Risman (1998) argues that to be able to break the cycle of reinforcing traditional gender roles in organisations and families, research needs to focus on how social institutions rather than individual choice shape actual behaviour. I will introduce workplace organisations and the welfare state as critical social institutions with regard to work/life balance in the final section of this chapter.

GENDERED SOCIAL INSTITUTIONS

Feminist researchers have evaluated the extent to which social institutions are gendered and the situations under which changes are possible. In the two following sections, I outline the key feminist insights into workplace organisations and the state as fundamentally gendered social institutions which are critical in 'en-gendering' social behaviour.

The gendered organisation

Androcentrism and the resulting perspective of male as 'neutral' and the norm have had a significant impact on work organisations, their design and analysis. The term of the 'gendered organisation' was coined by Acker (1990) who unmasked the ostensibly gender-neutral workplace as essentially masculine enterprises. She maintains that rather than being gender neutral, organisations are the very place where social structures that sustain gender inequities, such as segregation of the labour market, unequal pay and gendered cultural images and identities are created. She offers the following explanation for the common perception of the gender-neutral organisation: "Since men in organisations take their behaviour and perspectives to represent the human, organisational structures and processes are theorised as gender neutral" (Acker, 1990, p. 142). Or as Howard and Hollander (1997, p. 23) put it: "Privilege is often invisible to those who enjoy it, because to them it is simply the normal state of affairs". Rephrasing this statement into a metaphor, it is the 'fish which is the last to see the water' (source unknown). This suggests that instead of being gender neutral, the notion of the 'ideal worker' is, in fact, a fundamentally male concept.

The concept of the gendered organisation is important for the investigation of work/life issues because workplaces have been identified as key areas in which negotiations about employment and private life play out (Rapoport et al., 2002; HREOC, 2005). The key argument in Acker's work was that a 'job' is a fundamentally gendered construct because it implicitly relies on the gender-based division of labour and the separation between public and private spheres and is based on the notion of the 'ideal worker'. Commitments outside of employment were not incorporated into job descriptions. Thus, the potential incumbents of jobs were thought of as being male because women were seen as having too many outside commitments to be suitable for filling a job, or at least the good ones: "Those who are

committed to paid employment are 'naturally' more suited to responsibility and authority; those who must divide their commitments are in the lower ranks" (Acker, 1990, pp. 149-150). Furthermore, Acker demonstrated that the structure and hours of work were such that 'jobs' were most suited to those workers who had a partner to look after the private sphere, i.e. males with wives at home. Thus, gendered jobs and organisations are major tools in maintaining the public/private divide and in creating work/life conflicts.

Two studies in the work/life field have used Acker's work (Bailyn & Harrington, 2004; Swanberg, 2004) but produced significantly different outcomes. Using the concept of the gendered organisation as a starting point, Bailyn and Harrington (2004) were able to demonstrate that employer commitment to structural changes can be achieved when business imperatives, e.g. the need for a qualified workforce, is stronger than ideological attachment to gendered norms and beliefs. Their case study of a legal services firm showed that the attachment to the belief in the ideal, full-time, unencumbered worker who is totally devoted to the job can be overtaken by the force of necessity. Because of the nature of the work, no other workforce was available to management of the organisation in Bailyn and Harrington's research except mothers with family responsibilities. The limited labour supply became the driver for change and made work redesign possible.

In contrast, other applications of Acker's approach to the study of organisations have fallen short of potential. A study conducted by Swanberg (2004) is one such example. She used a municipal government as a sample organisation and aimed to illustrate how gendered workplace assumptions negatively impacted on employees and their achievement of work/life balance. She investigated and challenged the gendered nature of organisational policies, cultures and "certain work structures and practices" (Swanberg, 2004, p.18), but despite the claims to ground her theoretical model in Acker's work, she failed to question the fundamentally gendered nature of workplaces, hierarchies and organisations. While she discussed some structural problems in her analysis, in her conclusion Swanberg falls back on an essentialist perspective of gender roles that, in her view, justifies an adaptation of workplaces to the particular needs of women: "While organisations cannot possibly make special arrangements for all employees' varying needs, they can institute policies that take into account women's unique needs and the demands of employees' complex lives" (Swanberg, 2004, p. 24). In doing so, she does not take into consideration that organisations

are social institutions which are fundamentally masculine in conceptualisation and practice as was argued by Acker (1990).

Writing at the same time as Acker (1990) with a very similar message was Ferree (1990). She proposed that because of the masculine character of paid work, women's entry into the paid labour force could not be a panacea for feminist struggles. Ferree stated (1990, p.128): "Women who enter a conventionally male-defined careers [sic] do 'need a wife', as the complaint goes, because the expectations built into the structure of the job and the workplace take such a full-time support system for granted". This phenomenon has been discussed in the women in management literature (e.g. Marshall, 1984, 1995; Forster & Still, 2002) and will not be elaborated on here in any great depth. However, the point I want to make is that the male organisation and the 'ideal worker' norm depend fundamentally on the public/private divide and the existence of a homemaker in the private sphere. Ferree (1990) maintained that women's careers could only succeed when both spouses are 'husbands' and that a sharing of domestic responsibilities was best achieved when neither spouse placed highest priority on their paid work. She pointed out that carrying responsibility for housework had measurable occupational costs for men and women of all classes and that the need to advocate a 'mommy track' in corporations or 'special protection' was rooted in the recognition of the gendered nature of the occupational system. This request for special protection is illustrated by Swanberg's study. However, Ferree concluded that such efforts were counterproductive to achieving gender equality because "these authors plead for accommodation to it [the occupational system], rather than transformation" (Ferree, 1990, p.128). Again, this stresses my argument that work/life policies in their current format are unable to bring about changes in workplace structures or a transformation of the work/life interface and, thus, maintain rather than reduce work/life conflicts. The way forward seems to be the redefinition of social standards.

The point implied in both Ferree's (1990) and Acker's work (1990) is that trying to change women's situations to enable them to 'live up' to the male standard is a doomed endeavour. Sustainable change in the public/private interface has to include the definition of new standards both in employment and in the home that allow women and men to be full members in both spheres of social activity because the public and the private are complementary rather than independent from each other (Pateman, 1989; Ferree, 1990). Such a redefinition has to be modelled on a carer-worker ideal (Lister, 2003) rather than an

ideal of excessive work involvement which leaves no room for a meaningful life outside of paid employment, and disqualifies both men and women aspiring to such a life from holding a meaningful job.

Feminist authors have not only argued that workplace organisations, the capitalist firm in the terminology of feminist economists (Folbre, 1994e.g.), are inherently gendered but that there is a need to analyse the interrelationships between capitalism and patriarchy as wider social systems. Patriarchy has been defined as "a system of interrelated social structures through which men exploit women" (Walby, 1990, p.51). Building on a review of the early work on patriarchy and capitalism, especially that of Hartmann (1979), Walby (1990) argued that the two concepts were theoretically distinctive systems of exploitation. She argued that the two concepts were highly interrelated but that, instead of the great harmony between capitalism and patriarchy assumed by Hartmann (1981), Walby demonstrated that the two structures have been in significant conflict and that their relationship has changed over time as part of a continuous struggle. She argued that paid work was of central importance in determining the nature of contemporary gender relations. Feminist literature on citizenship confirms this evaluation (Pateman, 1989; Lister, 2003) as does the continuing struggle of redefining the work/life interface.

Arguably the gloomiest, yet insightful, analysis of the interrelationship between capitalism and patriarchy is put forward by Mies and Bennholdt-Thomsen (1999). They argued that patriarchy and capitalism were intrinsically linked systems and created a capitalist patriarchal economy. According to Mies and Bennholdt-Thomsen, this economy is characterised by the male proletarian wage worker and his necessary complement, the 'housewifed' woman. They define housewifeisation as "the *wageless reproduction* of labour power [and] also the *cheapest kind of production work*, mainly done by women in homeworking or similar work relations" (Mies & Bennholdt-Thomsen, 1999, p.34; emphasis in the original). They argued that the 'housewifed' woman was essential to the capitalist system of production which aimed for permanent economic growth and capital accumulation.

There are at least three points in their argument which are important for the work/life balance debate. Firstly, researchers have widely documented the phenomenon of 'housewifeised' work, and termed it the 'mommy track' (e.g. Schwartz, 1996), which is largely filled by women and, especially, by employed mothers. These jobs are not

underpinned by 'ideal' worker expectations and, consequently, do not receive the same level of reward, protection and opportunity of advancement as 'ideal worker' jobs do, i.e. permanent and full-time jobs. This flexibilisation or housewifeisation of labour has had massive impacts on national economies as well as the global economy. Mies and Bennholdt-Thomsen (1999) showed that those countries which have apparently successfully dealt with rising unemployment levels, the USA, Denmark and the Netherlands and, I might add, Australia have created housewifeised jobs: "badly paid, part-time, casual, without the protection of labour laws, non-unionised, short-term, atomised" (Mies & Bennholdt-Thomsen, 1999, p.47). These economies are characterised by deregulated labour markets and large service sectors which to a large extent, in the words of Mies and Bennholt-Thomson (1999, p.47), are "nothing but commodified housework".

Secondly, it is absolutely crucial to capital that women maintain the responsibility for unpaid work. If they did manage to 'outsource' this responsibility to the market, their partners or the state, they would be able to compete on 'ideal worker' terms which is not in the interest of capital if it prefers 'housewifeised' labour. Mies and Bennholdt-Thomsen (1999) point out that housewifeisation of labour seemed to be the optimal strategy of capital because the housewife was the ideal labour force at a time where labour needed to become more 'flexible'. The male wage worker "does too little and knows too little" (von Werlhoff in Mies & Bennholdt-Thomsen, 1999, p.47), was too expensive and too well protected to continue the capitalist expansion. According to Mies and Bennholdt-Thomsen, the 'flexibilisation' of labour has to be seen as the main method to undermine established and protected core labour standards of industrialised countries and, consequently, some men's work has also been 'housewifed' "[b]ecause in capital's strategy the white, male wage worker is not the image of the future of all workers" (Mies & Bennholdt-Thomsen, 1999). This observation is important and needs to be seen as an indicator of Walby's (1990) thesis of conflicting interests between capitalism and patriarchy rather than harmonious interests, as assumed by Mies and Bennholdt-Thomsen. The 'housewifeisation' of men implies the loss of the 'breadwinner' status which used to secure male status and privilege over women. Universal 'housewifeisation' is, therefore, not in the interests of those who want to maintain patriarchal gender relations, i.e. a male provider with a female dependent, but it is in the interest of sustaining capitalism due to cost savings and the flexibilisation of labour.

This leads me to my third point in that I disagree with Mies and Bennholdt-Thomsen (1999) who argue that the white, male wage worker is no longer preferred by the capitalist system. I propose that, in contrast, it remains vitally important to mobilise a select group of core employees to place top priority on their employment and to willingly offer unlimited time to their jobs. It is not only the unpaid work women perform in the home which is part of the 'hidden' economy, it is also the significant unpaid overtime which is expected from those employees who are on career trajectories. The ideal worker norm is crucial to exclude workers with multiple commitments from the 'good jobs' and to price the 'good jobs' over the 'housewifeised' jobs. The result of increasing housewifeisation is not a universal race to the bottom, as described by Mies and Bennholdt-Thomsen, but instead the creation of a two-tier labour market with 'ideal' and 'non-ideal' workers in two different categories of jobs which are distinguished by their level of rewards, protection, status and opportunity. In the light of Mies and Bennholdt-Thomsen's analysis, the attempt to redefine the work/life interface to achieve more gender egalitarian and integrated arrangements seems even more illusive. It is not only androcentric gender regimes which prevent such change, it is also capitalist interests which aim to maintain women's care responsibilities in order to achieve a supply of cheap, flexible, 'housewifeised' labour. A controversially debated question in feminist research has been whether the welfare state can mediate against these effects which sustains women's secondary role in the labour market and, as a consequence, gender inequalities.

Welfare states as mediators?

The influence of welfare state legislation and policy on gender relations has been researched and theorised by feminist analysts over the past decades. Sainsbury (1999) in her summary of feminist comparative welfare state analysis, points out that there have been three main advancements with regard to the dynamics between gender and welfare state policies: Firstly, there is evidence of significant diversity in welfare state policy outcomes across national contexts. Secondly, the principles of entitlement to social benefits have been identified as being decisive in determining the capacity of policies to reinforce or transform existing gender relations. Finally, analytical frameworks have been developed to include gender into comparative welfare state analysis. These analytical frameworks have either systematically reworked mainstream theoretical frameworks to include gender, especially Esping-

Anderson's categorisation of capitalist welfare states (Orloff, 1996), or have developed new frameworks independent of the existing mainstream ones because they found existing mainstream models as fundamentally lacking (J. Lewis, 1992; Sainsbury, 1994). Sainsbury (1999) argues that the two approaches have largely complemented each other.

Irrespective of the different frameworks feminist analysts have used, they show that mainstream comparative welfare state analysis is fundamentally deficient in its explanatory power of the relationship between the market, the state and the family because mainstream frameworks do not explicitly theorise gender, the gendered division of labour within the home and between the state, the market and the home, and have not taken into consideration that most of their key concepts, such as the 'citizen' and the 'worker', are fundamentally male concepts (O'Connor, 1993; Orloff, 1993). Feminist analysts argue that public policies, e.g. parental leave, as well as their absence shape the gendered division of labour between a couple and society overall by structuring women's access to paid work and their employment opportunities and, hence, female employment patterns (Sainsbury, 1999). Importantly, feminist research shows that the provision of public policies creates alternatives for women who, in the presence of policies, can 'choose' to combine paid and family work or leave the labour market for a period of time. In the absence of public policies there is no 'choice' for women in the first place. This finding is important for my study and work/life research more generally because work/life solutions so far have focused on corporate policies and, consequently, have largely ignored the support or otherwise provided by welfare state policies.

The ways in which the welfare state mediates between the market and the family are, thus, significant. But the importance of the welfare state as a social force has so far not entered the work/life debate to any significant extent. Esping-Andersen (1990) recognised that the provision of family-responsive services by the welfare state created options for women which had the potential to transform the relations between the state and the family. He pointed out that in liberal welfare states, such as Australia, concerns of gender were less important than the "sanctity of the market" (Esping-Andersen, 1990, p.28) while social-democratic welfare states tried to 'socialise' the costs of families and children to society overall and encouraged mothers to enter the paid workforce by providing care services and parental leave. I have proposed in the previous chapter that one major reason for this omission may be the concentration of work/life research in liberal welfare state regimes,

particularly in the US, the UK and Australia, where state provisions of work/life policies are lowest and the focus on organisational solutions is strongest. Work/life research in the Nordic countries and the few comparative studies which have been conducted suggest that public provisions of work/life policies are an important influence for the take-up of the policies. I will outline the major findings from such comparative work in the following section.

The influence of state intervention on gender attitudes and behaviour

I demonstrated in the previous chapter with the comparison of the studies by Brandth and Kvande (2001) in Norway and Blair-Loy and Wharton (2002) in the US that welfare state intervention exerts a strong influence on the behaviours of individuals in terms of the take-up of work/life policies. However, state intervention (or the lack thereof) in the structuring of the work/life interface also influences the attitudes of individuals in a particular country with regard to gender equality and the roles of women and men in society. Rapoport et al. (1996; 2002) argued that it was necessary to change the attitudes and assumptions underlying the current structures of workplaces and families. Thus, it is of crucial importance to understand the extent to which government intervention can drive such attitudinal change which might ultimately lead to a change in the work/life interface.

Several cross-national studies have been conducted in recent years that are able to shed some light on the capacity of the welfare state to change attitudes related to gendered social relations. In an early study, Crompton and Le Feuvre (2000) found in their comparison of the French and British approaches to equal employment opportunity (EEO) policies that the existence and the public discussion of EEO policies in Britain seemed to be reflected in the attitudes of the British respondents towards gender equality in that they were aware of the fact that gender inequalities were a reality in the workplace. In contrast, the lack of EEO policies in France and the corresponding lack of public debate of the issues around gender inequality in the workplace seemed to result in an unawareness of gender inequality among the French respondents which was also reflected in the attitudes expressed. They concluded that the nature of the EEO policies in France and Britain influenced national attitudes towards gender and gender equality.

Such qualitative findings have recently been confirmed in quantitative studies, most notably those conducted by Sjoberg (2004) and Ferrarini (2006). Based on data from the International Social Survey Programme (ISSP), Sjoberg (2004) investigated the influence of family policy institutions on the gender-role attitudes in 13 industrialised countries. He found that family policy institutions in a particular country affect both the options available to individuals in organising their private lives and the ways in which they perceive the 'proper' roles of women and men. In countries in which family policy supports dual-earner families, there are significantly more positive attitudes towards women's employment than in countries which support one-earner families. Sjoberg points out that while his findings significantly contribute to the understanding of how cross-national variations in family policy institutions influence differences in gender-role attitudes, family policies are not the only explanation for attitudinal difference.

Sjoberg's findings were confirmed by Ferrarini who compared the family policy institutions of 18 countries and concluded that both the politics of family support as well as the specific family policy institutions that were created in the different countries mattered with regard to the agency, behaviour, orientations and living conditions of parents. He states (Ferrarini, 2006, p.144):

> The analyses of family policy institutions show that cross-national differences by the end of the twentieth century were substantial, and that institutional structures of family policy benefits entail different choice capacities of parents both regarding mothers' participation in paid work and fathers' involvement in care work.

Importantly, researchers have not only demonstrated the impact of public policy on attitudes but there are several studies on parental leave provisions which have shown that the behaviour of individuals closely aligns with the design of parental leave legislation. Bird (2004) studied three different cohorts of German women and found that they took the leave period 'recommended' to them by the design of the legislation, i.e. most of the women who had six months of leave available to them took six months whereas many women who had access to three years of leave took the full three years. As described earlier, Brandth and Kvande (2001) have shown that, in Norway, the compulsory paternity quota increased the take-up of parental leave by men whereas the optional time account scheme did not. In addition, Ekberg, Eriksson and Friebel (2005) found that the take-up of leave days of fathers increased with the introduction of the fathers' quota in Sweden.

Those studies suggest that work/life balance researchers would benefit from considering the policy framework provided by national governments which exists in addition to organisational policy frameworks. This is why the conceptual framework I propose features welfare state policies as an important level of analysis of the work/life interface.

It goes without saying that I am not the first researcher to propose a conceptual framework which seeks to explain the interrelationships between the family, the welfare state and the market. However, none of the existing frameworks addresses these interrelationships from a work/life perspective. I am going to outline contemporary feminist frameworks in the next chapter and will integrate their insights with Habermas' model of societal evolution to create my own conceptual framework which will guide the analysis in this thesis. Before this, however, I will summarise the key insights gained from the feminist literature and will use them to demonstrate that the idea of work/life balance has a radical core and, therefore, can become a lever for the ideological and practical redefinition of the public/private divide.

MY GENDER LENS

I proceed from the assumption that families, workplace organisations and the state are inherently gendered and that they are sites where gendered relations are created and reproduced (Acker, 1990; Sainsbury, 1994). However, gender can be acted out in a way that maintains differences and gender inequality or in such a way that challenges differences and gender inequality (Gherardi, 1995). Thus, while they are inherently gendered, social institutions are not inherently oppressive (Britton, 2000; Siim, 2005). They are also not monolithic and static, but sites of ongoing struggle of different interests and between different groups of people (Lister, 2003). The outcome of such struggles is that gender relations are constantly being contested and renegotiated (Gherardi, 1995), but at the same time build on previous gender patterns (Walby, 1990). The important point is that social institutions are social constructs and, thus, changeable at least in theory. Although they are gendered they do not necessarily have to be masculine; but social institutions in androcentric societies are usually masculine and uphold and reproduce male advantage and female disadvantage.

Projected onto the work/life balance debate this means that workplaces do not have to be built on 'ideal worker' norms, but in the current gender system they usually are. The responsibility for care work and housework do not need to rest with women, but in contemporary society it largely does. The current work/life interface is based on gendered assumptions and beliefs which were institutionalised as the social reality of the public/private divide in the late 18th century. The social, political and demographic realities of workers and carers have changed dramatically since. The substantial shift of women and, particularly, mothers into the public sphere of paid employment accompanied by dropping fertility rates is possibly the most important one. The actions taken by women, initially against traditional gender expectations, have led to increased strains on traditional gender arrangements which manifest themselves in work/life conflicts. Despite mounting pressures on traditional gender arrangements, most workplace practices and government policies still proceed on assumptions of breadwinner/homemaker arrangements and the emerging alternative of the 1.5 earner model as the contemporary variant of the male breadwinner model. The 1.5 earner model does not reflect a change towards more gender egalitarianism because it does not change the underlying traditional gender roles and division of labour in heterosexual couple families (Whitehouse, 2004; Pocock, 2005b). It is still mothers who take over primary care responsibilities, take up the lion's share of parental leave, exit the labour market upon becoming a parent, and return to paid employment part-time. The work/life balance debate shows that it is high time for a redefinition of the work/life interface to create a gender system that reflects more adequately the great similarities between women and men as well as the principle of gender equality.

THE RADICAL IDEA OF WORK/LIFE BALANCE

Private life and employment have been conceptualised as separate and opposing spheres in which women are assigned to the private sphere of unpaid work in the home and men to the public sphere of paid work in organisations. I have demonstrated that the public/private divide has to be regarded as the root cause of contemporary work/life conflicts. Feminist authors have challenged the public/private divide for decades (e.g. Walby, 1986; Pateman, 1989; Lister, 2003) and I illustrated that feminist and work/life balance researchers share the common vision of overcoming the dichotomy which reinforces gender inequality and

produces work/life conflicts. Rapoport et al. (2002, pp.167/68) describe as their vision of an equitable world the following situation:

> Women and men, no matter where and how they are positioned, could then freely move between different sectors of life and succeed in any. Men and women could relate to each other with respect for each other's worth without gender stereotyping or adversarial interaction.

My argument is that efforts to achieve work/life balance are intimately bound up with efforts to achieve gender equality. While work/life researchers, such as Rapoport and Bailyn, have acknowledged the importance of gender relations in shaping work/life conflicts and arrangements, they have not fully conceptualised gender as a social system which is deeply institutionalised, not only in workplaces and individual psyches, but in all other social institutions, notably the family and the welfare state, and in the belief systems and norms which shape daily interaction between women and men. Drawing systematically on feminist theory to inform explanations of work/life conflicts and gendered work/life arrangements unveils the issues involved in brining about more balanced and egalitarian life models in their entirety. The magnitude of the challenge becomes visible.

My argument is that organisational work/life balance policies in their current format are unable to bring about change towards a more equitable organisation of employment and private relationships because they only address one aspect of the problem, workplace organisations, and maintain the standards of the 'ideal worker' and the 'good mother' (Charlesworth, 2005) which underlie the public/private dichotomy (Pateman, 1989; Ferree, 1990). The work/life balance literature has reached its limits in the existing conceptualisation as an organisational issue and has to be taken to a new level with more fundamental questions being asked, such as those proposed by Lewis et al. (2003). Connell (2005) suggested that the idea of work/life balance has a radical core which demands more gender egalitarian ways of organising employment and private lives:

> The idea of 'work/life balance' is a conservative expression of a radical impulse. The impulse is for justice, specifically gender equality, and for the fuller life made possible for all parties by just human relations. The need to express it as a demand for 'balance' arises because of the impossibility of realising equality within an institutional system that subordinates home to economy. Thus the demand for balance, while apparently contained within this institutional system and requesting no more than adjustments to it, in fact points beyond this system. (Connell, 2005, p.378)

Connell's statement implies that the concept of work/life balance in its radical interpretation presents a fundamental challenge to the principles of structuring and conceptualising the division of the social world in public and private spheres which produces a gender hierarchy in which men are categorically superior to women. It does so by problematising the fact that employment and private life are currently being separated when, in fact, they are integrally related. Above all, work/life advocates postulate a holistic perspective on the employee, a need to see them as a whole person with needs and responsibilities outside of their work commitments. Moreover, there is a recognition that the organisational reality has shifted from an all-male environment to one of dual presence of men and women in most aspects of organisational life, and that both women and men have to take on responsibility for paid and unpaid work. Finally, work/life balance policies, such as sick, parental and emergency leave, force employers to acknowledge changes, difficulties and emergencies related to their employees' bodies as well as to the bodies of their children, spouses or parents. These core assumptions of work/life balance initiatives contradict all of the organising principles of the masculine organisation as outlined by Acker (1990).

Indeed, the conventional discourse around work/life balance fails to uncover the concealed power structures that underlie the concepts of workplaces and families which are highly gendered. Instead of blaming the time crisis and work/life conflict on the lack of innovation on the side of employers or campaigning for better equal opportunity policies, which are popular lines of argument in contemporary work/life balance literature (Gerson, 2004; Swanberg, 2004), there is a need to look at the underlying power structures of the two most central institutions of social life, organisations and families. Both, as I demonstrated above, have been created in a way that continuously reinforces male dominance. This is my interpretation of Connell's (2005) statement that the idea of work/life balance has a radical impulse which 'points beyond the existing system'.

I have shown that at the heart of the concept of work/life balance is the attempt to break up the strict division of public and private spheres, to overcome the subordination of the private to the public, and the assignment of people to each sphere according to their sex. In practical terms, this creates a vision of the work/life balance concept which aims to overcome the structural and ideological separation of employment and private life; to give equal value to both spheres of human activity by lifting the value of care work and reducing the value of paid work, and the development of an earner-carer model as the new standard for both female and

male life histories. Following this argument a new definition of work/life balance which reflects its radical core is possible. Work/life balance then means to be able to have full membership in both public and private spheres, that paid and care work are regarded as equally necessary for a fulfilled human existence, and that access to both life realms is available irrespective of sex. Theoretically, the traditional, gendered public/private divide would eventually become meaningless as a tool for structuring the work/life interface.

The question is how this vision can be achieved in practice. I have established that relying on organisational work/life policies alone will only create marginal help and quick fixes for some employed carers (Kingston, 1990; Friedman & Johnson, 1997; S. Lewis et al., 2003). Conceptualising work/life issues as problems of individual employees in individual workplaces renders the structural constraints that frame work/life choices invisible (Charlesworth, 2005; Connell, 2005; Pocock, 2005b). Moreover, workplaces are not islands but are shaped by the larger economy and workforce demographics, families and communities (Friedman & Johnson, 1997). Thus, the context for crafting individual work/life arrangements is defined by several social institutions and varies across different countries (S. Lewis & Haas, 2005) which confirms that the work/life interface is time and place specific. For work/life balance research to produce more comprehensive explanations, the persistent work/life conflicts have to be understood as social problems, affecting women and men *en masse*, across organisations and even across countries (Gambles et al., 2006; Zacharias, 2006a).

At the same time, however, workplace intervention is necessary and possible as was demonstrated by the action research projects by Rapoport and Bailyn as well as Bailyn and Harrington. The latter state (Bailyn & Harrington, 2004, p.206):

> By bringing organizational task needs and employees' family needs together, work redesign begins to challenge deeply ingrained beliefs about work, family, and gender roles […] articulating a principle of gender equity can open a workplace conversation about women's changed work and family lives and the need to face the change.

Yet, I demonstrated that focusing on the workplace is not enough because gender inequality is deeply ingrained in social institutions other than the workplace and because workplaces in themselves are unlikely to generate sufficient 'pull' for systemic organisational change. It appears that a 'workplace conversation' is not enough, and that there needs to be a 'societal conversation' driven by national government. By comparing the US approach to that in

Norway, I showed that the state acts as an important 'normative third party', to use the words of Brandth and Kvande (2001), in the decision to take up work/life policies.

It has been suggested that government policies are in themselves insufficient to bring about systemic change (Rapoport et al., 2002). Gambles, Lewis and Rapoport (2006) made the limited success of welfare state policies their starting point and argued that to achieve systemic change at multiple and connected levels, policies were insufficient because they did not address systemic problems, i.e. they did not change practices, structures and cultures, including values and norms, that reward certain behaviour and characteristics over others. I demonstrated that the same is true for an exclusive focus on organisational work/life balance policies.

The way out of this dilemma appears to be the combination of organisational and government approaches to solving work/life issues. Gambles et al. (2006) found that there was a need for a broader approach to work/life balance which included individuals, families, organisations, communities and societies as a whole in the global economy and which aimed for optimal outcomes at many different levels, in terms of equity, well-being and sustainability. I agree wholeheartedly with their evaluation, but showed that national governments are key players in addressing issues of social and even global dimensions. Gambles et al. (2006) stressed the need for workplace intervention and for social discourse about established ways of getting work done in a society and the gendered assumptions which underlie the organisation of work. Yet, they fail to mention who should start such discourse and drive workplace interventions.

I demonstrated above that there is no evidence that employers are engaging in work redesign following the Dual Agenda of increased gender equity and workplace effectiveness to any significant extent. But even if it was possible to alter workplaces, the progress made at the organisational level would be undermined by unaltered societal norms and belief systems as well as by the various other social institutions, such as government support policies, the tax system, child care and school systems, the media, and religion, which would continue to be structured around traditional gendered assumptions. Similarly, government intervention which does not address the organisation of workplaces has demonstrably delivered little progress towards increased gender equity. Thus, the vision of a more equitable distribution of paid and unpaid work between women and men can only be accomplished if government

and workplace organisations work in tandem to bring about systemic changes which alter not only the actual sharing of paid and unpaid work between women and men, but also the gendered assumptions underlying the organising principles of workplaces and families.

I propose that the issues that are currently debated under the banner of 'work/life balance', especially the increasing female labour force participation and the concentration of human capital in female hands, can be turned into levers to reignite the radical agenda of overcoming the public/private divide along gendered lines. Practical changes need to happen at an organisational level as well as in families and action research can be an important tool in bringing about changes in behaviour. At the same time, however, systemic change requires government intervention to drive the change agenda on a social level and to establish new social norms which support and propel changes at the behavioural level in workplaces and families. In isolation, both organisational and welfare policies do not deliver systemic change. In collaboration, however, there is a real chance to achieve a restructuring of the work/life interface.

CHAPTER CONCLUSION

In this chapter, I demonstrated that work/life researchers can benefit from systematically integrating feminist literature into their conceptual approaches and research methodologies. I proposed that the concept of work/life balance is inherently related to the feminist concept of the public/private divide. Gender becomes the central category of analysing how paid and unpaid work is organised in a society. Using the work of constructionist researchers, I have shown that a country's gender regime is a social construct which is time and place specific and that it can be changed. To be able to change the gender regime, the beliefs, norms and collective experiences which underpin it need to be made visible. I used Bem's (1993) approach of the 'three lenses of gender' to do so. Moreover, it is important to understand how gender has been embedded in social institutions. I illustrated this by focusing on the welfare state and workplace organisations and outlined feminist critiques of those two social institutions. I subscribe to a theoretical position which holds that workplaces and the welfare state are inherently gendered, but that they do not necessarily have to be oppressive and that they can be changed. The notion of change is at the heart of

my research project. If change to social institutions towards more gender egalitarian ways of organising society was impossible my investigation would be pointless.

I perceive the concept of work/life balance and the feminist project to redefine the public/private divide as inherently related in their attempt to overcome the current work/life interface, which is organised along gendered lines and which subordinates the private to the public and, by doing so, subordinates women to men. I have aimed to demonstrate that both are essentially change projects and aim to bring about a society which relies less on gender to organise work, which assigns more equal value to the different types of work that are necessary to sustain society, and which creates less inequalities between different groups of people within this society. Ultimately, both aim to alter the status quo of gender relations and of the work/life interface.

In the next chapter, I will outline a conceptual framework which is able to make visible the gender regime in a society. It is only when the configuration of the public/private divide in a society becomes explicit that a challenging of the status quo is possible. In defining my conceptual framework, I ventured outside of feminist theory and into critical theory, namely into Habermas' theory of communicative action. I have been challenged on this decision by feminist researchers, but ultimately reclaimed my use of Habermas' work because it allows for an analysis of social structures and institutions which is most conducive to my argument. I acknowledge Habermas' gender blindness and specifically address it using the work of feminist theorists. It is here that I leave the relative safety of the feminist paradigm in an attempt to operationalise a mainstream framework for feminist analysis.

CHAPTER THREE

A CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK FOR WORK/LIFE
BALANCE RESEARCH

I demonstrated in Chapter One that the work/life balance debate has reached a stalemate in its current conceptualisation. The criticisms refer to five components of the literature which focuses on the organisational dimension of work/life issues: conceptual issues as to what constitutes work/life balance; the voluntary limitation to an organisational approach to work/life balance; the strong focus on individual employees and companies; the failure to systematically theorise gender; and the taking for granted of the US context. Part of the problem appears to be that no coherent conceptual framework has been proposed for the work/life balance field so far that would be able to explain the phenomenon of low take-up of corporate work/life policies, despite the persistence of work/life conflicts, while there is a wealth of empirical research. Thus, there was a need to develop a conceptual framework which was able to explain the phenomena more fully.

Based on the criticisms developed earlier, I propose that a conceptual framework for the work/life balance field has three crucial characteristics that must be taken into consideration. Firstly, it needs to feature an explicit 'gender lens'. Secondly, it needs the capacity to make visible the interrelationships between social structures and institutions, namely the beliefs, norms and experiences with regard to women's and men's roles in society and the institutionalisation of such gendered structures in the welfare state and workplace

organisations. Finally, it needs the potential to critically evaluate the status quo of the public/private divide along gendered lines. As I have demonstrated in the previous chapter, the feminist literature offers critiques and explanations of the gendered structures and institutions which sustain the public/private divide. However, there is currently no conceptual framework in the feminist literature which integrates those insights and which fulfils all of the requirements outlined above.

A model that does incorporate two of the requirements, but is markedly gender blind, is Habermas' (1987) model of societal evolution which is based on his theory of communicative action. This theory represents an attempt to create a macro-level social theory that incorporates central insights from various sociological and philosophical fields (Eriksen & Weigård, 2003). Meehan (1995) states that Habermas' discourse theory offers an analytical framework for examining social structures, especially their potential to liberate or politically repress, to economically manipulate and dominate members of modern societies. This ability, in her view, classifies Habermas' theory as a valid tool in feminist research despite its marked gender-blindness. Thus, instead of developing a conceptual framework from scratch, I draw significantly on Habermas' work and operationalise it for feminist research which I will apply to the work/life balance field. I also retain Habermas' terminology of Lifeworld, Steering Media and Systems in order to reflect the strong grounding of my conceptual framework in his theoretical approach.

In this chapter, I address this limitation of gender blindness in Habermas' theory of communicative action by equipping the model with a 'gender lens', building on the work of feminist theorists including Bem (1993), Pfau-Effinger (2004), Pocock (2005) and West and Zimmerman (1987). Habermas' work is complex and extensive. The difficulty of operationalising it for my purposes was in containing the scope and detail of his thoughts as well as the complexity of his concepts. I will only refer to the most central of Habermas' ideas as outlined in *The theory of communicative action* (Habermas, 1987) and will not attempt to use his work in its entirety. I will briefly outline the core concepts and terms of his theory of communicative action and then focus on their relevance to organisational and feminist theory. These explanations are necessary to appreciate the value of his insights for furthering the work/life balance debate.

HABERMAS' THEORY OF COMMUNICATIVE ACTION

The work of Habermas is impressive in both its range and depth (Rasmussen, 1990). The theory of communicative action is at the heart of his work and represents a systematic approach to formulating a critical, macro-level social theory of modernity (Eriksen & Weigård, 2003). Habermas' theory is based on an alternative understanding of rationality which he calls 'communicative rationality' and offers a significant departure from the understanding of rationality as instrumental rationality. Instrumental rationality is based on efficiency and means-ends considerations and has dominated the theories of Habermas' predecessors and contemporary colleagues who wrote in the tradition of the enlightenment, in particular Weber with his pessimistic notion of the 'iron cage of rationality' (Eriksen & Weigård, 2003). The interpretation of 'rationality' as purely instrumental rationality has limited the applicability of the concept.

At the heart of Habermas' work is the reinterpretation and broadening of the concept of rationality. Habermas' (1987) concept of communicative rationality describes the intersubjective relationships between individuals who communicate and interact in order to reach understanding. Eriksen and Weigård (2003, p.4) explain: "This aspect of rationality [communicative rationality] is necessary in order to maintain society as a social fabric regulated by norms, institutions and conventions, a place where new insights and knowledge can be developed and transferred, and where individuals can be socialised into fully developed personalities". Sitton (2003, p.48) explains that in Habermas' interpretation, rationality becomes 'procedural': "it is socially and culturally grounded in the competence and inclination of actors to distinguish, challenge, and defend actions or beliefs on the basis of validity claims". This means that all truths, norms and subjective experiences can be explained and challenged on the basis of reasoned discussion within their own validity domains, namely culture, society and personality, which Habermas calls the three symbolic worlds of the Lifeworld. The concept of communicative rationality allows members of the Lifeworld to reach understanding based on reason, but does not rely on means-ends considerations which only serve strategic and self-interested goals. Thus, it becomes possible to act in a way that maintains social relationships and furthers understanding of others.

Using communicative rationality as the starting point and proposing language as the central medium of social interaction, Habermas (1987) proposes that a primitive society consists of

two levels: the Lifeworld and the Systems. The Lifeworld is defined as life experiences and beliefs that are communicatively formed over time and that guide attitudes, behaviour, and action (Habermas, 1987). On the other hand, Systems are defined as tangible and functionally definable (economic or administrative) organisations which are the expressions of the Lifeworld and are bound to follow Lifeworld concerns (Broadbent, Laughlin, & Read, 1991). The dualistic Systems-Lifeworld model of society is at the heart of Habermas' thesis (Eriksen & Weigård, 2003). The processes of strategic action and instrumental rationality, which enable the modernisation of the economy and the state, are distinct from those processes that are involved in the 'rationalisation' of the Lifeworld which are based on communicative action and rationality.

Habermas (1987) maintains that a third dimension is created through the increasing sophistication of the Lifeworld and the resulting differentiation of the Lifeworld and the Systems. He calls the actors in this third dimension the 'Steering Media'. In the strictest sense, Steering Media are abstract actors such as money and power; however, they have been operationalised by researchers as governments and other 'steering' social institutions (Broadbent et al., 1991) as I will demonstrate later. The Steering Media are important because the Lifeworld and the Systems are guided by different kinds of rationality and the Steering Media need to integrate the two in order to guarantee social cohesion. This is particularly important because the Systems have a tendency to 'colonise', i.e. impose themselves on, areas in the Lifeworld that should be governed by standards of communicative rationality (Eriksen & Weigård, 2003). These processes of 'colonisation' have major consequences for the Lifeworld as I will explain later in the chapter.

Over the last two decades, scholars in various disciplines have engaged critically with Habermas' work. The theory of communicative action is regarded as an exceptional contribution to theory in multiple disciplines (Rasmussen, 1982). At the same time, Habermas' theory has been subject to many criticisms which can be explained by its conceptualisation as a macro-level social theory which contains theoretical claims and choices that are debatable (Eriksen & Weigård, 2003). A detailed review of the criticisms is beyond the scope of this thesis and has been summarised elsewhere (e.g. Rasmussen, 1990; Eriksen & Weigård, 2003). Nevertheless, his theory has made a substantial contribution to knowledge, including organisational theory. In this thesis, I will focus on analysing the

engagement of authors in organisational and feminist theory with Habermas' work, in particular, the theory of communicative action.

THE USEFULNESS OF HABERMAS' THEORY FOR ORGANISATIONAL AND FEMINIST RESEARCH

The most constructive engagement with Habermas' work with regard to organisational theory is that of Broadbent et al. (1991). Habermas' model of societal evolution takes a whole-of-society approach that integrates the three analytical levels of the Lifeworld, Steering Media and Systems (Eriksen & Weigård, 2003). Broadbent et al. (1991) offer a way to operationalise Habermas' model of societal evolution for organisational research in conceptualising the first level, which Habermas (1987) calls the Lifeworld, as consisting of intangible elements such as values and norms that act as interpretative schemas; the second level as the more tangible Steering Media in the form of social institutions, such as governments, professional and financial institutions; and the third level of the Systems as functionally definable, tangible organisations which are held together by the action of the Steering Media and follow Lifeworld imperatives.

Broadbent et al. (1991) argue that Habermas' three-level model offers a better understanding of organisations for three important reasons. Firstly, the approach has the potential to link theory and practice, although they acknowledge that it does so in a complex way. Secondly, it offers a tool to constructively challenge the status quo. Finally, the theory accounts for the importance of the societal and historical context of particular organisations. All of those characteristics qualify the theory of communicative action as a promising tool for investigating work/life issues from a critical perspective because I want to apply feminist theory to the practical reality of work/life conflicts, challenge traditional gender norms which underpin the current work/life interface and evaluate work/life balance policies in their broader social context.

However, there is one fundamental issue in using Broadbent et al.'s (1991) version of the model for analysing work/life balance related social processes. In proposing the theory of communicative action and, in particular, his understanding of the Lifeworld, Habermas fails to specifically theorise gender (Fraser, 1989) which can be regarded as a major reason why

the theory of communicative action has been categorically rejected by many feminist researchers (Meehan, 1995). Broadbent et al. (1991) do not address this critical blind spot in Habermas' work.

The question is whether its gender blindness categorically disqualifies Habermas' model for feminist research. I have been challenged by feminist theorists who argued that my conceptual framework was fundamentally flawed because it was based on the work of a mainstream, male researcher and, thus, on androcentric methods and concepts and should not be used for feminist analysis. To justify my use of Habermas' work, I draw on Orloff who adapted another important mainstream model for feminist research: Esping-Andersen's classification of welfare states. Orloff argued (1996, p.305):

> To understand the mutual effects of state social provision and gender relations requires a conceptual scheme that can be used in systematic comparative research. Rather than developing such a scheme anew, I would argue that it will be more fruitful to directly engage the conceptual frameworks of mainstream literature and propose amendments that will reflect what is already known about gender relations and the state. Feminist research can thereby incorporate advances in the mainstream literature while transforming it to incorporate gender relations.

Therefore, I argue that it is legitimate to use Habermas' work and adapt it for feminist analysis by synthesising mainstream and feminist insights.

Moreover, in defence of Habermas' work for feminist analysis, Meehan (1995) argues that his notion of communicative rationality and the concept of the Lifeworld enable a critical evaluation of modern social and political institutions and offers the potential to recognise and explain their normative character. This means that, firstly, the theory of communicative action provides a tool for a comprehensive analysis of the context, normative, legislative and organisational, in which social arrangements, such as work/life arrangements, are situated and negotiated. This particular strength of Habermas' work was also stressed by non-feminist scholars (e.g. Sitton, 2003). Secondly, Meehan (1995) argues that increased rationalisation in the Lifeworld allows for increased reflexivity of social norms through the medium of language and, ultimately, leads to emancipation from normative imperatives that cannot be justified by discourse and the power of the 'best argument'. "For it is only when the force of the group and tradition loosens its grip, that individuals can reflectively question the legitimacy of norms and move beyond merely conventionally justified beliefs and values" (Meehan, 1995, p. 3). This is essential for being able to question the public/private

dichotomy which is based on the belief of biological essentialism and reproduced by androcentric norms.

Despite the many insights that Habermas' theory of communicative action offers to researchers, it has several conceptual flaws (for full details see, for example, Sitton, 2003). One conceptual flaw is particularly relevant to an investigation of work/life balance issues and gendered relations: it is not obvious to what extent the concept of the Lifeworld allows for the analysis of concrete behaviours of individuals, i.e. whether it has a sociological dimension. Dietz (1993) outlines that Habermas' theory is ambiguous about this aspect of the Lifeworld and conceptualises it partly as a transcendental place for communicative action and partly as an empirical place of daily interaction. In this thesis, I utilise Giddens' (2001) concept of the 'duality of structure' to work around this conceptual dilemma. I conceive of the Lifeworld as both a sphere of intangible assumptions, beliefs, norms and life experiences as well as an empirical place where the actions of individuals sustain these intangible interpretive schemas. As I outlined earlier, Giddens (2001) proposes that social structure is maintained only by the coordinated actions by individuals but that, at the same time, all action is guided by structured social knowledge. This suggests that conventional gendered structures are only maintained as long as individuals behave in gendered ways but all action of individuals is guided by gendered interpretive schema.

To sum up, Habermas' theory of communicative action offers a valuable tool for analysis when researchers are interested in the interplay between beliefs, social norms and subjective life experiences using the concept of the Lifeworld. Moreover, the idea that power and money act as Steering Media between the Lifeworld and the Systems is a potentially powerful tool to explain the effects of government intervention. Finally, the distinction between communicative rationality in the Lifeworld and instrumental rationality in the Systems serves as an explanation as to why the Systems and Lifeworld have drifted apart creating the need for institutionalised Steering Media. This distinction can be helpful in explaining the phenomena around work/life conflicts because it offers a new perspective on the conflicting spheres of 'work' and 'life'. Not only have they been created as opposing spheres which manifest themselves in the public/private divide along gendered lines (Pateman, 1989; Ferree, 1990) they also rely on different ways of rationalising actions. The 'work' sphere in the Systems is governed by instrumental rationality while the 'life' sphere relies on communicative rationality.

As mentioned earlier, Habermas' theory of communicative action and the associated model of societal evolution are limited in their potential to explain social relations because he does not explicitly theorise gender. Despite existing feminist critiques (Fraser, 1989; Braaten, 1995; Cohen, 1995; Landes, 1995; Meehan, 1995; Sawyer, 2000; Lang, 2003) no attempt has been made so far to develop Habermas' model of societal evolution into a conceptual framework for feminist analysis. In the following section, I propose one possibility of equipping Habermas' theory with an explicit 'gender lens' in order to operationalise the model of societal evolution as a tool for analysing gendered social relations, especially with regard to work/life balance. There have been some attempts by feminist authors to depict these relationships in models and theories. I will outline the models proposed by Pfau-Effinger (2004) and Pocock (2005) in more detail and demonstrate how they help provide a gender lens for Habermas' model.

HABERMAS WITH A 'GENDER LENS'

Pfau-Effinger (2004) developed a model to identify the complex society-level processes, the 'gender arrangement' of a country, which provide a basis for women's participation in the labour market. Her model is helpful to the development of my own framework for several reasons. Firstly, she conceptualises the 'gender arrangement' as three interrelated levels: gender culture, gender order and social actors. Her categories mirror Habermas' levels of Lifeworld, Steering Media and Systems, but were developed explicitly to analyse gender relations. Secondly, she established that the social institutions most important for an analysis of gender relations in modern societies are the family, the welfare state and the labour market. These three social institutions are also incorporated in Habermas' concepts of the Lifeworld, the Steering Media and the Systems. Finally, her comparison of the West German, Dutch and Finish gender arrangements revealed that a macro-level theory of society is very applicable to cross-country research. Her model can function as a guideline in operationalising Habermas' model of societal evolution for a gender-sensitive analysis applicable to the work/life balance field.

As a representative of the work/life balance area, Pocock (2005b) proposes a multi-layered model to illustrate the relationships between the gender order and work/care regimes. At the centre of her argument is that work/care outcomes are determined by the interplay of

culture, institutions and actions, preferences and behaviour which is similar to Habermas' construct. Yet, while both gender sensitive models are important in explaining phenomena relating to work/life arrangements, Habermas' model of societal evolution is a tool to analyse the interrelationships between the three levels as well as their internal processes.

The Lifeworld, i.e. the intangible elements such as beliefs, norms and subjective life experiences which act as interpretative schemas, is the most complex of Habermas' (1987) analytical levels and is conceptualised as three distinct but interrelated symbolic worlds of modern society: culture, society, and personality. The Lifeworld is most fully developed in *The theory of communicative action* (Habermas, 1987) on which I draw in the following. Habermas understands 'culture' as the 'objective world', as the valid knowledge or 'truths' which are held in a society. He defines 'culture' as the "stock of knowledge from which participants in communication supply themselves with interpretations as they come to an understanding about something in the world" (Habermas, 1987, p. 138). This means that in every society there has to be a significant base of knowledge which has been widely accepted as valid and true, which is coherent and thus becomes an interpretative schema to guide everyday interaction in order to create meaning for the individual.

The second symbolic world is called 'society'. 'Society' is understood as the 'social world' and represents the ordered social relationships reflected in social norms that form the basis of social solidarity. Habermas (1987) maintains that social integration coordinates actions by drawing on the valid knowledge because it conveys what is regarded to be right or wrong in a society. Finally, the world that Habermas calls 'personality' is conceptualised as the 'subjective world' of personal life experiences. 'Personality' is where Habermas sees the historical dimension of the Lifeworld in that universal competences for action are handed down from generation to generation to ensure that individual life styles and subjective life experiences align with collective life histories in a society. At the same time, it is in the dimension of 'personality' that Habermas sees individual agency and responsibility. He defined 'personality' as the "competences that make a subject capable of speaking and acting, that put him [sic] in a position to take part in a process of reaching understanding and thereby to assert his [sic] own identity" (Habermas, 1987). The term 'personality' in Habermas' model is ambiguous. It does not seem to relate to the psychological concept of 'personality' but rather to the sociological concept of 'identity'. The ambiguity might have been caused in translating the German term 'Persönlichkeit' which can be translated into

both 'personality' and 'identity'. I will show in the next section that all three symbolic worlds have a gender dimension which Habermas does not acknowledge in his theory.

Making gender visible in the Lifeworld

To turn Habermas' model of societal evolution into a workable tool for feminist analysis, I apply the work of Bem and other feminists to his concept of the Lifeworld and, thus, equip it quite literally with a 'gender lens'. The three 'lenses of gender' suggested by Bem (1993), which I have introduced in Chapter Two, align perfectly with Habermas' three symbolic worlds. Figure 1 shows the ways in which I match Habermas' 'culture' with Bem's (1993) 'biological essentialism', 'society' with 'androcentrism and 'personality' with 'gender polarisation'. It also provides assistance in tracing the changes that I propose to Habermas' model using the concepts of Pocock (2005), Pfau-Effinger (2004) as well as West and Zimmerman (1987) which will be elaborated on in the next section.

Figure 1: Equipping the model of societal evolution with a 'gender lens'
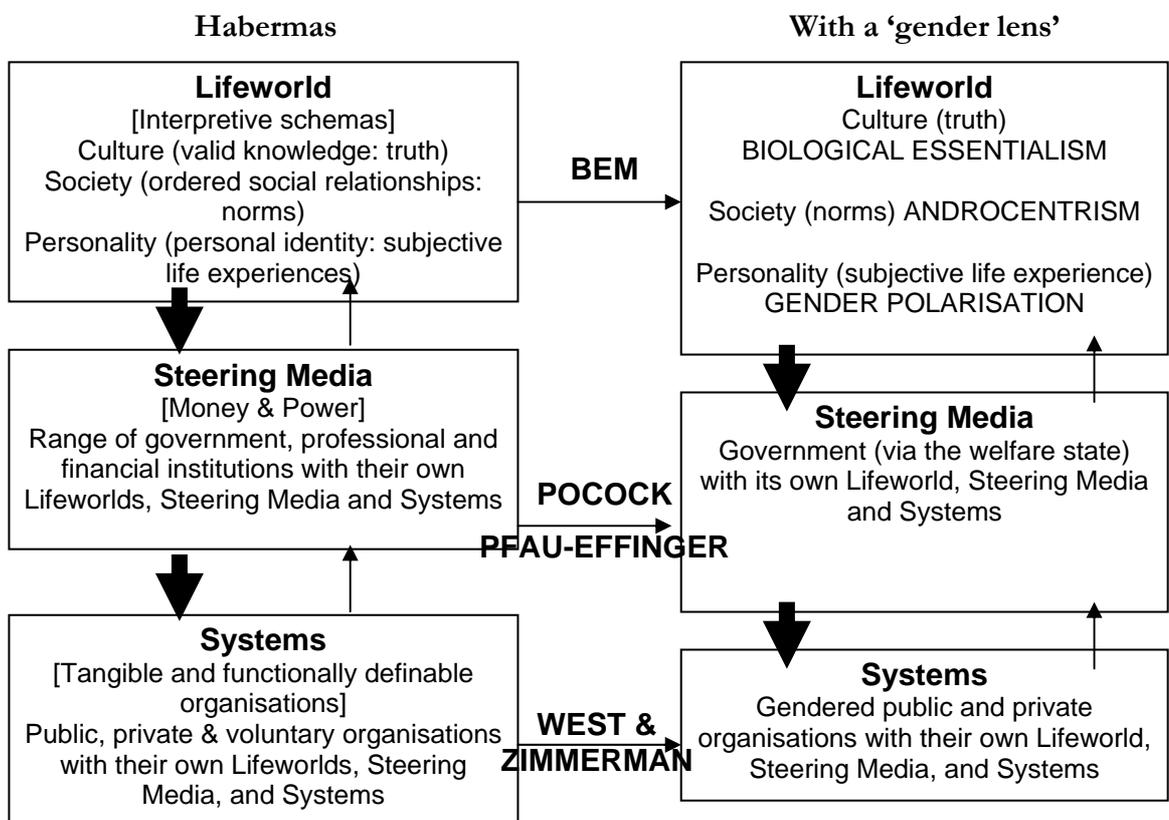
Source: Adapted from Broadbent, Laughlin and Read (1991)

Habermas' 'culture' is conceptualised as providing 'participants in communication' with valid knowledge, or 'truths', to be able to interpret the world around them and to act in it. Beliefs and assumptions, which individuals hold, draw on this valid knowledge. When Habermas' symbolic world of 'culture' is conceptualised with a 'gender lens', it becomes clear that the valid knowledge relevant to 'doing gender' in Western societies rests in the widely held belief of biological essentialism. As detailed in Chapter Two, Bem (1993) argues that the inequalities between women and men are commonly perceived as the 'natural' and inevitable consequences of biological sex differences. Thus, the belief that men and women are ultimately different and, consequently, should perform different social roles, forms the accepted platform of knowledge for doing gender in virtually all societies and, at the same time, informs beliefs and assumptions which are inherently gendered.

Although Habermas speaks about 'participants in communication', this statement also applies to 'participants in doing gender'. Best and Williams (1993) showed that what it 'means' to be male or female is internalised by children at a very early age through socialisation. West and Zimmerman (1987) pointed out that there are virtually 'manuals' available for doing gender in the form of magazines, books and TV shows in popular culture. To 'do gender' successfully, individuals must be able to adapt their display of gender to specific situations and alter their behaviour as the occasion demands (West & Zimmerman, 1987). So, just as in communicative action, there is a stock of valid knowledge that provides interpretive schema and, thus, meaning to a given situation in 'doing gender'.

In adapting Habermas' concept of 'society' to the context of 'doing gender', I draw on West and Zimmerman (1987) who point out that the category of sex is one of the major criteria for placing people in different social groups. However, it is not only the segregation of people according to their sex, there is also a value judgement included in that separation. Bem (1993) argues that in contemporary societies the coordination of individuals who 'do gender' takes place according to the principle of androcentrism. Men and the male experience are portrayed as the neutral standard or norm in cultural discourse, social institutions and individual psyches and, therefore, the female is defined as a deviation. "It is thus not that man is treated as superior and woman as inferior but that man is treated as human and woman as 'other'" (Bem, 1993, p. 2). This invisibility of women in androcentric societies and theories demonstrates that in failing to acknowledge sex as one of the key

principles of organising society, Habermas' theory is fundamentally limited in analysing social relations in androcentric societies.

Finally, Bem (1993) refers to the process of socialisation and identity formation, Habermas' symbolic world of 'personality' or subjective life experience, as gender polarisation. She argues that the perceived differences between women and men become "superimposed" (Bem, 1993, p. 2) as the organising principle for virtually every social interaction and, hence, create a cultural connection between sex and almost all other aspects of human life. West and Zimmerman (1987) maintain that gender polarisation is at the heart of 'doing gender' and once the placement into separate sex categories has occurred, it becomes an inevitable frame of reference in virtually all social interactions:

> If sex category is omnirelevant (or even approaches being so), then a person engaged in virtually any activity may be held accountable for performance of that activity as a *woman* or a *man*, and their incumbency in one or the other sex category can be used to legitimate or discredit their other activities. (West & Zimmerman, 1987, p. 136; emphasis in original)

By means of gender polarisation, an individual gets equipped with skills to reproduce the status quo of the existing gendered life histories. This suggests that individuals internalise the gendered norms and beliefs and are motivated to construct identities that are consistent with those norms and beliefs. Ultimately, this internalisation leads to the perception that conventional gender roles are a 'natural' arrangement when in fact they are socially constructed.

I proceed from the assumption that social structures and institutions are inherently gendered but acknowledge that gender can be acted out in ways that conform with gendered beliefs, norms and life histories or in ways that challenge the conventional gender regime as suggested by Gherardi (1995). Thus, while social structures and institutions are inherently gendered, they are not inherently oppressive (Britton, 2000; Siim, 2005) so that they can, theoretically, be changed to reflect more gender egalitarian ways of organising societies as I have proposed earlier. I contend that these assumptions need to be reflected in my conceptualisation of the Lifeworld in that the three symbolic worlds are thought of as being a continuum rather than a fixed state. They are not static and need to reflect the fact that they are under constant negotiation. Crompton (1999) developed a continuum of gender relations which aimed to reflect the variance of gender relations across different countries. Her construct depicted five different earner/carer models ranging from the traditional, male

breadwinner/female carer model to the less traditional, dual earner/dual carer model. In evaluating Crompton's continuum, Gornick and Meyers (2003) contended that it may serve as a useful tool for comparing the employment and care divide across countries. I follow Crompton's continuum but add two more dimensions to remain true to Habermas' idea of the three symbolic worlds of the Lifeworld. The three-dimensional Lifeworld allows not only for the evaluation of gendered norms, as reflected in the continuum of household models, but also for an analysis of the beliefs and assumptions which underpin these models and the subjective life experiences they entail. I have developed the following figure to illustrate this idea.

Figure 2: Lifeworld continuum

Culture: truth BIOLOGICAL ESSENTIALISM	HIGH: Only women can be nurturers of children; men are better suited to employment; men are superior to women	LOW: Mothers and fathers can nurture children and are equally capable to be in employment; women and men are equals
Society: norms ANDRO-CENTRISM	HIGH: Adults should be organised in married, male breadwinner families	LOW: Adults should engage in egalitarian forms of social relationships, esp. dual earner/dual carer couples
Personality: subjective life experience GENDER POLARISATION	HIGH: Life histories of men and women are vastly different	LOW: Life histories of women and men are very similar

The value of using the concept of the Lifeworld in a cross-country comparison is that the analysis of two different countries shows that accepted truths, norms and subjective life experiences differ across societies. This stresses the point that gender regimes are social constructs which are time and place specific and can be changed. However, changing the Lifeworld is not an easy undertaking. Habermas argues that the three symbolic worlds of the Lifeworld are integrally related and systematically act to reproduce the status quo: "The interactions woven into the fabric of every communicative practice constitute the medium through which culture, society, and person get reproduced" (Habermas, 1987, p. 138). Moreover, Habermas maintains that the Steering Media and Systems are bound to follow Lifeworld imperatives although they can alter the Lifeworld through colonisation as I will explain later. Usually, Habermas' theory suggests that the Lifeworld filters down the belief

system of biological essentialism, androcentrism and gender polarisation to shape the Steering Media and the Systems. This has implications for the context in which individuals negotiate work/life arrangements.

Making gender visible in the Steering Media and Systems

As outlined in Chapter Two, feminist theorists and researchers have unmasked workplace organisations (Acker, 1990; Crompton & Sanderson, 1990; Walby, 1990; Gherardi, 1995; Britton, 2000; Walby, 2002) and the welfare state (Sainsbury, 1994; Orloff, 1996) as inherently gendered institutions. This is why not only the Lifeworld but also the Steering Media and Systems need to be analysed with an explicit 'gender lens'. In operationalising Habermas' model, I draw on Acker (1990) who argues that the assumptions about women and men created by the existing gender order are so fundamentally reflected in the design of jobs and hierarchies that organisations become major actors in reproducing gendered relations. As I have demonstrated in Chapter Two, 'gender' is not just one aspect of organisational culture as portrayed by work/life researchers (McDonald et al., 2005) but at the very heart of organising paid and unpaid work in Western societies. They have to be regarded as such in a conceptual framework which aims to systematically theorise gender and to show how gender is embedded in social institutions.

Broadbent et al. (1991) conceptualise the Steering Media as government, professional and financial institutions. In my analysis, I focus on government intervention via welfare state provisions. The importance of government intervention in a work/life balance context has been demonstrated by Sjoberg (2004) who found in his cross-country study that family policy institutions have the potential to affect both the possible ways in which individuals can pursue their private lives *and* how they look upon the 'proper' role of both women and men in society. He argues that this influence makes such institutions a 'prime explanatory candidate' in accounting for cross-national variation in gender-role attitudes. In Habermas' terms, this implies that analysis in the area of work/life balance has to explicitly address Lifeworld concerns as well as the action taken by Steering Media to direct behaviour in the Systems, especially in the form of legislation, to be able to explain why employees suffer work/life conflicts and why the current solutions in the form of work/life balance policies have such limited success.

The work/life balance literature demonstrates clearly the mismatch between current practices in organisations, government policy frameworks and social norms and belief systems as to what constitutes an ideal mother, father, spouse, worker, manager, woman or man and how these ideal types can be combined in the lives of real people. In Habermasian terms, the work/life balance literature illustrates a non-equilibrium state between the Systems, Steering Media intervention and the Lifeworld. I demonstrated earlier that, by definition, the Lifeworld aims to reproduce the status quo to guarantee social cohesion and, thus, is unlikely to change rapidly but rather to evolve slowly. This is particularly true with regard to norms and values relating to gender relationships. As Probert (2001, p. 8) found in her Australian study: "attitudes to motherhood itself, and beliefs about what children need, are remarkably unchanged in the 1990s [compared to the 1950s]." However, for the Australian context, it can be argued that recent changes which have been causing work/life conflicts for employed carers, such as the intensification of work and the increase in working hours (as can be seen in the HILDA data used by Drago, Black, & Wooden, 2004), were not initiated in the Lifeworld but in the Systems and reinforced by Steering Media action. This means that workplace changes which have been driven by the desire to increase efficiency and productivity, by instrumental rationality in Habermas' (1987) terms, were exacerbated by Steering Media intervention and have changed the Lifeworld. An example of this process is that of individual employment contracts, which were introduced to allow for greater labour market flexibility, are strongly supported by the recent workplace reforms (Pocock, 2005b). These changes towards increasingly individual employment contracts can potentially alter the Lifeworld in that employment is no longer considered as a collective but an individual relationship between employee and employer. Habermas' thesis of the 'Colonisation of the Lifeworld' allows for investigating this phenomenon.

The thesis of Colonisation in a work/life balance context

Broadbent and Laughlin (1997) explain that the differentiation of Lifeworld and Systems in modern societies, i.e. their 'drifting apart' from each other, is a result of disturbance to the equilibrium state between Lifeworld, Steering Media and Systems. A first order change to that equilibrium has an adaptive character in that it alters the Steering Media and Systems to realign with the Lifeworld. A second order change, on the contrary, alters the interpretative schemas and, therefore, the norms and beliefs that make up the Lifeworld. Habermas (1987)

argues that societal evolution can be attributed to a second-order process of differentiation between Systems and Lifeworld. If the differentiation is initiated by discourse within the Lifeworld, the change is classified as 'evolution'. However, if the differentiation is initiated by changes in the Steering Media or the Systems and forced onto the Lifeworld, the change is perceived as 'colonisation'.

It can be argued that such colonisation has happened with regard to work/life issues in Western societies. Using the findings by Duncan and Irwin (2004), I demonstrate that an application of instrumental rationality to areas of life that are not, or only partly, governed by these principles, namely family relationships, create unsatisfactory outcomes, especially when it is reinforced by Steering Media action, in this case by government policy. Duncan and Irwin showed that British government policy with regard to childcare relied on cost-benefit considerations of 'affordability' and 'availability' of childcare facilities and was driven by an economic agenda which was built on the assumption that care commitments of mothers were a barrier to their labour market participation. However, Duncan and Irwin's analysis of interview data showed that rather than perceiving their care commitments unequivocally as a barrier to employment, mothers had different preferences for childcare which were largely determined by moral judgements about 'good motherhood' and appropriate care for young children. Their decisions for or against labour market participation were quite independent from demographic and labour market factors. Thus, mothers' preferences were formed in the Lifeworld and not driven by instrumental rationality. None of the mothers stated availability and affordability of childcare as a primary concern when deciding how to care for their children. This demonstrates that Habermas' notion of communicative rationality as well as his three-levelled model are highly beneficial to analysing social phenomena within the work/life balance field.

In my thesis, I will use the idea of the Colonisation of the Lifeworld to analyse the intervention by Steering Media actors, namely governments, in the negotiation process of work/life arrangements. This includes the economic implications of Steering Media intervention on parents' ability to take up work/life balance policies. The intervention creates the normative and financial framework in which work/life arrangements are negotiated and in which the costs of policy take-up are determined. Duncan and Irwin's (2004) study showed that these interventions can have negative outcomes for individuals trying to reconcile paid and care work. However, using the example of the Swedish parental

leave legislation, I will demonstrate that Steering Media intervention can indeed have positive effects on work/life arrangements, reduce the economic disadvantage to taking work/life balance policies and bring about changes towards more egalitarian ways of organising society. In the final section of this chapter, the main contributions and limitations of my conceptual framework are summarised.

CONTRIBUTIONS AND LIMITATIONS OF THE MODIFIED MODEL

Existing models in organisational and feminist theory are helpful in explaining some phenomena with regard to work/life balance issues and in crafting my own conceptual framework, however, as in the conceptual model of McDonald et al. (2005), one crucial element is missing in all of them: the accountability of power relations between the levels of analysis. Pfau-Effinger (2004) and Pocock (2005) both place equal value on the three analytical levels though do not explain how exactly they interact with each other. Although Pfau-Effinger talks about power relations, she does not establish how those shape the actions of individuals or social institutions. However, Connell (1987) maintains that a social theory of gender needs to cater for power imbalances between social actors and needs to illustrate how power is used in the form of social structures to reinforce the status quo or alternatively to facilitate change. Although Habermas has been criticised for defining the Lifeworld as a power-free space (Honneth as cited in Eriksen & Weigård, 2003), his argument of power and money that function as Steering Media makes visible the power relations *between* the conflicting spheres of 'work' and 'life'. Also, his concept of communicative and instrumental rationalities can help explain why Lifeworld, Steering Media and Systems interact in particular ways. This element of power as well as the notion of different rationalities which underpin the major social spheres add value to an analysis of work/life balance beyond those theoretical approaches that have been available in this field of research so far.

Furthermore, the explicit notion of change which is at the heart of Habermas' model is highly beneficial to the work/life balance debate. The situation for most individuals in Western societies is that normative systems of the Lifeworld conflict with behaviours expected in workplaces. However, individuals cannot escape the demands of the Lifeworld reinforced and 'superimposed' on them by social structures because those demands mostly

act on an unconscious level and are deeply institutionalised in the Steering Media and Lifeworld and, hence, in the major social institutions as well as individual life histories. Simultaneously, a rejection of workplace imperatives, which rely on strategic action and instrumental rationality, by individuals leads to disadvantages in that sphere, most often in the form of negative career consequences. The outcomes of these conflicts are currently dealt with on an individual level, are often perceived as unique concerns of individuals and manifest themselves in phenomena of guilt, stress, depression, resentment and the like, as Pocock (2003) documented so clearly in *The Work/Life Collision*. However, Habermas' theory allows for investigating these conflicts as structural rather than individual problems.

Another advantage of using the theory of communicative action as the basis for my own conceptual framework relates to its applicability to cross-cultural research. Habermas' model has been developed in a western context and Broadbent et al. (1991) point out that it is not value free. However, due to its conceptualisation as a macro-level theory, the model of societal evolution is transferable to any 'modern' society which features some form of institutionalised Steering Media that act to integrate the differentiated Lifeworld and Systems. At the same time, the model is place and time specific (Habermas, 1987). This suggests that the framework is transferable across all 'modern' societies while the characteristics of the Lifeworld, Steering Media and Systems as well as the nature and level of their interplay will be unique for each society. I propose that the model lends itself particularly well to cross-cultural research because of this quality.

In crafting my own conceptual framework, I have used only the most central of Habermas' ideas that he presented in the theory of communicative action. I have relied heavily on Broadbent et al.'s (1991) explanations and experiences in the process of transforming the model of societal evolution into a workable analytical tool for the work/life balance field. Like Broadbent et al.*,* I acknowledge the serious difficulty of doing justice to the complexities of Habermas' thoughts as presented in his landmark publication when transforming his theory into an operationalised model for empirical research. I do not claim to have used his insights in their entirety. Similarly, I do not aim to address the conceptual issues brought forward against his theory beyond those developed by feminist researchers. However, I am confident that the model of societal evolution with the adaptations in the form of a 'gender lens' that I have proposed will provide a relevant tool for the analysis of

gendered social relations, which will prove most applicable to research concerned with work/life balance issues.

CHAPTER CONCLUSION

This chapter has demonstrated how the gendered variant of Habermas' theory of communicative action can be operationalised as an analytical tool for the work/life balance field, drawing on feminist theories in crafting an explicit 'gender lens'. In its altered form, the model fulfils the three crucial functions of a conceptual framework for the work/life balance field. Firstly, it features an explicit gender lens by incorporating systematically the work of feminists on all three levels of analysis. Secondly, it provides the opportunity to show the interrelationships between organisations, the welfare state and the beliefs, norms and subjective life experiences of women and men using Habermas' concept of the Lifeworld as well as his systems-approach to society. Finally, it allows for a critical examination of the status quo of organising social relations along the gendered public/private divide using the concept of communicative rationality. It is only when gender arrangements, and work/life arrangements in particular, are subjected to reasoned debate that there is a possibility of identifying those traditional norms and conventions that are no longer reasonable and sensible in organising social relations for the 21st century.

Thus, my conceptual framework has the potential to provide a fresh look at the work/life balance debate and to move it from a focus on the individual towards a focus on gendered social structures and institutions which are reproduced on an individual/society, government and organisational level. Because Habermas' model is fundamentally concerned with social development, it offers an avenue for analysing the potential of government and organisational policy as well as social discourse to facilitate a change process towards a more gender egalitarian society that is accepting of different and new ways of organising workplaces and intimate relationships.

In Part 2, I will use the conceptual framework to guide my analysis of the Australian and Swedish case studies. I will focus particularly on the potential of the Steering Media to alter the Lifeworld and the Systems. I will, thus, utilise Habermas' idea of the 'Colonisation of the Lifeworld'. The rationale behind this focus has been established in Chapter Two: if the public/private divide is to be redefined, the underlying assumption and beliefs of organising

paid and unpaid work need to change as do the social norms which reflect and reproduce the separation and opposition of public and private spheres. Because of my focus on the Steering Media, I will structure the analysis into two distinct but interrelated parts by investigating first the Lifeworld-Steering Media interactions and then the Steering Media-Systems interactions. Before I launch into the analysis, however, I will outline my methodology and briefly introduce the country case studies of Australia and Sweden.

CHAPTER FOUR

THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVE AND RESEARCH DESIGN

This research project started out with the phenomenon that although workplace organisations had implemented a comprehensive range of work/life balance policies and employees seemed to experience persistent or increasing work/life pressures, they did not make use of work/life policies. The most basic question at the start was thus: why is that so? As I have demonstrated earlier, this question took me deeper into the phenomenon, past the common explanations offered by the work/life balance literature and into the depth of the gender literature. Without intention, I soon found myself engaging with the fundamental questions of epistemology: what is the nature of human knowledge and reality? Are there any truths that exist 'out there', independent of the individual, or are knowledge and reality subjective constructs of our minds? Although Crotty (1998) maintains that hardly any researcher starts from the epistemology to determine their methodology and methods, in my case this is exactly what happened.

I need to introduce my epistemology and theoretical paradigm in some detail because I have adopted a philosophical perspective which has shaped my analysis and presentation of the material included in this thesis. I mentioned in the Introduction that my engagement with the literature was a critical one and I have reviewed, in Chapter One, the current work/life balance literature with the explicit aim to identify, from a feminist perspective, those

weaknesses which contribute to the limited explanations of the low take-up of work/life balance policies in the face of persistent work/life pressures. Similarly, my review of the gender literature was conducted with a view to identify those concepts which have the potential to advance current explanations of the persistent work/life conflicts and enhance the understanding of the barriers to work/life balance and to the take-up of work/life balance policies.

In this chapter, I will first outline my epistemology and theoretical paradigm with a focus on explaining more fully my understanding of feminism as a research paradigm and myself as a feminist researcher. Secondly, I will introduce my methodology and illustrate that the critical analysis of literature is one of my methods of inquiry, together with other secondary and primary data sources. Moreover, I will elaborate on my rationale for designing the study as a cross-country comparison and for choosing parental leave as my policy example.

EPISTEMOLOGY AND RESEARCH PARADIGM

Epistemology refers to the nature of knowledge and what researchers perceive as valid knowledge (Collis & Hussey, 2003), its possibilities, scope and basis (Hamlyn, 1995). "Epistemology is concerned with providing a philosophical grounding for deciding what kinds of knowledge are possible and how we can ensure that they are both adequate and legitimate" (Maynard, 1994, p. 10). There are three main epistemologies – objectivism, constructivism and subjectivism – and I will use constructivism, also known under the term constructionism, which represents the belief that truth, or meaning, cannot be detected but is constructed by the engagement of individuals with each other and with the realities in the world (Crotty, 1998). This implies that different people perceive the same phenomena in various ways because they construct meaning differently.

Constructivist epistemology is common in gender research, especially if it is conducted from a radical feminist perspective (Connell, 1987; MacKinnon, 1987; Bem, 1993; Gherardi, 1995; J. A. Howard & Hollander, 1997; Risman, 1998; Britton, 2000; Walby, 2004; Crompton & Lyonette, 2005). Connell (2005) states that it is now accepted in most serious scholarship that gender relations are historically constructed. As I explained in my review of the gender literature, the school of thought operating from a constructionist position conceptionalises

gender as an activity ('doing gender') rather than as a static condition ('having gender') (West & Zimmerman, 1987). Howard and Hollander (1997) maintain that it is the social context, and not the activity itself, that gives meaning to a person's action and, thus, determines whether it acts to reinforce or contradict established gender norms.

The complexity of the idea of constructionism, of 'doing gender', is that individuals face a world of meaning, the existing gender order, that shapes their thinking and behaviour throughout their lives but, at the same time, this world of meaning is shaped by the actions of individuals. This sociological dilemma of 'structure versus agency' emerged with the earliest thinkers and has persisted since. It has been discussed by Giddens (2001) as the concept of the 'duality of structure' which I outlined in my review of the gender literature in Chapter Two.

Constructionist epistemology allows for the conceptionalisation of gender as a social construct which can be altered by interactions between subject and object, between the individual and gendered norms, expectations, practices and institutions. However, before change can happen, individuals have to become aware of how the gender order shapes their assumptions, beliefs and norms, i.e. internalised interpretive schema, which guide their actions (Bem, 1993). These implicit interpretive schemas have to be made explicit so that they can be discussed and their relevance and effectiveness for organising contemporary societies can be evaluated (Meehan, 1995). Far from being a reflection of 'natural' or 'god given' differences between women and men, the current social order needs to be seen as a complex set of social arrangements which has been institutionalised at a given point in time to serve a number of purposes (Pateman, 1989; Lister, 2003). I propose that the current attention to the concept of work/life balance can be interpreted as an indicator that the traditional gender order, which was built on the public/private divide and relied on the 'ideal worker' and the 'good mother' as the archetypes of masculinity and femininity, is no longer appropriate for the organisation of social relationships in the 21st century.

Constructionist epistemology is often paired with a phenomenological paradigm. Crotty (1998, p. 12) points out that "[c]onstructionism and phenomenology are so intertwined that one could hardly be phenomenological while espousing either an objectivist or a subjectivist epistemology". Initially, phenomenology was understood as a research paradigm that asked the researcher to take a fresh look at things: to set aside the learned habits of thought

(Husserl, 1931), to open their eyes and keep them open (Heron, 1992), to call into question their culture and their way of seeing the world (Wolff, 1984), or to say it with Marton's (1986, p. 40) words: "to make us conscious of what the world was like before we learned how to see it". Crotty (1998) argues that behind this call to break with our culturally derived meanings lies a deeply rooted suspicion of culture, the meanings it forces on its members and the everyday practices that take place within it.

The radical element which is contained in the phenomenological paradigm is important for my research because I aim to broaden the work/life balance debate beyond its existing boundaries. It has been argued that there is a need to look beyond the current system of institutionalising paid and unpaid work (e.g. Connell, 2005) and that it is necessary to ask some fundamental questions regarding the organisation of the work/life interface and gender relations (e.g. S. Lewis et al., 2003; Gambles et al., 2006). Such critical evaluation and discussion would ideally enable progress towards a redefinition of the public/private divide and a more just division of work and rewards between women and men. My study contributes to the critical evaluation of the current work/life interface and aims to question the underlying, taken-for-granted, institutionalised assumptions and norms in relation to work and private life arrangements which are gendered, using the example of parental leave policies.

However, phenomenology has come to be used in a different way in contemporary social research. Crotty (1998) argued that phenomenology, as a methodology and theoretical perspective, has become a subjective form of inquiry which has lost it critical spirit. This is why I do not use phenomenology in its contemporary understanding as my main paradigm. Instead, I turn to feminism and critical inquiry and blend the two theoretical perspectives to create a critical feminist paradigm which underpins my thesis.

Critical inquiry

Critical inquiry has its roots in Marxist thinking and writing but has developed in different directions over the last century (Held, 1990). The two authors who are most influential to my theoretical perspective are Habermas and Freire. Critical inquiry is 'radical' in a very literal sense of "going to the root of something" (Edwards, 1988, p. 31). Edwards maintains

that Marxists and Feminists regard the organisation of society (either capitalist or patriarchal) and accepted knowledge in social sciences (perceived as either bourgeois and/or sexist) as fundamentally flawed and argue that both need critical re-vision, followed by fundamental transformations and reconstruction. This shared goal of researchers in critical inquiry and feminism legitimises a blending of the two paradigms.

I draw on the work by Freire and Habermas as representatives of critical inquiry. Freire's influence on my work is mostly ideological. I use his idea that individuals do not exist apart from the world or the culture they live in but are rooted in it, interact with it and thus shape it (Freire, 1972). Freire maintains that in our capacities as human beings, we have the creative possibilities and the responsibility to see the world not only for what it is but also for what it can be. The task arising from Freire's work is to use these creative possibilities to craft a more humane and more just world for everyone (Crotty, 1998). Freire's idea is reflected in the feminist statement of "the personal is political" (Hanisch, 1969) as well as in the vision of overcoming the public/private divide (Pateman, 1989; Lister, 2003) and redefining the work/life interface. Connell (2004, p.16) stated that the concept of work/life balance was the conservative expression of a radical impulse: "The impulse is for justice, specifically gender equality, and for the fuller life made possible for all parties by just human relations". I adopt Freire's vision which is reflected in feminist analysis and theorising as the vision of my own work.

My use of Habermas' work is conceptual as well as practical. As I explained in the previous chapter, I use Habermas' model of societal evolution as the basis of my own conceptual framework and operationalised it for feminist research by equipping it with a 'gender lens'. However, the need to adapt the work of critical researchers for feminist analysis points to a severe flaw with critical inquiry as a theoretical perspective. Both Habermas and Freire have been criticised by feminists for their androcentric language and approach and, thus, their gender-blindness. I appreciate this criticism but would like to argue with the words of bell hooks that, although their work is androcentric and gender-blind, it does not prevent feminists from learning from their insights to frame feminist responses to social issues. She states (hooks, 1993, p. 148-149):

> For me this [sexism in Freire's work] is always a source of anguish for it represents a blind spot in the vision of men who have profound insight. And yet, I never wish to see a critique of the blind spot overshadow anyone's (and feminists in particular) capacity to learn from the insights. […] Freire's

sexism is indicated by the language in his early works notwithstanding that there is so much that remains liberatory. There is no need to apologize for the sexism. Freire's own model of critical pedagogy invites a critical interrogation of this flaw in the work. But critical interrogation is not the same as dismissal. […] It is feminist thinking that empowers me to engage in a constructive critique of Freire's work […] and yet there are many other standpoints from which I approach his work that enable me to experience its value, that make it possible for that work to touch me at the very core of my being.

The significant use of non-feminist work in a feminist piece of research calls for an explanation of my understanding of feminism. I will outline my feminist perspective and journey in the next section.

My feminism

My basic assumption about feminism is that it represents a worldview comprised of a specific set of beliefs and values which have at their heart the eradication of androcentrism as the dominant organising principle of virtually all social relationships. Underlying this aim is the belief that knowledge and reality are socially constructed and that female inequality is not a product of sexual difference, i.e. a 'natural' inferiority, but of the ways in which social context creates and institutionalises gendered meaning out of these differences (Bem, 1993). Sex is perceived by feminists as the major axis of power and the most fundamental principle of organising societies, but race, class and age are acknowledged as other divisions of social power (Connell, 1987).

I understand feminism as a worldview, as a lens that a person adopts and from that day sees the world differently. I assume that it is the feminist values that give meaning to feminist research and not the fact of being a woman or possessing female traits. To put it in Crotty's (1998, p.182) words: "[F]eminist research addresses the world to 'know it differently than we have ever known it' – yes, and to fashion it anew". Therefore, I do use the work of women and men who have adopted a 'gender lens' and who have used and built on feminist ideas and theories. However, I also use theories that have been designed from an unreflected androcentric worldview, such as Habermas' model of societal evolution, where the ideas support, unintentionally, the aims of feminist inquiry and recognise the need for change. This theoretical

and philosophical openness has provided additional insights but also caused some grief as I tried to reconcile it with feminist principles.

My feminist journey was a very personal struggle and I needed to come to terms with the many versions of feminism that were presented to me and develop my own feminist position. I eventually discovered that other researchers had been on this rollercoaster ride before me. Marshall (1984), in her landmark publication *Women managers: Travellers in a male world*, gives a frank account of her own journey to reach a feminist position which has many parallels to my own. I draw on her work to illustrate the philosophical and personal expedition on which I embarked early in my PhD candidature.

In the beginning, I felt restricted by the managerial paradigm and implicit assumptions which underpinned the work/life balance debate and set out to find a different way to investigate the issues involved in reconciling paid and unpaid work. More than 20 years earlier, Marshall (1984, p.43) talked of her dissatisfaction with writing in the established, male-dominated management discipline:

> I often felt passive, muted frustration at writers' implicit assumptions, but could not say clearly what I wanted instead. Eventually my dissatisfaction became so great that I had to break out of this lethargic tunnel. In doing so I found new positive directions just waiting to be taken. There was another strand to women's thinking which I had so far hardly touched on.

She experienced her discovery of radical feminism as a "shift to a new level of enquiry" (Marshall, 1984, p.43), as a break with traditions in her discipline which is exactly how I use feminist literature in my own work. I perceive the integration of feminist literature into the established work/life balance debate, at least where it is conducted within the management discipline, as a break with current practice and as an opening up of a new theoretical perspective on work/life issues.

To that end, the discovery of radical feminist writing and thinking was a relief. Marshall (1984, p.44) states:

> This new material [radical feminist ideas] welcomed me, seeming to know who I was. Much of the writing had the quality of expressing with clarity what I knew, inarticulately, as 'truth'. As my reading and thinking touched my personal sphere in this powerful way, I experienced a new sense of myself – as a woman, and with new freedom. I began the delicate, engrossing process of developing my own feminism.

Like Marshall, I found a wealth of feminist perspectives and feminist mentors who opened up a world view which would change my understanding and analysis of social relationships forever; for better and for worse. While, all of a sudden, I had access to a comprehensive set of explanations of women's disadvantaged situation in workplaces and families, an insight into why it was women who had to make the 'tough' decisions about combining employment and family life that men never had to make, I remember vividly the night I first read the critique of global capitalism by Mies and Bennholdt-Thomsen (1999) which left me devastated and staring into exactly the black hole of hopelessness that they were trying to fill.

I also had to come to terms with my own life as a woman in the new world that I had discovered. Similar to Marshall, I became very self-conscious and dissatisfied with my inability to let go of many of my previous assumptions, beliefs and habits. I often did not know how to behave in trying to reconcile my feminist consciousness with my life in the 'real' world. I had fierce and sometimes hurtful arguments with the people who were closest to me and who I loved most and who, consequently, came to experience the struggle I was fighting with myself first hand. Yet, these struggles eventually became liberating from both my previous gender-blind existence and some of the feminist perspectives that were offered to me. Again, Marshall (1984, p.45) puts it beautifully:

> Underneath all this turmoil, a strong sense of increasing knowing and personal worth was growing, as I did battle with so many of my own assumptions, and survived. I found I could embrace challenges and uncertainty with a faith in my own competence and opinions. My sense of humour returned. I developed, too, a clearer appreciation of the range of beliefs and experiences encompassed within feminism.

This ability to appreciate different 'feminisms' and to discriminate between feminist ideas that resonated with me and helped me to make sense of the world and myself within it, and those which I found too distressing and removed from my own experience to accept them as my 'truth', was important and necessary for my own understanding of feminism as well as my integrity as a person. I had turned to feminism in search of new horizons and insights and was not prepared to accept yet another doctrine with fixed assumptions and rules so similar to the androcentric doctrines it criticised. Marshall (1984, p.45) also makes this point:

> Surveying the field now I can choose my place within the radical feminist frameworks which dominated this phase of my journey. I am still, however, a

little cautious. Whilst feminism explicitly offers freedom, some of its literature is as normative, evaluative and condemning of alternatives as the belief systems it denounces. Encountering such attitudes I become fiercely independent. I will not risk being swept along again by a perspective which denies me my sense of the world. Within feminism there is, however, sufficient latitude and welcoming of new enquiry for me to escape such a fate. As a broad area of thought and writing it is the nearest to 'home' I have found on my journey. From passive, frustrated opposition, I moved to rewarding, active exploration.

As a result, my feminism does not sit well in a 'classic' radical feminist paradigm because I draw on work by non-feminist researchers and am essentially concerned with changing the relationships between women and men in heterosexual relationships; an endeavour that some radical feminists would regard as fruitless at best and as counterproductive at worst. Yet, radical feminism is at the heart of my analysis as I aim to go to the roots of work/life conflicts and locate them in the unequal relationships between women and men which have been institutionalised in the public/private divide. I conceive of gender inequality as a social concept which is maintained by social mechanisms and, thus, can be changed. In my view, there is nothing 'innately evil' about men that makes them sustain patriarchal relations any more than there are innate deficiencies in women which disqualify them from being full and equal citizens. At the same time, I acknowledge that there are men who actively and consciously oppress and exploit women for their own benefit and who are supported by androcentric social institutions to do so. I have, then, developed a feminism which is located at the outer layers of the radical feminist paradigm and which also draws on insights developed by liberal and socialist feminists as well as non-feminist researchers. As such, I have opened myself up to attack from multiple groups of scholars which, I suppose, is the price I have to pay for my unwillingness to commit, yet again, to a prescriptive paradigm.

So far, I have established my epistemological stance as a constructionist researcher and my use of feminism which is inclusive of other theoretical influences. The second part of this chapter will detail my methodology as well as methods of data collection and analysis.

METHODOLOGY: COUNTRY CASE STUDIES AS PRIMARY RESEARCH DESIGN

At the heart of my study is the objective to gain a more comprehensive understanding of the low take-up of work/life balance policies provided by organisations and governments in a

situation of persistent work/life pressures. To achieve this objective, I have devised a rather unconventional methodology following Daly (2000) and van Doorne-Huiskes et al. (2005) who argued, as mentioned in my Introduction, that research agendas for this complex field needed methodologies which are more open in character, such as comparative and interdisciplinary approaches or those which combine different methods of data collection and analysis.

I have taken up their challenge and adopted comparative case studies as a research strategy. While I have drawn on various sources of data, including the existing literature on work/life balance, I focus on only one set of work/life balance policies, those relating to parental leave, which allows for an in-depth analysis of this policy in two different national settings. This methodological approach potentially provides a rich picture of how this work/life policy is designed and implemented in a specific social context. Moreover, I propose that this approach allows for the evaluation of policy outcomes in terms of improving work/life balance and challenging the public/private divide. I aim to demonstrate that work/life balance policies, particularly in the form of legislation, can reduce or exacerbate the barriers to work/life balance and influence the take-up of work/life balance policies. Because I am investigating the impact of national legislation, the case study analysis needed to be conducted as a comparison of two countries at the national level.

This analysis is facilitated by the conceptual framework I developed in the previous chapter. I do not aim to establish its validity in a traditional sense, i.e. by testing various hypotheses. Instead, the purpose of the conceptual framework is to create the context for my analysis and to provide the structure for a multi-level, gender-sensitive analysis of work/life balance policies. This approach is unproblematic in case study research because, as Veal (2005) outlines, there is no need to generalise to a defined wider population. In the following section, I will establish my rationale for choosing a case study approach before outlining why I selected Australia and Sweden as case studies.

Case study approach

My research strategy is the compilation and analysis of two country case studies: Australia and Sweden. Robson (1993, p. 40) defines a case study as the "development of detailed,

intensive knowledge about a single 'case', or a small number of related 'cases'". I propose that a case study approach is an appropriate methodology to address my research question and objective in several ways. Case study research is considered to be especially appropriate in new topic areas (Eisenhardt, 1989) and is applied in areas that are not covered by established theories and a sufficient body of knowledge (Collis & Hussey, 2003). In 1994, Duxbury et al. (1994, p. 450) stated that "given the multiple and complex links between work and family spheres, no one unifying theoretical framework exists within the field". I have established in Chapter Three that this gap has not yet been addressed and have proposed my own conceptual framework for the analysis of work/life issues, in my case the low take-up of work/life policies. In light of the lack of established theories in the work/life balance field and the strengths of case study research outlined above, my choice of comparative case study research seems to be an appropriate methodology to work towards theory building for the work/life balance field.

In addition, case study research is popular among work/life researchers, i.e. it is an established methodology in my field, and case studies have been used in a variety of ways. These include case studies using qualitative data only (Swanberg, 2004), based on secondary data only (Galinsky & Stein, 1990; Spearitt & Edgar, 1994), using ratings and gap analysis (Wright & Sheridan, 1998), using questionnaires as the sole method of data collection (Kossek & Nichol, 1992), using various methods of data collection (Abbott et al., 1997), multi-organisation case studies (Rapoport & Bailyn, 1996; Charlesworth, 2004a) and multi-country case studies (Gambles et al., 2006). With the exception of the last study, all of those research projects were concerned with work/life balance solutions within workplace organisations and none of these studies has investigated work/life issues from a theoretical perspective which is interdisciplinary and gender-sensitive.

The choice of country case studies as the research strategy has the potential to advance the work/life balance research agenda in multiple ways. Veal (2005) stated that a key strength of case study research was that they give the researcher the ability to place people, organisations, events and experiences in their social and historical context. According to Veal, this quality of case studies allows the researcher to treat the subject of study as a whole, rather than abstracting a limited set of pre-selected features. For my study this implies that, firstly, a case study methodology may be a vehicle to move the focus of inquiry away from the individual employee/organisation and towards a societal level of analysis

because, in comparing two countries, it is possible to examine differences in government policy and philosophies with regard to work/life balance. This is important because the current work/life literature with its focus on individual employees and individual companies fails to identify the structural nature of work/life issues. Furthermore, comparative case study analysis offers a tool to unpack the gendered taken-for-granted assumptions and norms which underlie work/life arrangements and policy because these assumptions and norms are likely to differ in the two countries under investigation. Finally, the country-specific design of work/life policies is likely to result in different outcomes for individuals' ability to achieve better work/life balance because policy design can facilitate or discourage their take-up, as Brandth and Kvande (2001) demonstrated in their study of the changes to Norwegian parental leave legislation. In summary, cross-country research provides a broader framework for analysis of policies as Walby (1996) stresses in her own work on cross-cultural gender analysis:

> Comparative analysis enables us to ask questions about the causes of differences in patterns of gender relations in employment. It provides an opportunity to examine relations between work, household and state in a wider frame of reference than is possible if the analysis is confined to one society with one set of government policies. One of the problems in comparative analysis of gender relations is the production of a set of concepts and a means to operationalize them which is simultaneously sensitive to specific cultural contexts while having sufficiently general range to be relevant in a wide variety of settings. (Walby, 1996, p.9)

I proposed in Chapter Three that my conceptual framework provides a context of analysis which allows for an evaluation of the specific cultural context, mainly via the concept of the Lifeworld, but is applicable to different countries because of the three level structure which integrates Lifeworld, Steering Media and Systems that are present in every developed society. Yet, to be able to support my two key arguments, namely that there are country-specific assumptions and norms which underpin the design of work/life policies and the design of the policies influences their take-up, it was important to identify two countries which are comparable but have institutionalised very different approaches to work/life balance in general and parental leave provisions in particular.

Australia and Sweden as case studies

The main reason why I designed this study as a cross-country comparison between Australia and Sweden is the need for maximum differences between the work/life balance policies which have been established in two otherwise comparable countries. I propose that Australia and Sweden are comparable in the sense that they are two wealthy, highly developed countries with highly sophisticated Steering Media in the form of public administrations. OECD data for 2004 shows that the two countries have virtually identical GDPs per capita, US$ 31,231 for Australia and US$ 30,361 for Sweden (all figures in this section are taken from OECD, 2006a). Australia and Sweden have growing populations, which is largely due to immigration, and both countries have relatively high total fertility rates in comparison to other OECD countries (1.8 in Australia and 1.7 in Sweden in 2002). They share the trend of a growing services sector which has contributed to the increase in female employment in both countries. The traditionally high levels of female employment in Sweden and the increasing female employment rates in Australia coupled with relatively high birth rates in both countries have fuelled the need for employment conditions which enable the combination of paid and care work. However, there are also significant differences between the two countries in terms of their economies, labour markets and legislative and collective bargaining frameworks which suggests that they make for an interesting comparison in terms of their approaches to addressing work/life conflicts at a national government level.

Specifically, I want to demonstrate in my analysis of the two country case studies that women have entered the labour market in different numbers and under different conditions in the two countries and that governments and employers in Australia and Sweden have produced very different approaches to dealing with work/life conflicts, in particular parental leave provisions. I contend that these differences in approach need to be interpreted in the light of different welfare state histories and philosophies of the two countries.

I demonstrated earlier that most of the work/life balance literature which focuses on the organisational level of work/life issues has taken the social and political context of liberal welfare states, and especially of the US, largely for granted. I propose that this uncritical approach to the national context in which work/life arrangements are negotiated omits an important actor in the negotiation process: the welfare state. At the same time, I established in Chapter Three that Habermas saw the Steering Media, which I conceptualise in this study as government intervention via the welfare state, as the mediating link between Lifeworld and Systems which acts to keep those two life realms in an equilibrium state. This suggests

that Steering Media intervention is a crucial component in the analysis of work/life balance issues.

Thus, it appears to be sensible to compare two countries which feature very different Steering Media approaches to addressing work/life balance issues to make visible the importance of the Steering Media in shaping the behaviour of individuals when negotiating work/life arrangements. Using Esping-Andersen's (1990) categories of capitalist welfare states, Australia can be classified as a representative of the liberal welfare state model, although not unequivocally, whereas Sweden represents a social democratic welfare state approach. Therefore, they represent two countries which have developed very different Steering Media approaches to dealing with welfare state issues, including work/life balance.

To date, cross-country comparisons of work/life policies involving Australia have largely stayed within the liberal paradigm (e.g. Buckingham, 1999; Whitehouse & Hosking, 2005) and have contrasted public policy approaches in Australia to those in the US and the UK. However, all three countries fall under the liberal welfare state paradigm because they rely on the concepts of needs assessment and mutual obligations with regard to welfare benefits (Perry, 2000). While such within-paradigm comparisons provide important insights into differences between countries which are very similar in their approach to work/life balance, they are limited in that they do not allow for the opportunity to learn from 'real' alternatives to organising paid and care work which exist outside of the liberal paradigm. The comparison of Australia with Sweden which operates in a different welfare state paradigm provides the opportunity to identify real differences in approach to designing work/life balance policies.

Important supra-national legislative bodies have emerged over the last decade, especially in the form of the European Union (EU). Their influence on national legislation has been demonstrated in an increasing number of comparative studies with a focus on countries of the EU (e.g. den Dulk, Doorne-Huiskes, & Schippers, 1996; Blossfeld & Hakim, 1997; Drew, Emerek, & Mahon, 1998; O'Reilly & Fagan, 1998; Crompton & LeFeuvre, 2000; Hantrais, 2000; Rubery, Smith, Anxo, & Flood, 2001; Guerrina, 2002; Gerhard, Knijn, & Weckwert, 2003) While I acknowledge the importance of supra-national bodies, I will not analyse their influence on parental leave policies in Australia and Sweden for several reasons. Firstly, for the Swedish case, Walby (2004) points out that the transition in gender regimes in Sweden and other Nordic countries took place before the EU intervention on gender

equality and mainstreaming of gender. Importantly, most of the changes to the Swedish parental leave legislation took place before Sweden joined the EU. Duncan (2002) demonstrates that, in fact, Nordic women drove the very programs established on an EU level because their national approaches were seen as a model for European policy. Moreover, while Australia takes part in alliances in the Asia-Pacific region, those bodies do not have the regulatory influence on matters concerning work/life balance as does the EU. Thus, my focus on the national level is justified for the purpose of this analysis. Australia and Sweden as national case studies make for an interesting comparison because they are comparable but have pursued very different approaches to reconciling paid and care work. The differences in policy approaches in Australia and Sweden are particularly poignant when it comes to parental leave provisions.

Parental leave as the work/life balance policy under investigation

As I will illustrate in the next chapter, Australia and Sweden have implemented very different approaches to providing for parental leave benefits at a government level. I chose parental leave as the work/life policy for analysis because it has particular relevance among the work/life balance policies provided by governments and organisations. The arrival of the first child (and subsequent children to a lesser extent) marks a turning point in the work/life arrangements of young couples (e.g. Coltrane, 1998). As I will demonstrate in subsequent chapters, the changes are drastic for young women whereas the lives of their partners are affected to a lesser extent. I will argue that parental leave is decisive in setting parents onto trajectories of how they share paid and unpaid work and has the potential to influence the extent to which mothers and fathers achieve equality in sharing employment and care work.

For this study, I isolate parental leave policies and use them as an example of one set of work/life policies. I propose that this approach can demonstrate that the design and take-up of work/life policies are integrally linked to gendered norms and assumptions, result in gendered patterns of sharing paid and unpaid work between women and men and set the guidelines for corporate policy interventions. The in-depth analysis of one policy in a cross-country comparison has been identified by Crompton and LeFeuvre (2000) as an effective research approach:

> In evaluating this failure and success [of policies], a comparison of the outcomes of different policies is an invaluable research tool and, indeed, cross-national comparisons supply an 'international laboratory' for policy evaluation. (Crompton & LeFeuvre, 2000, p.335)

> We have suggested that cross-national comparative research might play an important role in policy evaluation, in that the comparison of national circumstances that are very similar, but in which a particular policy is present (or absent), is one way in which to gauge the effectiveness of the policy in question. (Crompton & LeFeuvre, 2000, p.345)

This suggests that a comparison of countries where individuals face similar issues but where governments have developed different policy approaches to dealing with these issues can reveal the effectiveness of government intervention to address the issues in case. Applied to my study, this means that a comparison of Australia and Sweden where individuals need to reconcile employment with care work, but where governments have developed different policy approaches to dealing with these issues, i.e. providing generous and universal parental leave benefits compared to implementing minimum parental leave provisions as part of the industrial relations safety net, makes it possible to analyse the ability of parental leave policies to improve work/life balance. Thus, instead of investigating the take-up of work/life policies from the perspective of individuals, I look more closely at the policies themselves, their design and their outcomes in terms of take-up, using existing macro-level data and secondary sources.

Parental leave policies offer a unique opportunity for a cross-country comparison between Australia and Sweden because comprehensive data on take-up is available in both countries as are documents detailing the ideological foundations of the current policy approaches. This means that a wealth of secondary data is available for analysis in both countries which forms the basis of my cross-country comparison.

Research methods and analysis

My study uses data triangulation which combines qualitative and quantitative sources of data and methods of analysis. In addition, I have included the work/life balance literature as well as feminist literature from various disciplines in my analysis. I have outlined earlier that my critical review of the literature constituted part of the analysis of the weaknesses of current explanations of the low take-up of work/life balance policies.

Three main sources of secondary data are used to compile my country case studies: firstly, the relevant pieces of legislation are analysed in both countries. Secondly, I include reports and white papers produced by different government-associated bodies, such as government departments, parliamentary committees and statutory bodies. In this study, I refer to these government-associated bodies as Steering Media actors. The third source of secondary data used in my analysis are statistics produced by the national statistics agencies (Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) and Statistics Sweden) as well as the PLA survey which was designed by Whitehouse, Baird, Diamond and Hosking (2006) and conducted as part of the national *Growing Up in Australia: The Longitudinal Study of Australian Children* (LSAC) project. Other relevant statistics for both countries are contained in publications by the OECD.

Thus, the quantitative sources in this study come from existing survey data sets. Analyses of the data are available in published material, such as research reports both in hard copy and electronically. However, I have been given access to some of the raw data, notably the PLA data and take-up data of the Swedish parental cash benefits for the years 1993 to 2006, and have analysed some of the data myself, using descriptive statistics in most cases. I will acknowledge the analysis of survey data by other authors throughout the thesis and will indicate when I include my own, i.e. will reference '(my own calculations)'.

To analyse the textual sources, I use feminist content analysis which Reinharz (1992) describes as the systematic study of cultural artefacts, in the form of text, by interpreting the themes contained in them. Reinharz (1992, p.146) argues that the study of cultural products through a feminist lens typically exposes a pervasive patriarchal culture. This quality of feminist content analysis is crucial for my study which aims to unmask taken-for granted gendered assumptions and norms which underpin the work/life interface in Australia and Sweden.

Reinharz outlines two defining characteristics of cultural artefacts: they are not created for the purpose of academic study and, thus, can be described as having a "naturalistic, 'found' quality" (Reinharz, 1992, p.147), and they are non-interactive in the sense that there is no interrelationship between the researcher and the subject of study as there would be, for example, in the case of interview-based research. I will show in the next section that the reports under analysis in my study were produced to inform policy makers and the broader

community in Australia and Sweden about issues relating to work/life balance. These documents were not created for the purpose of being studied in the same sense as interview data or surveys are produced for the sole purpose of being studied by a researcher. The reports included in my analysis were produced by public actors who had studied phenomena relating to reconciling employment and private life and who made recommendations as to how the work/life issues could be addressed. These recommendations rely on assumptions, norms and experiences which are gendered and are likely to result in different outcomes for women and men. Public actors may or may not be aware of the gender dimension of their recommendations. Thus, analysing reports which are available in the public domain is a unique opportunity to analyse, in the context of my conceptual framework, the gendered assumptions, norms and experiences which are used by policy makers while addressing issues related to work/life balance.

Turning secondary sources into primary data

As I mentioned earlier, the material which I collected for my case studies consisted entirely of secondary data which was both qualitative and quantitative. I will detail the sources of the secondary material and briefly outline the design of the surveys I drew on for my analysis in the following two sections, starting with the textual sources.

Acts of Parliament

The pieces of legislation which form the basis for my analysis are, in Australia, the Workplace Relations Act (WRA) (1996) and its WorkChoices Amendment (2006). The WorkChoices reforms were largely promoted via a government-administered website (www.workchoices.gov.au) and much of the material for my analysis is taken from that website. In Sweden, the pieces of legislation under analysis are the Parental Leave Act (1995:584) and the National Insurance Act (1962:381).

Steering Media reports and white papers

In identifying relevant reports and white papers, I focused on the period between January 2002 and March 2007. There are a number of reports which refer to work/life issues in general and parental leave in particular that have been put forward by Steering Media actors in Australia and Sweden. I will detail the relevant publications in both countries in turn.

In Australia, my analysis focuses on the reports compiled by the Human Rights and Equal Opportunities Commission (HREOC), the Standing Committee (House of Representatives Standing Committee on Family and Human Services, 2006) and a policy statement released by the Department of Employment and Workplace Relations (DEWR) in September 2006 titled *Work and Family: The importance of workplace flexibility in promoting balance between work and family* (DEWR, 2006) because they provide the most complete expression of the approach to work/life balance by the Australian government. The HREOC reports which are included in this analysis are: *A time to value: proposal for a national paid maternity leave scheme* (HREOC, 2002a), the discussion paper *Striking the balance: Women, men, work and family* (HREOC, 2005) and the most recent report *It's about time: Women, men, work and family* (HREOC, 2007).

Apart from these comprehensive reports on work/life balance and maternity leave, the two Australian Government Departments in charge of work/life balance policies, namely the DEWR and the Department of Family, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs (FaCSIA, previously FaCS), have published a number of policy white papers and co-authored Australia's background report for the OECD's *Review of Family Friendly Policies* in August 2002 (Australian Department of Family and Community Services & Australian Department of Employment and Workplace Relations, 2002). In addition, there have been published reports of government-commissioned research, notably the influential study *Men's uptake of family-friendly employment provisions* by Bittman, Hoffmann and Thompson (2004) for FaCS. I also draw on the websites government where appropriate, such as the WorkChoices website established by the DEWR.

For Sweden, I draw on publications by the Swedish Social Insurance Agency (Försäkringskassan), namely its annual report *Social Insurance in Sweden* for the years 2004 and 2005 (Forsakringskassan, 2005, 2006b). The Swedish Social Insurance Agency is the

government department which administered social insurance benefits and collects all data on the take-up of parental cash benefits. Moreover, I use the bi-annual publication produced by Statistics Sweden *Women and Men in Sweden, Facts and Figures* for the years 2004 and 2006 (SCB, 2004; Statistics Sweden, 2006) which disaggregate national statistics by sex and provide historical overviews of government initiatives to address gender inequality. A third source of Swedish publications is provided by the Government Offices of Sweden (Regeringskansliet), mostly in the form of websites (e.g. Naringsdepartementet, 2005). However, there are two major reports which I use in my analysis: *Sweden's Action Plan for Employment* (Regeringskansliet, 2003) and *The Swedish Reform Program for Growth and Jobs 2006 to 2008* (Regeringskansliet, 2006). Finally, the Swedish Institute provides information on the government's approach to managing the work/life interface and gender relations (Swedish Institute, 2004).

All reports were produced by Steering Media actors to inform policy decisions or to communicate policy decisions to a broader public. They are similar in intent but not equivalent in terms of methodology. However, this is not an issue for this study because I use the reports to demonstrate the link between assumptions, norms and beliefs expressed by Steering Media actors and their influence on policy design. I do not aim to compare the details or methodologies of the reports produced by Australian and Swedish Steering Media actors but the implicit and explicit assumptions and normative statements they contain. These reports represent the qualitative component of my analysis which is complemented by a quantitative component detailing the take-up of parental leave and, to a lesser extent, data relating to labour market and household patterns of parents with young children.

Take-up data

The data on the take-up of parental cash benefits available to Swedish parents is published in the annual reports of the agency and I use the reports which present data for the years 2004 and 2005 (Forsakringskassan, 2005, 2006b). Moreover, the full details of the use of parental cash benefits by Swedish parents in 2006 as well as summary data for the years 1993 to 2006 were made available to me personally by the Swedish Social Insurance Agency (Forsakringskassan, 2007). I contacted the agency by email in April 2007 and again in June 2007 and was provided with various tables which organised the data according to the age of

the child, the time fraction in which the leave was accessed and the level of compensation received by the parent. All information was available for women and men but the tables also gave total numbers. This data provides a rich source for analysing patterns of take-up of parental leave days in Sweden.

In Australia, reports from two national studies investigating the take-up of parental leave provisions have recently been made available: the Pregnancy and Employment Transitions Survey (PaETS) was conducted by the ABS in November 2005 and released in October 2006 (ABS, 2006b). The second study is the Parental Leave in Australia (PLA) survey which was designed by Whitehouse, Baird, Diamond and Hosking, conducted in May 2005 and released in November 2006 (Whitehouse et al., 2006). The advantage of the PLA survey is its location within the LSAC which will eventually allow for a longitudinal analysis of the interrelationships between the use of parental leave provisions and child and family wellbeing (Whitehouse et al., 2006), information which will be beneficial for future research into parental leave take-up. The PaETS is a cross-sectional survey.

While some data in the two surveys overlap, they allow for a differentiation between two different samples. The PaETS focused on mothers living with a biological child under two years of age when the mothers were interviewed in November 2005 (ABS, 2006b). The information collected covered women's employment situations and decisions during and after pregnancy as well as women's use of paid and unpaid leave associated with pregnancy, the birth of their child and the subsequent caring for the new born child. Details of the work arrangements of the mother's partner, both before and after the birth, were also collected. The PaETS was a supplement to the Australian Bureau of Statistics Monthly Population Survey (MPS) which is a representative household survey. Thus, the PaETS calculates the take-up rates of maternity, paternity and parental leave using all employed mothers and fathers with children under two years of age as the population.

The PLA survey allows for a second sample with regard to take-up of parental leave because those parents who were not eligible for unpaid parental leave could be eliminated from the population. This allows for a more accurate depiction of take-up rates in the PLA survey compared to the PaETS. I will elaborate on the eligibility criteria of the Australian legislation and their impact on take-up in the case study chapter for Australia. The PLA survey is based on the LSAC's Infant Cohort sample which is a random sample of Australian families with a

child born between March 2003 and February 2004 (Whitehouse et al., 2006). The survey was designed to provide information on the eligibility for statutory unpaid parental leave provisions under the WRA (1996) by determining the employment status and continuity of employment in the 12 months prior to the birth or adoption of the child for both parents.

In the Swedish case study, the take-up data refers only to paid parental leave provisions, i.e. cash benefit days. In Australia, the data includes take-up of both paid and unpaid leave provisions. I will focus on the use of unpaid parental leave because this is the statutory provision under the WRA (1996). However, the use of paid parental leave is also discussed in a separate section in the Australian case study.

LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

The limitations of my study are three-fold. The first limitation relates to the available data on take-up of parental leave provisions in both Australia and Sweden. The second is with regard to my research design while the third limitation is related to my conceptual framework. I will outline the three limitations in turn.

There have been immense improvements over the past two years in terms of the data which are available in Australia on the take-up and availability of parental leave. Yet, none of the available surveys provides information on the number of employees who had access to paid maternity/paternity leave provisions but chose not to take them up. Thus, for the sake of this analysis it has to be assumed that the take-up of paid leaves equals the eligibility of employees to such leave. Similarly, there is no national data available from the Swedish Social Insurance Agency on the take-up of parental leave periods which makes it difficult to say how long Swedish parents exited the workforce. However, it is known that most parental cash benefit days were accessed in a full-time fraction (Forsakringskassan, 2007) so that it can be assumed that in most cases, the take-up of parental cash benefit days equalled the number of leave days taken.

Moreover, the take-up of parental cash benefit days is reported in the total number of days taken per year. The data can be disaggregated by the sex of the parents, i.e. there are separate statistics for mothers' and fathers' use of parental cash benefit days. In addition, they can be

disaggregated by the age of the child in a particular year, e.g. it is possible to determine the number of parental cash benefit days which were accessed by parents of children who were aged between 7 and 12 months in 2005. However, the data only allow for averages and it cannot be traced how much difference there was in the leave taking of individual parents or even individual couples.

Apart from the nature of the data, the strengths of my study in terms of research design simultaneously map its limitations. Because of its design as a cross-disciplinary and cross-cultural study, the scope of my project was potentially enormous and it was impossible to deliver comprehensive reviews of the interrelationships between social institutions, especially families, governments and organisations, and the beliefs, assumptions and norms which underpin them. Therefore, I had to limit this study in a number of ways to make the project manageable.

Firstly, I decided to focus on theories provided by feminist researchers, to investigate the interrelationships outlined above, because I demonstrated that the gender dimension is crucially important for understanding the issues around work/life balance. While recognising other important influences on work/life arrangements, including age, class and race, they are not theorised and investigated here. Secondly, I focus on one specific set of work/life policies, parental leave, which represents only one strategy to help employees balance their employment and personal lives. Other important work/life policies would be part-time work, flexitime, emergency leave, child care support, etc. which present potential avenues for future research. Thirdly, I limited my cross-country comparison to only two countries because of the depth of data presented. It was initially envisaged to include Germany as a representative of the corporate-conservative welfare state paradigm. However, due to the sheer volume of material available and the fact that German policy makers implemented a major reform to the parental leave regime during my PhD candidature this third case study was not included. This reform in itself presents a case study for future, post-doctoral research.

Finally, I have explained earlier that there is ambiguity in Habermas' work, on which my own conceptual framework is based, about the nature of the Lifeworld. It is both a transcendental place, i.e. the realm of norms, assumptions and beliefs, and an empirical place, i.e. the realm of personal life experiences. I have used Giddens' (2001) concept of the

Duality of Structure to address this issue for the sake of my analysis. Yet, the place of the family as a social institution in the Lifeworld has not been entirely resolved. It has been argued that the family is an important social institution in the Lifeworld (Fraser, 1989) and I have incorporated the importance of the family as a social institution in shaping gender relations in the discussion of Bem's (1993) three lenses of gender as well as frequently referred to the implications for parents in terms of managing their private and public life. I did not, however, explicitly establish the family as the social institution which underpins the Lifeworld, in the same way that I established governments and workplace organsiations as the social institutions which underpin the Steering Media and the Systems. While a discussion of the family as a gendered social instution would have been of interest, it was beyond the scope of this thesis to discuss its place in the Lifeworld in-depth and not essential to the analysis and findings.

What I do present in this research is an in-depth investigation of one set of work/life balance policies and the ways in which these have been institutionalised in two very different social contexts. I developed a unique approach to analyse the different outcomes for users of these policies in the light of the gendered assumptions which underpin them, the norms they imply and the subjective life experiences they reflect. I investigate the relationships between social norms and assumptions, government intervention and workplace organisations, i.e. the Lifeworld, the Steering Media and the Systems, and their implications on the sharing of paid and care work and comment on their outcomes for individual women and men in terms of achieving better work/life balance.

CHAPTER CONCLUSION

This chapter outlined the epistemology, theoretical paradigm, methodology and methods of my study. I follow a constructionist epistemology which is based on the belief that knowledge and social reality are constructed by individuals and do not exist as external objects apart from those individuals. The constructionist approach reflects the view that gender is something individuals 'do' rather than 'have'. My understanding of feminism sits between the established feminist schools of thought because it draws on radical feminist ideas while at the same time incorporating the work of other feminisms as well as non-feminist researchers. I have established my reasons for using a blend of two theoretical perspectives to craft a research

paradigm, namely feminism and critical inquiry. This paradigm reflects my objective to critically evaluate androcentric cultural norms and structures and their influence on work/life arrangements.

I designed my study as a cross-cultural comparison between two countries, Australia and Sweden, because they are comparable countries which feature distinctly different approaches to work/life balance policies. I have outlined my reasons for analysing one set of work/life policies, parental leave policies, in depth. I contrast the policy approach to parental leave in Australia with that of Sweden to uncover the great differences in policy design and outcomes in the two countries and to link these differences to their underlying gendered norms and assumptions as well as to their outcomes in terms of take-up. Moreover, I want to evaluate the influence of the different policy approaches on the work/life balance policies which are provided at an organisational level. My analysis of the case studies will be presented in four chapters. The first chapter, Chapter Five, will give a brief and descriptive overview of the parental leave provisions and the history of this work/life policy in Australia and Sweden. The next two chapters, Chapters Six and Seven, will present the case study analysis by country, starting with Australia. The final analysis chapter, Chapter Eight, will provide the cross-country comparison and is organised by themes. It also integrates the findings of my cross-county comparison with the existing literature.

CHAPTER FIVE

INTRODUCTION TO THE CASE STUDIES

I have established in the previous chapter that I chose Australia and Sweden as case studies because the two countries are comparable in principle but have established distinctly different approaches to dealing with work/life conflicts. I have proposed that these differences in approach may be related to their overall welfare state philosophy. In the first part of this chapter, I will elaborate on the differences in welfare state philosophy in the two countries. In the second part, I will outline the history of parental leave provisions in Australia and Sweden and sketch the current parental leave benefits which are available to parents in the two countries.

WELFARE STATE PHILOSOPHIES IN AUSTRALIA AND SWEDEN

I have demonstrated in my critical review and analysis of the literature that, so far, much of the work/life balance literature has not factored in the welfare state as an active agent in determining work/life arrangements. However, public policy analysts have demonstrated that welfare state approaches to family policy influence the attitude and behaviours of citizens (Brandth & Kvande, 2001; Ruerup & Gruescu, 2003; Bird, 2004; Sjoberg, 2004; Ferrarini, 2006). This is why I included the welfare state as an important actor in my conceptual framework which I have outlined in Chapter Three.

I have mentioned in the methodology that an important difference between Australia and Sweden is that the two countries can be assigned to distinctively different models of capitalist welfare states according to Esping-Andersen's (1990) classification. Australia can be regarded as a representative of the liberal welfare state model although, as Brennan (2002) points out in her historical review of child care services in Australia, it used to be closer to a social democratic welfare state model in the 1970s and 1980s, but has moved towards a more liberal approach under the Howard government since the mid 1990s. In contrast, Sweden represents a prototype of the social democratic welfare state approach (Orloff, 1996). In Esping-Andersen's classification, the characteristics of the liberal welfare state model are the focus on means-tested welfare benefits and the provision of social benefits, namely pensions and health care, through the private sector. This is not entirely true of Australia where health and pensions provisions have traditionally been provided through public services (Brennan, 2002). However, the Coalition government has pushed to increasingly privatise these services. Social democratic welfare states, by contrast, see universalism in entitlements as the reigning principle (Esping-Andersen, 1990). Esping-Andersen's classification of welfare states has been very influential in comparative welfare state research.

Researchers who have followed Esping-Andersen's approach have demonstrated that countries which enact a liberal welfare state model do not place a high priority on political solutions to achieve a compatibility of employment and private spheres but instead leave the initiative to employers. Private life concerns are regarded as such and the role of the state is considered to be non-interventionist (Ruerup & Gruescu, 2003). Also, the gendered division of labour is a largely unchallenged assumption (Lohkamp-Himmighofen & Dienel, 2000). At the same time, countries following a liberal model do neither actively encourage nor outspokenly discourage women's labour market participation (Ruerup & Gruescu, 2003). Hence, in liberal welfare states, women's labour force participation and a couple's decision to have children are regarded as 'personal choices' in which the state should not intervene. Yet, in reality, the liberal welfare state significantly shapes work/life arrangements as I will demonstrate in my analysis.

In direct opposition to the liberal welfare state model, the social democratic welfare state intervenes into parents' negotiations to share paid and care work. Brandth and Kvande (2001) have identified the Norwegian welfare state as a "normative third party" in the

parental negotiations around the sharing of parental leave provisions. Ruerup and Gruesco (2003) point out that in Sweden and other Nordic countries family policy is seen as equal opportunity policy supported by good state sponsored child care facilities and generous direct transfers for any parent staying home with the children during parental leave, reflecting the principle of universalism. Sweden has been called a women-friendly egalitarian model of leave policies by Lohkamp-Himmighofen and Dienel (2000). The welfare policies of the Nordic countries, and particularly those of Sweden, have been widely recognised by academics for their conscious attempt to facilitate gender equity in sharing paid and unpaid work responsibilities (e.g. Scott, 1982; Moen, 1989; Bergqvist & Jungar, 2000; Mosesdottir, 2001; Brandth & Kvande, 2002; Haas et al., 2002). Full employment is seen as a government priority and as a fundamental condition to the stated aim of the Swedish government to achieve gender equality (Naringsdepartementet, 2005). In reality, this suggests that the social democratic welfare state becomes a powerful actor in the work/life negotiations of women and men.

The different welfare state approaches to social policies are reflected in the parental leave provisions in Australia and Sweden. I will briefly outline their history and sketch the current provisions of parental leave in both countries.

PARENTAL LEAVE PROVISIONS IN AUSTRALIA

Australia is one of only two OECD countries, together with the US, which do not have a national paid maternity leave scheme as a publicly funded entitlement to all parents (Baird, 2004a, 2006). The only group of employees with guaranteed access to any paid parental leave are women in the public sector (Charlesworth, 2004a). Table 1 summarises the key developments in the history of parental benefits in Australia.

Table 1: History of legislative measures with regard to parental leave in Australia

DATE	NAME OF BENEFIT	DURATION OF LEAVE	DURATION OF PAYMENT	LEVEL OF PAYMENT
1973	Maternity leave for public sector employees * : Maternity Leave (Commonwealth Employees) Act 1973	Max. 52 weeks for mother	12 weeks	Paid
1979	Maternity leave becomes standard award provision	52 weeks for mother	N/A	Unpaid
1993	Inclusion of parental leave in the Industrial Relations Reform Act: all workers are entitled to parental leave; adopting parents also eligible	52 weeks shared	N/A	Unpaid
1996	Parental leave becomes 'allowable award matter' under the WRA (1996)	52 weeks shared	N/A	Unpaid
2006	Parental leave as one provision in the Fair Pay and Conditions Standard	52 weeks shared	N/A	Unpaid

Source: (Baird, 2006; NTEU, 2007)

* Note: Paid maternity leave legislation for government employees was successively introduced in the States which generally mirrors the federal provisions. An important difference to federal legislation is that in two states, Queensland and New South Wales, the provisions also cover casual employees who have regular and/or continuous service with one employer (HREOC, 2002b).

The right to paid maternity leave for public sector employees was introduced in 1973. In 1989, maternity leave became a standard award provision and, in 1993, parental leave was included in the Industrial Relations Reform Act which meant that all working parents in permanent full-time jobs were given access to 52 weeks of unpaid parental leave (Baird, 2006). This right was subsequently included into the WRA (1996) and, most recently, as one of the minimum provision in the Fair Pay and Conditions Standard (Australian Government (WorkChoices website), 2006b).

Table 2: History of test cases related to parental leave in Australia

DATE	NAME OF BENEFIT	DURATION OF LEAVE	DURATION OF PAYMENT	LEVEL OF PAYMENT
1979	Maternity leave test case (for permanent private sector employees)	52 weeks for mother	N/A	Unpaid
1985	Adoption leave test case	52 weeks for mother	N/A	Unpaid
1990	Parental leave test case	52 weeks to be shared by the parents; no leave may be taken at the same time with the exception one week of paternity leave; 3 weeks adoption leave for both parents	N/A	Unpaid
2001	Parental leave for casual employees test case	52 weeks for permanent and eligible casual employees; shared	N/A	Unpaid
2003	Family provision test case	Extend unpaid parental leave to 24 months; increase period of simultaneous unpaid parental leave up to maximum of 8 weeks; right to request the return from unpaid parental leave on part-time basis until child reaches school age	N/A	Unpaid

Source: adapted from HREOC (2002a; 2005)

Since 1979, test cases to extend paid and unpaid leave entitlements as well as access to unpaid leave to all groups of employees have been brought before the Australian Industrial Relations Commission (AIRC) (HREOC, 2005) which are summarised in Table 2. The successful test cases for maternity leave in 1979 and for parental leave in 1990 provided the basis for the legislative changes in 1989 and 1993 (Baird, 2006) that I outlined above. In 2002, the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission (HREOC) put forward a comprehensive proposal for a national paid maternity leave scheme which would have delivered 14 weeks of paid leave compensated at the rate of the federal minimum wage or a woman's previous earnings, whichever was the lesser amount under this recommendation. All working women who had worked 40 out of 52 weeks in the year prior to giving birth would have been eligible for paid leave (HREOC, 2002b). These suggestions, however, were never adopted by the federal Government.

Instead, the Australian government introduced a universal lump sum maternity allowance, termed the 'Baby Bonus', in 2002. Due to heavy criticisms regarding its complex administration and overt favouring of stay-at-home mothers the Baby Bonus was replaced in 2004 by the Maternity Payment of AU$3042 (Baird, 2006). This payment is available to parents whose child was born after 1 July 2004 and is paid regardless of the labour market status of the mother. The payment was introduced to recognise the relationship between a mother and her newborn child and to help with the extra costs of having a child (House of Representatives Standing Committee on Family and Human Services, 2006). The maternity payment was increased to AU$ 4,000 in 2006 and is currently paid at a sum of $4,133 (Centrelink, 2007).

There have been maternity payments similar to the 'baby bonus' since 1912. However, the payments were suspended in 1978 and re-introduced following initiatives under the Keating government in 1994. In addition to its temporary disappearance, the maternity payments have traditionally been low and in 2002, represented less than two weeks of pay at the minimum wage rate (HREOC, 2002a). It has been argued that the latest Maternity Payment does not fulfil the purposes of a national paid maternity leave scheme as an entitlement to all employed mothers (Baird, 2006; HREOC, 2007). The HREOC state:

> Since the release of the *Valuing Parenthood* report, the Australian Government has introduced a one-off maternity payment on the birth of a child […] however this fails to meet all of the aims of a national paid maternity leave scheme. (HREOC, 2007, p.82)

Despite the ongoing campaign of the HREOC and public support for paid maternity leave, the recent report of the federal inquiry into Balancing Work and Family (House of Representatives Standing Committee on Family and Human Services, 2006) failed to recommend the introduction of a national paid maternity leave scheme. I will investigate the reluctance of Australian policy makers to implement a paid maternity leave scheme more closely in the Australian case study chapter. At this point, I will sketch the current parental leave provisions which are available to parents in Australia and which will be analysed in more detail in the next chapter.

Since 1996, employed parents in Australia have a statutory right to unpaid parental leave under the Workplace Relations Act (WRA) (1996) which has been confirmed in the WorkChoices Amendment (2006) (Australian Government (WorkChoices website), 2006a).

The parental leave provisions in the two Acts are identical but in the WorkChoices Amendment (2006) have become part of the Fair Pay and Conditions Standard. Unpaid parental leave provisions of a maximum of 52 weeks apply to all full-time, part-time and eligible casual employees who have at least 12 months of continuous service with their current employer. In addition to the 12 months qualifying period, access to parental leave is subject to various other conditions. In its current form, parental leave is not a universal right for parents in Australia, but rather is tied to their employment status and length of employment.

In contrast to unpaid parental leave which is a statutory entitlement of parents under the WRA (1996) and WorkChoices Amendment (2006), paid maternity and paternity leave are matters for workplace negotiation because parents in Australia do not have a statutory right to paid parental leave under federal legislation (Baird & Litwin, 2005). As mentioned above, the only exception to that rule are women employed in the public sector who have a legislated right to paid maternity leave, in most cases between 12 and 14 weeks (Charlesworth, 2004a). When I discuss the take-up data of parental leave I will demonstrate that the access to paid maternity and paid paternity leave is highly uneven among employed parents in Australia.

In summary, the situation for Australian parents is almost unique in OECD countries in that Australian parents do not have access to statutory, let alone universal, paid parental leave entitlements. I want to demonstrate with my comparative study that the institutional framework in which Swedish parents make decisions as to how they share paid and care work are very different to that of Australian parents. Moreover, I aim to show that the different parental leave regimes lead to very different outcomes in terms of take-up of parental leave provisions and, thus, parents' ability to achieve better work/life balance. In the next section, I will outline the history of parental leave in Sweden and sketch the current entitlements of Swedish parents.

PARENTAL LEAVE PROVISIONS IN SWEDEN

The Swedish parental leave regime is reasonably complex which is why I am introducing the key concepts before outlining the history of parental leave in Sweden as well as the details of

the current entitlements. The official terminology for the paid parental leave benefits used by the Swedish Social Insurance Agency is 'parental cash benefit days' (Föräldrapenning) (Forsakringskassan, 2006b, 2007) which is the term I will also use in this thesis. In Sweden, parental leave and parental cash benefit days are two distinct but highly interrelated concepts. All employed parents have an entitlement to the parental leave period of 18 months and can claim parental cash benefit days while on leave. The Swedish Social Insurance Agency (Försäkringskassan) is in charge of administering parental cash benefit days and keeps records of benefit uptake (Forsakringskassan, 2005, 2006b, 2007). Those records will be used as the basis for my analysis. However, no records are kept by the Swedish government on the take-up of the parental leave period.

The Parental Leave Act ("Parental Leave Act", 1995) is administered through the Department of Industry, Employment and Communications. Parental cash benefits, on the other hand, are organised through the Department of Health and Social Affairs, more specifically, as outlined above, the Swedish Social Insurance Agency which is associated with this department. The entitlement to parental cash benefits is written into the National Insurance Act (1962). The parental cash benefit scheme is collectively funded by all employers irrespective of the actual policy use by their staff. Employers have to make compulsory contributions to social insurance in the form of a levy which represents 2.2 per cent of individual gross earnings for each employee in the company, regardless of whether they use parental cash benefits (Duvander, Ferrarini, & Thalberg, 2005). The definitions outlined above make it easier to understand the history of the Swedish parental leave legislation which spans more than 100 years. Table 3 provides a summary of the key changes.

Table 3: History of parental benefits in Sweden

DATE	NAME OF BENEFIT	DURATION OF BENEFIT	DURATION OF PAYMENT	AMOUNT OF PAYMENT
1901	Maternity leave	4 weeks	unpaid	unpaid
1931	Maternity insurance benefits			
1955	Maternity leave	3 months	3 months	paid
1974	Parental allowance: can be shared by both parents	180 days: 90 for each parent; all are transferable	180 days	90 per cent of prior income
1978	Parental cash benefit days	270 days	240 days Plus 30 days	90 per cent of prior income Minimum rate
1980	Parental cash benefit days	360 days	270 days Plus 90 days	90 per cent of prior income Minimum rate
1989	Parental cash benefit days	450 days	360 days Plus 90 days	90 per cent of prior income Minimum rate
1995	Parental cash benefit days: 'mummy/daddy month' (30 days non-transferable)	450 days	60 days (non-transferable) 300 days Plus 90 days	90 per cent of prior income 80 per cent of prior income Minimum rate
1996	Parental cash benefit days	450 days	60 days (non-transferable) 300 days Plus 90 days	85 per cent of prior income 75 per cent of prior income Minimum rate
1997	Parental cash benefit days	450 days	60 days (non-transferable) 300 days Plus 90 days	85 per cent of prior income 75 per cent of prior income Minimum rate
1998	Parental cash benefit days	450 days	360 days Plus 90 days	80 per cent of prior income Minimum rate
2002	Parental cash benefit days	480 days, 60 reserved for each parent	390 days Plus 90 days	80 per cent of prior income Minimum rate: 60 SEK
2006	Parental cash benefit days	480 days, 60 of which are reserved for each parent	390 days Plus 90 days	80 per cent of prior income (Income ceiling raised to 33,000 SEK) Flat rate benefit: 60 SEK Minimum payment of 180 SEK for non-eligible parents

Source: ("Parental Leave Act", 1995; SCB, 2004; Duvander et al., 2005; Statistics Sweden, 2006)

In 1901, Swedish women gained the right to four weeks unpaid maternity leave and in 1931 'maternity insurance benefits', i.e. paid maternity leave, were introduced. The length of paid maternity leave was extended to three months in 1955. In 1974, Sweden replaced its maternity leave scheme with a parental cash benefits scheme and was the first country in the world to introduce leave rights for fathers (Duvander et al., 2005). The couple was granted 180 parental cash benefit days upon the birth of a child: 90 for the mother and 90 for the father. However, all of these days were transferable from one parent to the other (Rostgaard, 2002). Initially, parents using parental cash benefit days were paid 90 per cent of their prior wage (SCB, 2004). Since then, the period for which parental cash benefit is paid was continuously extended but wage replacement levels fluctuated with economic prosperity and reached a minimum level of 75 per cent in 1996/97 (Duvander et al., 2005). However, by international comparison this level was still high. When the economy recovered in the late 1990s, the payments for the first 12 months of parental leave were standardised at 80 per cent of prior income (Rostgaard, 2002).

The most significant changes after the introduction of the scheme included the implementation of the 'father's quota' also termed the '*pappa* month' which relied on a 'use it or lose it' approach to fathers' entitlement to parental cash benefits in 1995 (Haas et al., 2002). The father and the mother were given 30 parental cash benefit days that were non-transferable to the other spouse. If the father did not make use of his leave days they were lost to the couple. The number of non-transferable parental cash benefit days was increased to 60 days per parent in 2002 (Rostgaard, 2002; SCB, 2004). Thus, Sweden and other Nordic countries have developed a concept of reconciliation of paid and care work that is explicitly based on equal parenthood and the dual-breadwinner family (Scott, 1982; Bergqvist & Jungar, 2000; Lohkamp-Himmighofen & Dienel, 2000; Mosesdottir, 2001; Brandth & Kvande, 2002; Haas et al., 2002). The structure of the parental cash benefits is very similar in 2007, but I will briefly outline the details.

The current entitlements to parental cash benefits for a couple or single parent in Sweden are 480 days, or 16 months (information on the current provisions is drawn from the following sources (Rostgaard, 2002; Gornick & Meyers, 2003; SCB, 2004; Duvander et al., 2005; Forsakringskassan, 2006a)). Of the 480 days, mothers and fathers have to take a minimum of 60 days each. Parental cash benefit days are paid at three different levels: as wage replacement benefits (the Swedish term is *Över grundnivå*) at 80 per cent of the previous

income, as a basic benefit (*Grundnivå*) for those parents who do not qualify for the wage replacement benefit, and as a flat-rate benefit (*Lägstanivå*) for parents who want to stay out of the workforce beyond the period of time which is paid at wage replacement levels.

Parental cash benefit days can be used very flexibly and until the child is eight years old or completes the first year of school. In addition to parental cash benefits, ten days of paid paternity leave, the so-called 'daddy days' (Pappadagar), are available to the father within the first 60 days after the mother returns from hospital. Since 2002, there are also 30 sickness benefit days that can be taken by either parent and for which temporary parental cash benefits are paid.

As can be seen from this brief introduction to the parental leave provisions, the institutional framework which supports parents at the time of child birth is very different in Australia and Sweden. I will elaborate on these differences in the following chapters.

CHAPTER CONCLUSION

I have sketched in this chapter the great differences in welfare state philosophies and policy approach to parental leave in Australia and Sweden. The analysis of the two case studies aims to demonstrate that these differences can be attributed to the gender ideologies which are drawn upon, consciously or unconsciously, by policy makers. Moreover, I want to show that the different government approaches to work/life balance create very different work/life options for parents in both countries and institutionalise different regulatory frameworks which influence the take-up of the provisions and, thus, policy outcomes.

The first analysis chapter presents the case study analysis for Australia and evaluates in-depth the design of the parental leave legislation, the reports prepared by Steering Media actors and the take-up data of parental leave provisions.

CHAPTER SIX

CASE STUDY AUSTRALIA

In this chapter, I analyse the design of the Australian parental leave legislation, Steering Media reports on work/life balance and the take-up of statutory parental leave provisions. I aim to show that Australian Steering Media actors in designing the parental leave legislation relied on traditional Lifeworld elements, i.e. stereotypical assumptions regarding the roles of women and men as well as a preference for breadwinner/homemaker arrangements. Moreover, I will argue that the liberal welfare state philosophy of providing minimum provisions to parents does not appear to support work/life balance but, instead, results in employer prerogative and flexibility at the cost of the work/life balance of employed carers. I propose that, in combination, the traditional gender ideology and liberal welfare state philosophy which underpin the Australian parental leave regime result in an approach to work/life balance which institutionalises multiple barriers to the take-up of work/life policies and that this may be a reason behind the low take-up of work/life policies.

I begin the chapter with a discussion of the Lifeworld elements which are activated by Australian Steering Media actors in the design of the parental leave legislation. The second part of the chapter analyses the roles of the welfare state and employers which underlie the parental leave regime in Australia.

INTERACTIONS BETWEEN THE LIFEWORLD AND THE STEERING MEDIA: ACTIVATING TRADITIONAL GENDER ROLES OF THE 'GOOD MOTHER' AND THE 'IDEAL WORKER'

I aim to demonstrate in this section that the Australian parental leave legislation reflects strongly traditional beliefs about appropriate roles for women and men. I propose that this can be seen in four distinct characteristics of the legislation which all act to define and maintain traditional gender roles. These characteristics are the assignment of leave periods to mothers and fathers, the employment ban for parents who take parental leave, the rigid access of the leave period and the lack of payment during parental leave.

Mothers as carers, fathers as breadwinners

The legislation is explicit about the ways in which the parental leave period of 52 weeks needs to be shared. I propose that, although the parental leave legislation is supposedly gender neutral, it has a gender dimension which is reflected in the assignment of leave periods to parents. The parental leave provisions seem to be gender neutral in that it applies to the couple, not the individual, and can be shared between partners. Any leave taken by the mother is lost to the father and vice versa. However, the parental leave legislation is gendered in that the leave can be entirely taken as maternity, parental or adoption leave but it cannot be taken exclusively as paternity leave. The WorkChoices Amendment (2006) introduced the provision that if the couple decides to access their statutory entitlement to parental leave, the mother has to take a minimum of six weeks as maternity leave. While the whole 52 weeks can be taken as maternity leave, there is no reserved father's quota. One week of parental leave can be taken as paternity leave at the same time as the mother is on leave. But this period is also transferable to the mother. Thus, the WorkChoices Amendment (2006) strengthened the norm of the mother as the primary care giver while not attributing an active care giving role to fathers.

This skewed assignment of leave periods to parents suggests that the Australian parental leave legislation does not encourage fathers to take on more responsibility as active carers of their children because the couple receives 52 weeks of leave regardless of the father's take-up of the provisions. In fact, if the father decides to access some share of the couple's

statutory parental leave benefits, e.g. his one week of optional paternity leave or more, this share is lost to the mother. Thus, the father has no separate entitlement to parental leave in his own right. The failure of the legislation to conceptualise fathers as active care givers places men firmly in the public arena of paid work and establishes them as breadwinners. In contrast, mothers are portrayed as the exclusive carers of young children and are assigned sole responsibility for unpaid care work in the home. This assignment of care and paid work to women and men, which is based purely on their sex, supports the public/private divide along gendered lines.

In addition to the assignment of parental leave periods, there are three other characteristics of the Australian statutory parental leave entitlements which further reinforce traditional gender roles and maintain a strict public/private divide along gendered lines: the parent is not allowed to be employed while on leave, the leave period has to be accessed as one continuous, unbroken period of up to 52 weeks and parental leave is unpaid. I propose that this design of the legislation has significant implications for the parent who decides to take up the leave and creates barriers to the take-up of parental leave benefits.

Firstly, the 'no employment' provision implies that the parent on leave is expected to be a full-time carer. The employment ban has to be taken seriously by parents as compliance with this condition of leave taking has to be certified in a statutory declaration. This requirement of providing full-time care reflects traditional beliefs in the 'good mother' who is at home permanently to take care of her children and the household and, therefore, reinforces the assumption that it is mothers who take up parental leave. The employment ban normatively disqualifies men from taking parental leave because they are conceptualised as breadwinners and, by definition, cannot interrupt their employment for child rearing purposes. Thus, the requirement to stop employment while taking parental leave reinforces traditional gender roles in that it sets up mothers as legitimate and full-time carers of young children, it supports breadwinner/homemaker arrangements, and places women and men in different life spheres with men focusing on the public sphere of employment and women focusing on the private sphere of caring.

Secondly, the requirement to access the leave in one continuous and unbroken period within the first year after the child is born entails that the leave taker will interrupt their career for a significant amount of time. The parent on leave does not have the flexibility to take several

shorter periods but has to forego the rest of the leave entitlement if they return to work before the 52 week period is used up. Coupled with the assumption of mothers as primary care giver and the employment ban, this implies that women have long absences from paid employment and interrupt their careers for a significant amount of time. Men cannot legitimately access long periods of leave because active care is not a part of their defined gender role. Again, parental leave legislation reflects traditional gender roles and supports breadwinner/homemaker models and gendered life histories.

Thirdly, the fact that the leave is unpaid implies that whoever takes up parental leave needs to rely on alternative sources of income to support themselves and their newborn child. Because employment is not allowed during parental leave, alternative sources of income can either be found in welfare support by the state, which is normatively and practically discouraged (Engels, 2006), or in a breadwinning partner who can make up for the loss of income during parental leave. Thus, the assumption underlying the Australian parental leave legislation is that the full-time carer of a young child is attached to, and reliant on, a breadwinning partner. This implies that the Australian parental leave regime supports androcentric household models which reflect traditional gender norms and require women and men to follow very different life trajectories. In sum, the parental leave legislation acts as an important tool to institutionalise the gendered public/private divide as the normative ideal and social reality in Australia.

The strong support of traditional gender roles and household models is hardly surprising in the current political climate. The preference for breadwinner models of the family has been expressed on numerous occasions by the federal government. The Prime Minister defined his understanding of 'mainstream Australia' as the "policeman and the part-time sales assistant" (J. Howard, 2003). I will analyse the norms and attitudes expressed by Australian Steering Media actors with regard to gender roles more closely in the following section.

Public support for traditional gender roles

The strong belief in traditional gender roles is reproduced in government documents, such as the report prepared by the Department of Employment and Workplace Relations (DEWR, 2006) and is reflected in the Australian parental leave legislation. The report leaves

little doubt that primary care giving is the responsibility of the mother. The authors (DEWR, 2006) demonstrate their understanding of who is in charge of care work and needs to do the 'balancing' when they state:

> Not surprisingly, the most common form of labour force participation for mothers in couple families and for lone parents is part-time employment, which enables them to balance their caring responsibilities with participation in the workforce. (p.3)

> Part-time work is especially important for families trying to balance work and family responsibilities and particularly for mothers, who are more likely to undertake the primary caring role in both couple and lone parent families (87 per cent of which have a female head). (p.11)

> The 2006-07 federal Budget included the following assistance for families […], assisting women's choices about their work and child care arrangements. (p.12)

The DEWR report is written in the tradition of regarding work/life conflicts as 'women's issues' which usually affect mothers who are juggling employment and the care for young children. Throughout, the DEWR uses the terms 'work/family' and 'family-friendly' to refer to issues around the reconciliation of paid and care work. The main target groups for family-friendly arrangements identified in the report are women in their role as mothers. At the same time, there is an implicit expectation that mothers engage in employment which is contrary to the full-time homemaker ideal promoted by the parental leave legislation. They state:

> As more and more women and parents take up full, part-time and casual employment opportunities, the Australian Government recognises that flexible family friendly working arrangements are critical in assisting those with caring responsibilities find a balance between their work and family responsibilities […] The increasing availability of flexible working arrangements has helped many parents with primary caring responsibilities to enter the workforce. (DEWR, 2006, p.3)

Even if the supposedly gender neutral term 'parents' is used by the DEWR in addition to women, in the light of the most recent statistics (ABS, 2006a) it has to be read as 'mothers'. The ABS figures show that fathers' participation rates have historically been unaffected by the age of the youngest child and there is no indication of a change in pattern. It follows that the government perceives mothers as the key user group of work/life policies.

All Australian reports which have been analysed for this study comment on the division of labour between women and men as well as the resulting household models and discuss it in the light of women's increased labour force participation, with the notable exception of the DEWR report (DEWR, 2006). The DEWR report makes no mention of this gendered and structural dimension of work/life conflicts and hardly draws on gender disaggregated data. In this report, men are absent from the discussion around dual responsibilities and the need for more flexible working arrangements and their breadwinning role appears to be taken for granted. The 1.5 earner model of the family is silently accepted as the social norm by the authors of the DEWR report. While men's breadwinning role is not challenged, women's role has been broadened from the traditional full-time homemaker to a part-time earner who retains responsibility for primary care giving.

In Australia, the belief in mothers as the 'natural' and sole carers of children is a Lifeworld aspect heavily utilised by Steering Media actors. The proposal by the HREOC in 2002 was for paid maternity leave rather than paid parental leave and maintained a very strong theme of a mother-child unit throughout the report. For example, the HREOC did not recommend paid paternity or parental leave because "paid parental leave fails to acknowledge the distinct experience of women and the particular disadvantage that they experience as a result of maternity" (HREOC, 2002a, p.150). Instead, they argued that the implementation of a paid maternity leave scheme would allow mothers to recover fully from birth and to stay at home with their children for the first months of the child's life and that this would represent "intrinsically desirable goals for individuals and society" (HREOC, 2002a, p.12). The authors also advocated a greater valuing of motherhood and unpaid work in the home.

In that report (HREOC, 2002a) an expectation was voiced that mothers stay at home with their newborn babies full-time for a significant amount of time. They state:

> Under these changing social circumstances a national paid maternity leave scheme answers an emerging and important unmet need; the need for newborn babies to be with their parent instead of being separated through financial necessity. Naturally it is for Governments to decide national priorities but I consider there is a strong case for government funding of this special time for mothers. We received many submissions from mothers' and child welfare groups, breastfeeding associations and health professionals arguing the benefits of mothers being at home full time for the baby as well as the mother during these early months. Many believed a period of fourteen weeks to be the minimum but none suggested a shorter period was desirable.

> Under current arrangements, it is the children of poorer working women who are the least likely to enjoy access to the paid maternity leave that would facilitate this time out of the paid workforce and poorer working women who are the least likely to recover from the birth at a time and pace best for them. (HREOC, 2002a, p. xii)

Similar to the DEWR, the HREOC seems to talk about 'mothers' when they use the term 'parents'. They portray women as having distinctly different needs to men when it comes to work/life arrangements and present a case to legislators that these different needs should be incorporated into parental leave legislation.

It is not surprising, then, that men are receiving only scant attention from Steering Media actors in the Australian context where work/life balance is so firmly positioned as a 'women's issue'. The parliamentary Inquiry Committee into 'Balancing Work and Family' does not conceptualise men as having any real responsibility for active care (House of Representatives Standing Committee on Family and Human Services, 2006). In their final report, they state: "Given that women still largely have responsibility for looking after their children, this chapter will generally focus on them, although the committee will also consider men's perspectives where appropriate" (House of Representatives Standing Committee on Family and Human Services, 2006, p.131). The only time that men are mentioned explicitly in that particular chapter (Returning to paid work) is in relation to jobless households. This implies that, as long as men make their labour power available to the market and fulfil their role as main income earner, they are of no interest to an inquiry into balancing work and family which suggests that men do not need access to work/life balance policies. Men's active role in care for children and housework is regarded by the Inquiry Committee as secondary at best. Therefore, they uphold a traditional and narrow role definition for men and confirm the male 'ideal worker' norm of full-time, uninterrupted employment and, thus, reinforce a belief in essentialist gender roles.

The Australian Government communicates consistently traditional assumptions and beliefs about women's and men's roles with regard to employment and care responsibilities, i.e. it activates traditional Lifeworld elements. This finding is confirmed by the latest HREOC (2007) report *It's about time*. The report found that the traditional gender ideals which underlie many government efforts to address work/life issues were not addressing the needs of contemporary Australians and that the government agenda needed to change to one that reflects more gender egalitarian norms and incorporates "a vision of social wellbeing which

encompasses the principle of shared work". I aim to demonstrate in the next section that the traditional Lifeworld elements which underpin the existing legislation and are expressed in reports by Steering Media actors influence the take-up by Australian parents of parental leave provisions which is one major work/life balance policy.

Take-up of parental leave provisions in Australia: Gendered patterns

As outlined in my methodology, the take-up data used in my survey is taken from two recent national surveys, the Pregnancy and Employment Transitions Survey (PaETS) (ABS, 2006b) and the Parental Leave in Australia (PLA) survey (Whitehouse et al., 2006). Both surveys find that there is a relatively low take-up rate of parental leave provisions in Australia by both mothers and fathers. Before the release of the two studies, there was no comprehensive data available on a national level since the study by Glezer in 1988 (Whitehouse et al., 2006). Table 4 illustrates the findings by Glezer and the PLA survey.

Table 4: Take-up of paid and unpaid maternity/parental leave by Australian women – Comparison 1988 and 2005

Percentage of employed Australian women who had a child and took paid and unpaid maternity/parental leave in 1988 and 2005	Glezer (1988)	Parental Leave Survey (2006)
Employed women who *took* maternity/parental leave, both paid and unpaid	44%	64%
Employed women who *were eligible but did not take* maternity/parental leave, both paid and unpaid	32%	16%
Employed women who *were not entitled* to maternity/parental leave, both paid and unpaid	24%	20%
Total	100%	100%

Glezer (1988) found that only 44 per cent of women who were employed during their pregnancy took maternity leave, both paid and unpaid, 32 per cent of women were eligible for maternity leave but did not take it and 24 per cent of women were not eligible for maternity leave. The PLA data shows that in 2005, 64 per cent of employed mothers took maternity leave, both paid and unpaid, 16 per cent were eligible for statutory leave but did not take any, and 20 per cent of employed mothers were not eligible for statutory leave provisions (my own calculations). This shows that a greater share of Australian women used

parental leave, including the unpaid statutory provisions, in 2005 but that similar shares of women were not eligible for these entitlements.

Glezer's (1988) survey investigated the combined paid and unpaid maternity leave provisions whereas both the PLA survey and the PaETS allow for an evaluation of the unpaid statutory provisions which are the main subject of my study. If only the statutory parental leave provisions are analysed, the PLA survey finds that just over half of Australian mothers (57 per cent) and only 7 per cent of fathers who were employed prior to having a child took up the statutory provisions of unpaid parental leave (Whitehouse et al., 2006). The PaETS (ABS, 2006b) offers similar findings with regard to the take-up of statutory parental leave benefits by employed mothers with 53 per cent of mothers in the survey reporting that they used unpaid parental leave. Table 5 offers a summary of the findings of both surveys.

Table 5: Unpaid leave taken by employed women and men in 2005 – Comparison PaETS and PLA

Percentage of all employed women and men who had a child in 2005 and took unpaid parental leave	PaETS	PLA survey
Women who took unpaid parental leave	53%	57%
Men who took unpaid leave	22%	
Unpaid parental leave		7%
'Other' unpaid leave		6%

As can be seen in Table 5, the two surveys report different results for the take-up of fathers. The PaETS finds that 22 per cent of men used unpaid leave options whereas the PLA survey finds that only 7 per cent of men used the statutory entitlement to unpaid paternity leave and 6 per cent used other unpaid leave options. These discrepancies may, in part, be explained by the design of the two surveys. For men, the PaETS (ABS, 2006b) does not distinguish between unpaid paternity leave and other unpaid leave as it does for women. Thus, it is not possible to tell what proportion of men, who took unpaid leave, actually accessed paternity leave options as a statutory benefit. In contrast, Whitehouse et al. (2006) designed the PLA survey so that respondents were asked to indicate which types of leave they used at the time of child birth. Participants then had to specify the periods they used as dedicated maternity or paternity leave. Whitehouse et al. employed this strategy to prevent over-reporting of the use of maternity/paternity leave because they found in their pilot study that some respondents tended to report all leave taken at the time of birth as

maternity/paternity leave, including annual leave. Thus, it can be anticipated that the PLA survey represents a more accurate picture of men's uptake of unpaid parental leave provisions than the PaETS.

Both surveys confirm, however, that only a small minority of fathers accessed the parental leave provisions which were technically available to them, but continued in their role as breadwinners. The comparison of male and female take-up patterns reported in the PLA survey reveals that Australian mothers are eight times more likely to take up the unpaid statutory leave benefits than fathers. In Australia, it is largely mothers who take up statutory parental leave to actively care for young children and who interrupt their employment for significant periods of time.

In light of my conceptual framework, I propose that the traditional gendered norms and assumptions which underpin the design of parental leave legislation are, at the same time, reinforced by the actual behaviour of parents and, therefore, support traditional gender norms and assumptions in the Lifeworld. The Australian findings suggest that the majority of Australian parents act out the traditional gender norms and assumptions on which the parental leave legislation is based in that it is largely mothers who take up unpaid parental leave and become the full-time carer of their young children while fathers usually retain their breadwinning role. As outlined above, only a minority of fathers uses the unpaid statutory benefits which are dedicated leave periods for caring purposes. Accessing work/life balance policies does not seem to be an option for fathers. At the same time, these gender-stereotypical behaviours strengthen the belief that mothers are the 'natural' carers of young children and that fathers do not have an active role in care giving. This reflects the interactions between the Lifeworld and the Steering Media theorised by Habermas (1987) as well as Gidden's (2001) concept of the 'duality of structure'. Building on those theories, I argue that the traditional gendered assumptions and beliefs underpinning the Australian parental leave legislation shape the take-up of the parental leave provisions. The gendered take-up of parental leave in turn reinforces these traditional assumptions and beliefs. This process maintains the status quo in the Lifeworld, i.e. the existing traditional gender ideology. I will show in the next section that this traditional gender ideology influences not only the behaviour of parents but also frames employer responses to work/life conflicts.

INTERACTIONS BETWEEN THE STEERING MEDIA AND THE SYSTEMS IN AUSTRALIA: CREATING FLEXIBILITY AND DISTRIBUTING THE COSTS OF CARE WORK

I have demonstrated in the previous section that the work/life balance strategies employed by the Australian government, as represented by parental leave legislation, have a normative dimension which is based on a traditional gender ideology and which steers the behaviour of individuals into traditional patterns. The current government conceptualises 'parents' largely as 'mothers' and perceives work/life conflicts as 'women's issues'. I aim to show in this section that the traditional assumptions about women and men which underpin the Australian government's framing of work/life issues, in the form of the parental leave legislation, are carried into workplace organisations and create the context for organisational responses to work/life issues. At the same time, however, workplace organisations influence the legislation in that the decisions of policy makers are influenced by business imperatives, such as the need to minimise costs and maximise labour flexibility. Using the terminology of my conceptual framework, I want to illustrate in this section the interactions between the Steering Media and the Systems. In order to do this, I will analyse the design of the Australian parental leave legislation to uncover how policy makers build the demands of employers into work/life provisions and assign responsibility for supportive policies to employers.

Parental leave as a statutory workplace entitlement

The Australian government provides parental leave as a workplace right (Baird, 2004a). The statutory entitlement of 52 weeks unpaid parental leave is included as one of five minimum employment conditions in the Fair Pay and Conditions Standard, together with provisions on maximum working hours, annual leave and personal/carer's leave (Australian Government (WorkChoices website), 2006b). The industrial relations strategy pursued by the Australian government is, hence, one of providing minimum conditions for all employees and encouraging enterprise bargaining for those parents who want parental leave entitlements over and above the minimum entitlements. The following statement is taken from the WorkChoices website and illustrates the approach:

> The Australian Fair Pay and Conditions Standard (the Standard) ensures that family friendly leave entitlements including parental leave and personal/carer's leave are set in legislation. Employers and employees may negotiate family

friendly working arrangements that are more favourable than the Standard through agreement-making. (Australian Government (WorkChoices website), 2006b)

Additional benefits, such as paid parental leave, are subject to negotiation between those employees who want more comprehensive benefits and their employers (DEWR, 2006). This suggests that 'work/life balance' is very much perceived as an individual issue which needs to be dealt with in the industrial relations framework and not as a collective issue which needs to be dealt with at the federal government level.

I have outlined in Chapter Five that the Australian welfare state philosophy has been classified as a liberal approach (Esping-Andersen, 1990). With regard to work/life balance policies, this means that the government does not place a great emphasis on political solutions to achieve reconciliation of employment and care work but instead leaves the initiative to employers. The following quote illustrates the current approach by the Howard Government:

> The workplace relations system has been important in workers' access to work and family provisions in Australia, providing a vehicle for entitlements that in other countries are often delivered through dedicated parental rights legislation and/or through social security. (Australian Department of Family and Community Services & Australian Department of Employment and Workplace Relations, 2002, p. 40)

This suggests that in the Australian context the workplace relations system *replaces* dedicated parental leave legislation and social security provisions with regard to work and family entitlements. Parental leave is clearly established as a workplace right and not regarded as a citizenship entitlement.

I aim to demonstrate in this section that the conceptualisation of statutory parental leave as a workplace right and of paid parental leave provisions as a subject of workplace bargaining has significant implications for the work/life options available to Australian women and men at the time when they become parents and need to renegotiate their work/life arrangements in the light of increasing care work. I will argue that the design of the legislation defines the level of responsibility of employers to provide workplace conditions which are more supportive of work/life balance, i.e. the Steering Media determine the regulatory framework in which the Systems operate. I contend that the extent to which employers are required by legislation to create more supportive workplace conditions has a

strong influence on take-up rates. To support my argument, I analyse the characteristics of the Australian parental leave legislation and how employer responsibility is conceptualised and institutionalised in the Australian parental leave legislation. From that analysis it appears that the legislation delivers more flexibility to employers than it does to employees.

Creating workplace flexibility

I showed in the first part of this chapter that the design of the legislation supports traditional gender roles which I identified as Steering Media and Lifeworld interactions. In addition, I propose that the Steering Media also interact with the Systems in similar ways in that the Australian parental leave legislation features four important characteristics which determine the responsibility of employers and which directly affect the work/life options of parents. These characteristics are, firstly, the restriction of eligibility for parental leave entitlements to those employees with 12 months continuous service, secondly, the relatively short length of the leave period, thirdly, the rigid conditions for leave taking; and, finally, the unpaid nature of the parental leave provisions. I will discuss these characteristics in turn and evaluate their impact on the work/life options of Australian parents.

The parental leave benefits and the conditions attached to their take-up are identical under the WRA 1996 and the WorkChoices Amendment 2006. Importantly, the 12 months qualifying period was retained in the WorkChoices Amendment which requires an employee to have 12 months continuous service with one employer in order to be eligible for parental leave. Casual employees have to demonstrate that they have been employed on a regular and systematic basis for a period or sequence of periods of at least 12 months and that there is a reasonable expectation of ongoing employment with the same employer. The 12-months qualifying period implies that while employers are obliged to grant parental leave to employees, the design of the legislation ensures that only those employees, who have already contributed significantly to the business, are eligible for parental leave benefits. As I shall demonstrate with the take-up data, this qualifying period results in a situation in which a significant share of employed parents does not have access to the benefits.

Moreover, by keeping the leave period relatively short and by making the leave taking extremely rigid, the interruption of employment by parents who take leave is relatively short

and predictable which assists employers in the re-organisation of the workload among existing staff or replacement workers while the employee is on leave. At the same time, there is no flexibility in the leave taking for parents who have to access the leave in one continuous, full-time period of up to 52 weeks and cannot take the leave in several fractions or save some leave for a later stage in their child's life. This again shows that the parental leave legislation creates flexibility largely for employers. The legislation does not seem to take into account the needs and preferences of parents beyond the minimum requirement of having access to a significant period of leave at the time of child birth. Instead, it addresses the needs of business for predictable and cost efficient workforce management.

I mentioned in the Introduction to the case studies that, in the current Australian parental leave regime, parents do not have a statutory right to paid parental leave under federal legislation. I propose that this is the design feature of the legislation with the most severe implications for parents' work/life options. Private sector employers have no legislated responsibility for providing financial assistance to parents on leave because the statutory parental leave provisions are unpaid. Employers can decide to offer paid parental leave on a case by case basis and, thus, directly control the cost of such leave because paid parental leave provisions need to be negotiated at the workplace level. The company can decide whether there is a 'business case' for providing paid parental leave to the employee who wants to bargain for it. Public sector employers, in contrast, have a legal responsibility to financially support mothers on leave and share the costs incurred by mothers who take extended leave periods in connection with child birth. Paid parental leave is not a universal entitlement and, thus, not a work/life option which is accessible for all Australian parents.

It appears, however, that this aspect of the Australian parental leave legislation might be deliberate and part of the broader industrial relations agenda of the current government. In the next section, I analyse how the responsibility of employers to provide workplace conditions which are more supportive of work/life balance and increase flexibility for parents is defined in the Steering Media reports.

Public support for the flexibility agenda

The main goal of the WorkChoices Amendment 2006 is to increase labour market flexibility. On the WorkChoices website, they state : "[We are] introducing our plan for a modern workplace relations system which will give Australia a flexible labour market, allowing economic growth and employment opportunities". The Australian government made 'flexibility' the catch cry of their advertising campaign for the contested reform package. Workplace flexibility is believed to help employees realise their preferences for work/life balance while at the same time maintaining a productive and engaged workforce (DEWR, 2006). The WorkChoices reforms are believed to benefit both employers and employees with virtually identical language used to promote the changes to the two parties (Australian Government (WorkChoices website), 2006b):

> The national workplace relations system provides more choice and flexibility for employees in the workplace. The system offers better ways to balance work and family life and receive greater rewards and incentives.

> The workplace relations system is the national system that provides more choice and flexibility for employers in the workplace. The system offers better ways to reward effort, increase wages and balance work and family life.

The belief in mutual benefits of workplace reform expressed by the DEWR and the Australian government, in general, reflects a unitarist approach to industrial relations. Stone (2005, p.871) explains that in a unitarist view "industrial relations is grounded in mutual cooperation, individual treatment, teamwork and the sharing of common objectives". This means that the fundamental belief underpinning labour market policy by the current Australian government is that of mutually beneficial workplace arrangements which increases flexibility for both employees and employers. However, the government's own advertising suggests that the flexibility created by WorkChoices is largely that of employers.

Under the heading "More flexibility" the government explains on the WorkChoices website (Australian Government (WorkChoices website), 2006b):

> Flexible, family friendly working conditions have a number of benefits for both employers and employees, including:
> - greater attraction and retention of quality staff, lower staff costs;
> - higher staff morale and productivity;
> - lower absenteeism rates; and
> - improved corporate image.

This framing of the issues suggests that in the unitarist belief system of the Australian government 'flexibility' becomes synonymous with the 'family-friendly workplace' and the benefits of flexibility are believed to be shared equally by employees and employers. Yet, all of the listed advantages of flexible and family friendly work conditions, namely cost savings, quality of employees and improved public relations, seemed to be aimed at employers.

There are also signs in the Steering Media reports that the commitment to work/life balance seems to be a lip service on the part of the government. The report by the Inquiry Committee (House of Representatives Standing Committee on Family and Human Services, 2006) quotes an ABS study on employee preferences which found that almost half of all employees with unmet care demands could not access care arrangements either due to work commitments or the nature of their work. The committee approved of that situation:

> The Bureau [Australian Bureau of Statistics] also reported that, of the 172,700 people who had unmet demand for caring arrangements, 75,800, or 43.9 per cent, could not access care arrangements either due to work commitments or the nature of their work made using the arrangements difficult. In the view of the committee, these are legitimate reasons for an employee not to be able to use work arrangements to care. (House of Representatives Standing Committee on Family and Human Services, 2006, p.159)

This suggests that the Committee categorically approves of workplace related demands overriding care related demands. They seem to be uncomfortable with the idea that employee needs can legitimately override employer needs.

The reluctance of the committee members to restrict the freedom of employers is also apparent in their discussion of what constitutes a 'flexible workplace'. The following quote illustrates this:

> In the committee's view, what characterises a flexible work place is a readiness to negotiate and an acceptance that employees will not be disadvantaged if they attempt to negotiate. Beyond this, there does not appear to be any requirements for flexible working to succeed. In other words, flexible working depends more on the culture of an organisation, rather than any particular right, requirement, benefit or agreement. (House of Representatives Standing Committee on Family and Human Services, 2006, pp.165/66)

This implies that, in the view of the committee, there is no room for government regulation beyond the creation of a workplace relations framework which allows for negotiation

without disadvantage for those employees who want to bargain for improved conditions. This is in perfect alignment with the WorkChoices reforms and the views expressed by Kevin Andrews in his foreword to the DEWR report (2006). Such a view suggests that employees should be enabled to negotiate with their employers; however, there is no guarantee that these negotiations will be successful and actually result in more supportive workplace conditions which would facilitate work/life balance.

The government, as illustrated by the Chair of the Parliamentary Inquiry into Balancing Work and Family, the Hon. Bronwyn Bishop MP, outspokenly rejects legislation which would give guaranteed rights to employed parents. This is strongly illustrated in their repeated refusal to introduce a national paid maternity leave scheme that I mentioned in the Introduction to the case studies. The latest rejection of the possibility to legislate for paid maternity leave has been documented in the report produced by the Inquiry Committee (House of Representatives Standing Committee on Family and Human Services, 2006). I will briefly sketch the argument presented against introducing a national paid maternity leave scheme and discuss the implications for the work/life options of Australian parents.

The Inquiry Committee (House of Representatives Standing Committee on Family and Human Services, 2006) acknowledges the high preference of parents for paid parental leave, the low provision and take-up of paid leave, the uneven access to paid leave which depends on employment status, the fact that virtually all OECD countries, with the exception of the USA, have more generous provisions than Australia and the availability of the HREOC proposal for a national paid maternity leave scheme. Despite this, the committee is content to point out that the government has implemented the Maternity Payment subsequent to the HREOC report in 2002. Moreover, the Maternity Payment costs in excess of $1 billion per annum, a fact acknowledged by the committee (House of Representatives Standing Committee on Family and Human Services, 2006). That this constitutes four times the amount of the paid maternity leave scheme proposed by the HREOC (2002a) is not perceived as in any way problematic by the Inquiry Committee. The Committee states that they support the Maternity Payment "in recognition that all women suffer a drop in income in pregnancy, birth and recovery" (House of Representatives Standing Committee on Family and Human Services, 2006, p.68). This statement is simply incorrect because the Maternity Payment is paid to all mothers and not all women are employed prior to having a child, so not all women would suffer a loss in income.

Thus, in spite of the overwhelming preference for paid leave as the most important workplace arrangement to help with care responsibilities, the availability of a blueprint for introducing a universal paid maternity leave scheme and the fact that virtually the entire developed world has taken action with regard to this important work/life balance policy, no such legislation is recommended by the committee. The report by the Inquiry Committee merely states some of the available evidence documenting the benefits of universal paid maternity leave and uses the lack of clear evidence for a positive relationship between universal paid maternity leave and increased fertility levels as a reason not to recommend further legislation.

Instead, the current approach of unpaid leave and employer sponsored paid maternity leave is assumed to deliver appropriate results and the need for a universal paid maternity leave scheme is portrayed as being overrated. This denial of the benefits of universal paid maternity leave can be seen as an indicator that the committee is not prepared to address the work/life issues experienced by a large number of Australians at the cost of employers. As long as there is a perceived win-win situation, in terms of cost-benefit considerations, some adjustments to work arrangements, such as flexible working hours, can be made by employed carers. If there are conflicting interests, however, i.e. if benefits to employees imply substantial costs to employers (or to the state for that matter), the pursuit of work/life balance appears to be abandoned by both Steering Media actors and employers. This leaves Australian employees in a situation in which they carry the main burden of workplace flexibility as an individual cost and they are held accountable for their 'choices' at an individual level.

Despite this lack of evidence that the reforms will improve the workplace conditions of employees and despite refusing to provide universal work/life entitlements to employed carers, the Australian government clearly promoted the WorkChoices reforms under a work/family banner:

> WorkChoices will make it easier for employees and employers to negotiate workplace agreements incorporating family friendly working arrangements. Bargaining at the workplace level is particularly suited to tailoring working arrangements in ways that assist employees to balance work and family responsibilities. (Australian Government (WorkChoices website), 2006b)

Again, the unitarist worldview allows for the assumption that such negotiations take place on a level playing field and are determined by market forces rather than power imbalances between employers and employees.

According to the DEWR (2006), the department responsible for the implementation of the WorkChoices reforms, there was a need to reduce barriers to workplace flexibility, labour force participation and enterprise negotiation, such as unnecessary regulation and 'red tape', in order to achieve more 'flexible' and, thus, family-friendly workplaces. It is believed that if these barriers could be abolished, then free market mechanisms would deliver optimum outcomes to employers and employees (DEWR, 2006). The government puts it like this:

> Agreements negotiated at the workplace level can include a range of innovative and flexible working arrangements including (but not limited to):
> - flexible working hours;
> - job sharing;
> - working from home arrangements;
> - casual or part-time work; and
> - parental leave entitlements.
>
> These types of employment arrangements allow employees to balance paid work with other responsibilities such as caring for others, study or voluntary work and can help to attract and retain parents, carers, mature age workers and people with disabilities in the workforce. (Australian Government (WorkChoices website), 2006b)

This is another expression of a unitarist view which underpins the WorkChoices reform agenda.

It appears that as a consequence of the unitarist view taken by the government, no consideration is given to fact that workplaces may be fundamentally unsupportive of work/life balance. Yet, structural barriers to achieving work/life balance, which are caused on a workplace level, have been identified in the reports by the committee of the Inquiry (House of Representatives Standing Committee on Family and Human Services, 2006) and the HREOC (HREOC, 2005, 2007), but are unacknowledged in the government publication (DEWR, 2006). The Inquiry Committee identified current workplace cultures, structures and processes as distinctly family-unfriendly and, thus, as major causes of these conflicts (House of Representatives Standing Committee on Family and Human Services, 2006). In particular, the persistent culture of long working hours, discrimination against pregnant women, and the lack of management support were identified as key sources of conflict. This is supported

by case studies of women who experienced problems in their workplaces and who gave evidence in the hearings and/or submissions during the inquiry.

Similar structural causes of work/life conflicts were identified by the HREOC (2005). They maintained that the most important workplace trends which undermine the creation of more family friendly workplaces were the increase in long hours for full-time workers and work intensification, i.e. the phenomenon of working harder and faster which is fuelled by workplace cultures and expectations creating the sense that working harder is 'the right thing to do'. Moreover, the spread of part-time work, often on casual contracts, as a common form of women's employment but not men's has resulted in 'mummy tracks' that offer little choice to mothers over the quality of the part-time work available and often excludes them from career structures and offers little career advancement. Furthermore, the high incidence of women's part-time work on casual contracts has to be seen as a structural barrier to work/life balance as is the largely female problem of underemployment. In addition, the HREOC identified the perceived risk of job security or career progression, unsupportive management cultures, selective availability of policies, and employer flexibility at the cost of employees as possible barriers to work/life balance.

The evidence provided in both reports suggests that there are indeed structural barriers to work/life balance in workplaces and that employers and employees may actually have fundamentally different interests when it comes to increased workplace flexibility. These structural barriers, however, are not addressed by the Australian government. Instead, there is a strong belief in individually negotiated work/life arrangements by the federal government (DEWR, 2006). In their view, the provision of family-friendly workplace conditions benefit both parties and employers will implement work/life policies if they are given the opportunity to do so by means of a flexible workplace relations framework with minimal amount of 'red tape'. The DEWR perceives as the main challenge for the government to communicate to employers the many benefits of flexible working and family friendly provision, i.e. the business case for work/life balance, and to encourage the spread and take-up of those provisions across industries. Informed by a unitarist view, the idea behind this approach is that once employers have recognised that it is in their own best interest to provide work/life policies they will implement them.

In summary, the WRA (1996) and, especially, the WorkChoices Amendment (2006) can be seen as crucial policy tools by the Howard government to achieve increased workforce flexibility. The Australian Steering Media actors perceive their role in the provision of work/life policies, including parental leave, as guaranteeing minimum standards. All other conditions which employees demand or employers offer need to be negotiated at a workplace level, including access to paid parental leave. This conceptualisation of parental leave provisions as workplace benefits defines the basic approach to parental leave and work/life balance policies more generally. It grants work/life balance policies to employed carers in their role as workers and not in their role as citizens. It is clearly an expression of a liberal welfare state philosophy and suggests that Australia has moved towards a 'residual' welfare state model and increasingly relies on service provision through the private sector. In the case of parental leave this means that employees need to bargain for paid provisions instead of having access to universal entitlements.

I will demonstrate in the next section that the take-up data of parental leave suggests that the provisions by the Australian government do not live up to the promise of improving work/life balance by delivering more flexible workplace arrangements to parents. Instead, the data indicate that the current parental leave regime creates only limited work/life options and delivers highly unequal outcomes to parents.

Take-up of statutory parental leave in Australia: A matter of choice or limited options?

The implications of parental leave design for parents are significant and negative as can be seen from the findings of both the PaETS and PLA survey. Because the parental leave provisions are granted as a workplace right, which need to be 'earned' by having 12 months continuous service with one employer, 28 per cent of employed mothers and 35 per cent of employed fathers were not eligible for the statutory benefits in 2005 (see Table 6).

Table 6: Take-up of unpaid parental leave by employed women and men, 2005

Percentage of all employed women and men who had a child in 2005 and took unpaid parental leave (PLA Survey, 2006)	Women	Men
Employed women/men who took unpaid parental leave	57%	7%
Employed women/men who were eligible but did not take unpaid parental leave	15%	58%
Employed women/men who were not entitled to statutory unpaid parental leave	28%	35%
Total	100%	100%

Note: The figures in Table 6 are based on the PLA survey (Whitehouse et al., 2006). The figures in the survey as published in the interim report are ambiguous. Table 2 in the report indicates that 28 per cent of employed mothers (N = 2462) and 35 per cent of employed fathers (N = 3210) were not eligible for statutory unpaid parental leave. Table 6 states that 57 per cent of employed mothers (N = 2144) and 7 per cent of employed fathers (N = 2521) took unpaid leave. Thus, the figures presented in the above table have been calculated based on a different number of cases which may result in inaccuracies.

But even for those parents who had access to unpaid parental leave, the statutory provisions did not appear to be an attractive option. 15 per cent of employed women and 58 per cent of employed men who were eligible did not use their statutory entitlements to parental leave. Moreover, only a minority of mothers used the whole period of 52 weeks technically available to them. I will investigate both findings in some more detail in the next paragraphs.

The PaETS reports that 26 per cent of all employed mothers did not take up any parental leave (ABS, 2006b). Of those mothers who did not take leave, almost three quarters (73 per cent) indicated that they dropped out of the workforce. Similarly, the PLA survey reported that 24 per cent of employed mothers did not take any leave and that the majority of those women dropped out of the workforce when their child was born (Whitehouse et al., 2006). In both samples women gave as the most important reason for dropping out of paid employment the desire to look after the family/care for the child full-time (53 per cent in PaETS and 64 per cent in PLA) which suggests that traditional gender norms, i.e. the expectation that mothers should care for their young children full-time, exert a strong influence on mothers' decisions with regard to their work/life arrangements. However, Whitehouse et al. (2006) found that the proportion of mothers who did not take parental leave but dropped out of employment was only half in the sample of women who had 12 months continuous service (12 per cent compared to 24 per cent of all employed mothers). This seems to suggest that women with stronger labour market attachment were less likely to drop out of the workforce at the time of child birth and to follow the traditional female role of full-time carer.

Moreover, both surveys show that mothers rarely took the full 52 weeks of leave. The average period of statutory leave taken by mothers in the PLA survey was 38 weeks and only 34 per cent of women accessed close to 52 weeks of leave (Whitehouse et al., 2006). Importantly, all women who took about one year of leave had access to some form of paid leave which suggests that the unpaid nature of the statutory parental leave provisions presents a barrier to achieving more work/life balance and to pursuing the preferred work/life arrangement. Yet, I will show that paid parental leave provisions are not a work/life option available to all Australian parents.

The take-up of paid parental leave provisions

In contrast to the assumption of the DEWR that the preferred work/life arrangement can be negotiated between individual employees and employers, the take-up data suggest that the access to paid maternity and paid paternity leave is highly uneven among employees in Australia. Two points are particularly important: paid parental leave is only available to a minority of employed parents and very few employees seem to be able to negotiate individual access to paid parental leave.

Before I present the details of paid parental leave provisions in Australia, I need to comment briefly on the nature of the available data. For the sake of this analysis, it has to be assumed that the take-up of paid leave equals the eligibility of employees to such leave. While the surveys provide information about the take-up of paid parental leave provisions, there is no data on the number of employees who had access to paid maternity/paternity leave provisions but chose not to take them up. The evaluations on the availability of paid parental leave indicate that more than 50 per cent of Australian working women had no access to paid maternity leave entitlements under previous practice (HREOC, 2002b). Statistics provided by the ABS (2003) suggest that only 36 per cent of female workers had access to paid maternity leave in their workplace. Sara Charlesworth (2004a) found that 'best practice' organisations were likely to offer paid maternity leave provisions but that they granted the leave on the condition of a specified amount of continuous service. The survey conducted by Baird and Litwin (2004) in 2002 found that more men than women worked in organisations that offered paid maternity leave (24 per cent compared to 18 per cent). The

provision of paid paternity leave is even less frequent than that of paid maternity leave (5.8 versus 9.8 per cent of enterprise agreements) (Baird, 2004b). What can be said is that the access to paid maternity, paternity and parental leave depends on the employment status and labour market power of the individual parent even more so than the access to unpaid parental leave provisions. This is also true for the take-up of paid parental leave which I will investigate in the next paragraph.

I mentioned above that only a minority of employed parents has access to paid parental leave. Both studies suggest that employers are reluctant to implement more expensive work/life policies, such as paid parental leave. Only a minority of parents have access to paid parental leave benefits. The PaETS finds that 34 per cent of all mothers and 18 per cent of all fathers used paid maternity/paternity leave. The figures were slightly higher for employed parents in the PLA survey where 37 per cent of mothers and 24 per cent of fathers reported to have access to paid maternity/paternity leave provisions (Whitehouse et al., 2006). These figures show that only a minority of parents is eligible for paid parental leave which indicates that employers offer this expensive work/life policy selectively.

In addition, the data illustrate that the belief by the DEWR in the ability of an individual to negotiate paid parental leave provisions at a workplace level needs to be regarded as overstated. The PLA survey suggests that access to paid parental benefits is often negotiated on a collective basis. By analysing the PLA survey data, I found that the provision of paid maternity leave is concentrated in certain sectors, salary brackets and among women who work for large employers (all of the following are my own calculations). Eighty-five per cent of women in the public sector but only 31 per cent of women in the private sector used paid maternity leave. Almost three quarters of women in the two highest salary brackets had access to paid maternity leave compared to 23 per cent of women in the lowest salary bracket. Women who worked for large employers (500+) were most likely to have access to paid maternity leave (71 per cent) and the numbers decline progressively with the size of the company (41 per cent in organisations with 20 to 99 employees, 21 per cent in organisations with less than 5 employees). Moreover, union membership made a significant difference to women's take-up of paid maternity leave and to a lesser extent to male take-up. In the private sector, 45 per cent of women who were organised in a union had access to paid maternity leave compared to 26 per cent of those women who were not. The public sector figures are 91 per cent compared to 73 per cent of women with and without union

membership. All trends are similar for men, but as was mentioned earlier, their overall access to paid paternity/parental leave which is care related is even lower than that of mothers. Thus, the incidence of individual employees negotiating rights to paid parental leave with their employers on a one-on-one basis is likely to be very small.

Instead of bargaining for paid parental leave, Australian parents and, especially, fathers resort to alternative leave arrangements to be able to spend time with their newborn children. Both surveys show that a large number of parents accessed 'other' paid leaves, such as annual leave and long service leave. Twenty-eight per cent of mothers in the PaETS and 38 per cent of mothers in the PLA survey reported that they had taken 'other' paid leave. The numbers were even more drastic for men with 62 per cent of men in the PLA survey indicating that they took 'other' paid leave around the time of birth. Yet, the periods of 'other' paid leave varied greatly between mothers and fathers with mothers taking an average of eight weeks compared to an average for fathers of 13 days (Whitehouse et al., 2006). This illustrates that both women and men seem to prefer time off for care related reasons but that the current parental leave regime does not support this preference. Tables 7 and 8 also show the highly diverse pattern of leave taking in Australia.

Table 7: Take-up of maternity leave by employed Australian women, 2005 – Comparison PaETS and PLA

Type of leave taken by employed women in 2005, multiple answers possible	PaETS	PLA survey
Women who took unpaid maternity leave	53%	57%
Women who took paid maternity leave	34%	37%
Women who took other unpaid leave	11%	11%
Women who took other paid leave	28%	38%
All employed women who took any leave	74%	76%

Table 8: Take-up of leave at the time of child birth by employed Australian men, 2005 – Comparison PaETS and PLA

Type of leave taken by employed men in 2005, multiple answers possible	PaETS	PLA survey
Men who took unpaid leave	22%	
Unpaid paternity leave		7%
Other unpaid leave		6%
Men who took paid leave	54%	
Paid paternity leave		24%
Other paid leave		62%
Men who took other leave	1%	
All employed men who took any leave	77%	83%

These figures suggest that the current Australian regime of unpaid parental leave as a statutory entitlement and paid parental leave as a negotiated workplace entitlement produce very different outcomes for different groups of parents. Those parents on permanent employment contracts and associated benefits as well as those with higher incomes are more likely to have access to paid parental leave than parents on casual contracts and in lower income brackets. There are large differences between mothers and fathers in terms of access to and length of paid parental leave taken. This shows that because of the reliance on workplace negotiations to secure paid parental leave entitlements, the current parental leave regime in Australia cannot deliver equitable outcomes for all parents. Instead, the approach by the federal government produces gender inequalities as well as class inequalities between privileged and less privileged mothers in particular. These inequalities persist long after the initial period of parental leave has expired.

Employment patterns of mothers and fathers after child birth

In this section, I will provide data to show that the differences in the work/life arrangements of mothers and fathers deepen after the immediate period of parental leave and I will outline the key differences in the last section of this chapter. I have established earlier that both the PaETS and PLA surveys suggest that men, by and large, do not interrupt their employment upon becoming a parent and do not take extended leave periods. I have also shown that, in contrast to men, the majority of women significantly adjust their employment patterns by taking extended leave periods or dropping out of employment completely. Both surveys show that mothers make substantial adjustments when they return to employment after having a child. Yet, these patterns are not homogenous and there are large differences between different groups of women.

The PaETS (ABS, 2006b) provides a break down of the employment status of surveyed women and shows that of all mothers with children aged two years and younger in November 2005, 45 per cent did not have a job after birth, 16 per cent were currently on leave and 39 per cent had returned to paid work after the birth of their child. Of those mothers who had returned to employment, 41 per cent did so in the first three months after

their child's birth. Another 24 per cent returned within the next three months so that 65 per cent of all mothers who had taken leave or temporarily dropped out of the workforce after the birth of the child returned to employment within the first six months.

The PLA survey (Whitehouse et al., 2006) reports markedly different figures for mothers who had taken leave, had been employed in the 12 months prior to taking leave and had since returned to employment. Only 13 per cent of the mothers in the PLA survey reported to have returned to employment within the first three months and a further 23 per cent within the first six months of the child's life. Most eligible mothers returned when their child was between 9 and 12 months old (27 per cent). Both surveys find that only a minority of women takes more than 12 months of parental leave, yet the PLA reports a significantly higher proportion who took between 12 and 15 months of leave. It needs to be said that the PLA survey included children who were a maximum age of 15 months whereas the PaETS surveyed parents who had children aged two years or younger.

Table 9: Return to work: Australian mothers who had returned to or commenced a new job after taking parental leave – Comparison PaETS and PLA survey

Timing of return to paid employment	PaETS		PLA survey	
	Percent	Cumulative percent	Percent	Cumulative percent
Up to 3 months	42	42	13	13
3 up to 6 months	24	66	23	36
6 up to 9 months	27	93	21	57
9 up to 12 months			27	84
12 up to 24/15 months	7	100	16	100

The PLA and PaETS surveys both find that a large share of mothers did not return to employment after leave. The PLA survey reports that 30 per cent of those mothers who had been employed for 12 months prior to taking leave had not yet returned to employment. The PaETS finds that 16 per cent of all mothers who had been employed prior to giving birth had not yet returned to employment. Moreover, they find that of all mothers who had a child of less than two years of age, 42 per cent were employed. The OECD (2007b) also provides statistics on maternal employment rates which show that only 45 per cent of

Australian mothers with a child less than three years were employed in 2002. Employment rates increase once the child reaches school age with 67 per cent of mothers with children aged six to fourteen engaging in employment. Overall, employment rates for Australian mothers with children aged fourteen and under are 57 per cent. These figures indicate that the majority of Australian mothers default to homemaker roles for extended periods of time after the birth of a child.

Both surveys suggest that mothers return to work earlier than they might have wanted to and forego parts of their leave. The PLA survey found that almost half of the mothers who had returned to employment within 15 months after delivery indicated that they would have taken longer leave if they had had access to paid maternity leave (Whitehouse et al., 2006). In addition, 45 per cent of mothers stated that they returned to work because they needed an income. Financial pressures were particularly felt by those mothers who returned within three to nine months after delivery (57 per cent of mothers in that group named financial reasons). These findings are confirmed by the data in the PaETS which reports that the main motivators for a return to work were financial reasons (73 per cent).

I propose that the financial dilemmas for Australian mothers on parental leave are directly related to their lack of entitlement to paid leave provisions. This is so because the design of the statutory parental leave provisions conceptualises mothers as full-time carers who are dependent on a male breadwinner and do not need an income in their own right. The reasons given for a return to employment show that the lack of financial support of mothers who take extended periods of parental leave becomes the main motivation for them to return to employment quicker than they might have preferred. However, there seem to be a significant number of women who have access to alternative sources of income to support them on extended leave periods either in the form of paid leave or a breadwinning partner. The decision to return to employment is, thus, not one of preference or 'free choice' but one that is related to financial necessity. The findings of both surveys indicate that the assumption of breadwinner/homemaker households as the social norm is no longer appropriate as families increasingly rely on female incomes.

Both Australian surveys provide information about the work conditions of parents once they return to employment after taking leave. These findings confirm that it is mothers who make substantial adjustments to their work/life arrangements to accommodate the new

child while fathers are largely unaffected by the birth of a child and remain in full-time employment. More than 20 per cent of mothers who were employed during pregnancy dropped out of the labour force around the time of birth. Upon return to employment, 39 per cent of mothers stated that they used part-time work as a strategy to assist with the care of their youngest child (ABS, 2006b). Only 2 per cent of fathers indicated that they used this strategy, a gender gap of 37 percentage points. The shift from full-time to part-time hours is the most drastic expression of mothers' care-related adjustments. While 49 per cent of all mothers were employed full-time during their pregnancy, 82 per cent of mothers were employed part-time after the birth of the child (ABS, 2006b). This represents a shift by 31 percentage points. In absolute numbers, this is a decrease in female full-time employment from 144,000 to 32,000 women. For a national economy which is characterised by an acute skills shortage, a decrease in prime aged female full-time labour supply by 78 per cent can hardly be desirable.

The OECD also published statistics on maternal hours of employment which confirms the importance of part-time work as a major work/life strategy for Australian mothers. While almost half of all Australian women worked part-time in 2002 (44 per cent), 67 per cent of mothers with children under six and 55 per cent of mothers aged six to 14 engaged in part-time work (OECD, 2007b).

Apart from the sharp decrease in working hours and the significant number of mothers who drop out of the workforce at the time of birth, Australian mothers make three other adjustments to their working patterns to accommodate care responsibilities (ABS, 2006b): mothers shift, firstly, from contracts with leave entitlements to contracts without such entitlements, i.e. from permanent to casual employment, secondly, from public into private sector employment and, thirdly, from being employees to being own account workers. These shifts represent a move by women into forms of employment which are all characterised by a lesser labour market status and are likely to result in lower access to work/life benefits and, thus, in a more limited ability to obtain workplace conditions conducive of work/life balance. While most mothers returned to the same employer (83 per cent) a significant proportion transferred to a different job within the same company (17 per cent) (Whitehouse et al., 2006) which may or may not reflect a demotion. Moreover, 44 per cent of mothers said they utilised flexible working hours as a work/life strategy whereas only 19 per cent of fathers used that options. Overall, only 17 per cent of employed mothers

indicated that they did not use work arrangements as a strategy to balance employment and care but 62 per cent of men stated that they had not made any adjustments to their work arrangements following the birth of their child.

In Australia, the lack of change in fathers' working patterns can be seen as a direct extension of their leave taking around birth and a confirmation of their 'ideal worker' status. The majority of fathers used 'other' paid leave which was not dedicated parental leave and thus was not explicitly related to their role as fathers. In the same way, men's employment behaviours do not reflect a change in care responsibilities. Fathers are largely unaffected by the birth of a child and the resulting additional work load in the home in terms of their employment status which reinforces the traditional gender arrangements prescribed in the Australian parental leave legislation. Instead, the adjustments to accommodate an increase in care work upon the arrival of a child are overwhelmingly made by mothers who become the primary carers of young children. The behaviours of Australian parents are in line with the expectations implied in the parental leave legislation in that they uphold the ideal of the breadwinner role for fathers and reinforce the ideal of women as the primary carers of young children and secondary earners.

I propose that the options provided by the parental leave legislation are an important reason behind the strongly gendered life histories of Australian women and men. The legislation and the leave taking of parents following child birth seems to set Australian mothers and fathers onto distinctly different trajectories with regard to their work/life arrangements. I will draw on employment data provided by the OECD to illustrate my argument.

Australian women and men have very different employment rates which reflect strong breadwinner roles for men and a weaker attachment to the labour market of women. In 2004, 76.4 per cent of men but only 62.6 per cent of women were in paid employment which represents a gender employment gap of 13.8 percentage points (OECD, 2007a). Moreover, there is a strong polarisation of working hours along gendered lines. Australia has traditionally had high rates of part-time employment (consistently over 20 per cent since 1990) (OECD, 2007b) while, at the same time, a large share of the population works in excess of 50 hours (Drago et al., 2004). However, part-time work and long hours are highly gendered.

Figure 3: Incidence of actual weekly hours of work among Australian workers age 20-54 (2005)
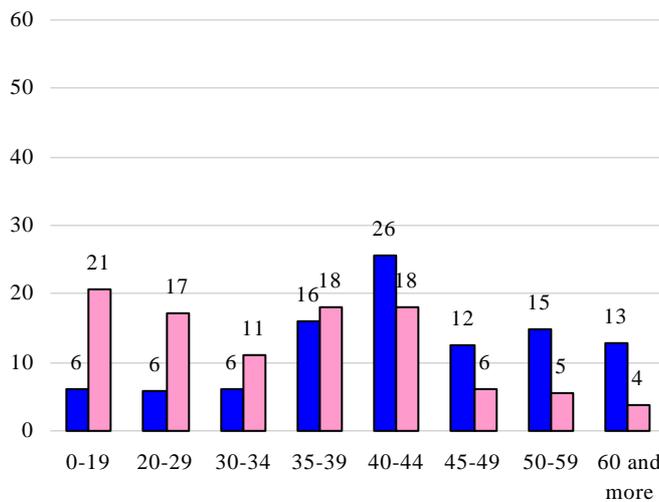
Women

Source: (OECD, 2007a)

Figure 3 shows that, in 2005, almost half of all Australian women (49 per cent) worked in part-time hours and 21 per cent worked less than 20 hours per week (OECD, 2007a). In contrast, Australian men were largely employed in full-time hours and 40 per cent of Australian men worked 45 hours or more in 2005. At the same time, 18 per cent of men worked less than 35 hours in 2005 and the male share in part-time employment has slightly increased over the past 15 years (OECD, 2007b). Similarly, the share of women in long working hours is increasing with 15 per cent of Australian women working more than 45 hours.

The effect of the polarisation of working hours is that, in Australia, only a minority of employees (36 per cent of women and 42 per cent of men) is employed in what has traditionally been considered as core working hours, i.e. between 35 and 45 hours per week. I propose that this effect causes both more work/life conflicts and greater gender inequality. The structure of the Australian labour market in terms of participation rates and working hours seems to reflect the adjustment made by mothers at the time of child birth and the lack of such adjustments made by fathers. Thus, the parental leave provisions appear to steer parents into work/life arrangements which are highly gendered and which persist long after the parental leave period.

CHAPTER CONCLUSION

I have demonstrated in this chapter that my conceptual framework can contribute to an analysis of work/life issues. Work/life policies, as illustrated by the example of parental leave, act as Steering Media tools which have a normative dimension in that they draw on Lifeworld elements which define appropriate roles for women and men in relation to employment and care of young children. Yet, the Lifeworld/Steering Media interaction also has implications for the Systems. The legislation and its normative basis set the framework for social relations in workplaces, define the responsibility of employers in providing supportive workplace conditions and legitimise leave taking for certain groups of employees.

My country analysis finds that the Australian government, as a Steering Media actor, activates traditional Lifeworld elements, i.e. assumptions and beliefs about women's and men's roles with regard to employment and care responsibilities, and the preference for breadwinner models of the family has been expressed on numerous occasions by the federal government. In line with its liberal welfare state ideology, the Australian government conceptualises care responsibilities as private issues and does not provide support beyond minimum entitlements. Moreover, it does not require employers to share the costs of leave taking of the employees.

I have demonstrated that the Australian pattern of leave taking is due to and, simultaneously, reinforces fathers' breadwinner status and maintains the male 'ideal worker' norm. Although they are supposedly gender neutral, the statutory parental leave benefits target women and are almost exclusively used by women who, with the exception of a small minority, interrupt their careers for extended periods of time and forego income and career opportunities. This behaviour reinforces women's traditional role as the primary carer of children as well as women's dependence on alternative sources of income. At the same time, men are staying on in employment as if their private circumstances had not changed at all. Both trends persist after the parental leave period has finished which was illustrated by employment statistics.

At the same time, the Australian take-up pattern of parental leave provisions is very diverse mainly because the access of parents to different parental leave options is so uneven. There are large differences in terms of take-up of parental leave between more and less privileged

mothers and between mothers and fathers in that mothers take significantly longer leaves than fathers but different groups of women take greatly different leave periods. When men take leave they mainly take paid leave which is not dedicated parental leave. These patterns of take-up can be seen as a direct result of the Australian parental leave scheme. In summary, the data indicate that parental leave legislation shapes the work/life options of Australian parents in significant ways and that they are an active agent in reproducing traditional gender arrangements.

Overall, the support by the Australian welfare state of employed carers is minimal and the Australian government has repeatedly denied the need to legislate for employers to share the costs of care. That is, the Steering Media do not prescribe a regulatory framework which may curtail the prerogative of the Systems. The high flexibility of employers is complemented by very little flexibility of employees who have to follow rigid rules to access unpaid leave, might not be able to access even the minimum provisions and, in the majority, are unlikely to be in a position to negotiate paid parental leave as an individual entitlement. It can be said that the Australian parental leave regime does create labour market flexibility, but it is employers who benefit from that flexibility which is created largely at the cost of employed mothers.

This study is designed as a cross-country comparison and the next chapter will analyse the parental leave regime and take-up in Sweden. The comparison is beneficial because it shows that while the a country's approach to work/life balance is largely consistent across the three levels of Lifeworld, Steering Media and Systems, it is a social concept which can be altered by social actors and which varies according to the social, historical and political context of a country. I will demonstrate in the next chapter that successive Swedish governments have taken a markedly different approach to supporting individuals in reconciling paid and care work than Australian governments. This different approach has resulted in a dramatically different parental leave regime with very different outcomes in terms of the take-up of provisions and the ability of parents to achieve a better work/life balance.

CHAPTER SEVEN

CASE STUDY SWEDEN

In this chapter, I aim to demonstrate that Swedish Steering Media actors, i.e. the Swedish government and policy makers, activate Lifeworld elements that are based on gender egalitarian ideals and have created a parental leave regime which supports the ideal of an earner/carer citizen for both women and men. The social-democratic welfare state philosophy has resulted in universal and generous benefits to both parents. Moreover, I will show that employers are conceptualised as 'social partners' who have a responsibility for sharing the costs of raising children and for supporting the earner/carer ideal. The take-up of parental leave benefits is very high which establishes the earner/carer model as a mainstream practice and, thus, reinforces gender egalitarian norms and beliefs.

The chapter is structured in the same way as the previous one in that I start with a discussion of the activated Lifeworld elements and analyse the role of employers in the provision of parental leave in the second part of this chapter.

INTERACTIONS BETWEEN LIFEWORLD AND STEERING MEDIA IN SWEDEN: ACTIVATING THE GENDER EGALITARIAN IDEAL OF THE EARNER/CARER CITIZEN

I outlined in the Introduction to the case studies that paid parental leave provisions in Sweden consists of two distinct but interrelated concepts: parental leave which is legislated in the Parental Leave Act (1995:584) and parental cash benefit which is regulated in the National Insurance Act (1962:381). However, I will integrate my analysis of the two pieces of legislation and will show that the principles which underlie their design are very similar. The discussion of take-up data, in contrast, will focus only on parental cash benefits because, as I have pointed out in the Introduction to the case studies, the Social Insurance Agency does not collect information on the take-up of parental leave. The only exception to this is the take-up of paid paternity leave which has to be taken in full-time.

I want to demonstrate in this chapter that both pieces of legislation reflect a commitment to gender equality as an important political goal and promotes the earner/carer citizen as the social norm. I propose that this can be seen in four distinct characteristics of the legislation which all act to define and promote gender egalitarian roles. These characteristics are: the assignment of leave periods to mothers and fathers, the possibility to combine parental leave with employment, the flexbility in accessing the leave period and the wage replacement benefits paid to parents on leave. I will discuss those in the first part of this chapter.

The ideal of the earner/carer citizen

The core assumption underlying the Swedish parental leave legislation is that both women and men can and should be carers of their young children. This suggests that the Swedish government, as a Steering Media, actively draws on assumptions and norms which do not support essentialist beliefs about women and men. I explained in the Introduction to the case studies that, under the Parental Leave Act (1995), every employed parent in Sweden has access to 18 months of parental leave. The Social Insurance Act (1962) entitles mothers and fathers to equal shares of parental cash benefit days (240 days each). Moreover, there are substantial shares of reserved cash benefit days for each parent (60 days need to be taken as mother's and father's quota respectively) which cannot be transferred to the other parent.

This has been termed a 'use it or lose it' approach to parental leave (Duvander et al., 2005). The assignment of leave periods to parents implies that the couple can only access the full leave period if the father takes his entire quota, i.e. at least 60 of the 240 cash benefit days which are available to him. Thus, Swedish parents have equal entitlements to parental leave and parental cash benefits. Mothers and fathers can access these entitlements in their own right and in their role as active carers to their young child.

The legislation actively encourages fathers to take on more responsibility as carers of their young children. In addition to the father's quota of 60 cash benefit days, there are ten days of paid paternity leave (*Pappadagar* or 'daddy days') available to fathers at the time of birth. Moreover, fathers are not allowed to take full-time leave simultaneously with the mother except for the 'daddy days'. This suggests that Swedish Steering Media actors do not draw on essentialist beliefs of mothers as 'natural' carers and of male breadwinners but, instead, base parental leave provisions on the ideal of the earner/carer citizen. This means, they draw on gender egalitarian elements of the Lifeworld rather then traditional gender ideologies. Swedish Steering Media actors deem both women and men to be capable of and responsible for the care of young children and challenge the traditional division of labour along gendered lines.

The traditional Lifeworld ideal of breadwinner/homemaker roles, in which one partner is dependent on the income of the other partner, is not encouraged under Swedish parental leave legislation. Instead, the legislation is based on the assumption that all adults are employed, regardless of sex. The most important indication of this assumption is that the 80 per cent parental cash benefits are conceptualised as a wage replacement benefit. If parents are not employed, they receive a substantially reduced payment. In practice, this means that the first 390 days are compensated at 80 per cent of the prior salary level up to a maximum amount of approximately SEK 270,000. To qualify for the 80 per cent wage replacement benefit (*Över grundnivå*) parents have to be employed for at least 240 days and have earned at least SEK 60 per day. Those parents who do not qualify for the wage replacement benefit receive an amount of SEK 180 per day (*Grundnivå*). The remaining 90 days are compensated at a low flat-rate level of SEK 60 per day (*Lägstanivå*). Thus, all parents are eligible for parental cash benefits but only those who have been employed prior to having a child receive them as 80 per cent wage replacement benefit. This strongly encourages women and

men to be employed before having a child which implies that female homemaker careers are not encouraged.

The parental cash payments are designed to make up for foregone earnings of the parent who takes parental leave to care for a young child. This implies that the person who takes parental leave can maintain an earner/carer status even when they dedicate their time to care work. In addition, parents are able to combine leave taking and employment because they have a right to permanently reduce their working time by up to 25 per cent and can access their parental cash benefits in less than full-time fractions. Thus, the parental leave legislation provides powerful support to the earner/carer ideal.

Moreover, the Swedish parental leave legislation provides strong incentives for male take-up of the provisions and, thus, discourages an exclusive focus on breadwinning for Swedish men. Firstly, couples receive the highest benefits if both parents are in employment prior to the birth of their child, if both parents take the maximum share of leave available to them and if the partner with the higher income (usually the man) takes the majority of leave. In addition, the income ceiling, which defines the maximum amount of the benefits, has been raised several times which is another incentive for male take-up. The ideal of the earner/carer citizen which is at the heart of the Swedish parental leave legislation supports the goal of gender equality because it encourages identical life histories for women and men and challenges gender specific life histories, i.e. traditional Lifeworld elements.

Another break with traditional gender ideology is that the Swedish legislation also supports single-parent families. It ensures the economic independence of single parents in that they receive the same number of parental cash benefit days (480 days) which need to be shared by a couple household. Thus, the basic assumption is that of an employed carer which may or may not be organised in a male/female couple household.

Supporting the earner/carer citizen

The assumption that both women and men are meant to be workers and carers underpins the design of the Swedish parental leave legislation but is, at the same time, an advocacy of gender egalitarian beliefs and social norms. This illustrates the complex interrelationships

between the Lifeworld and the Steering Media. The Swedish government appears to be strongly committed to the political goal of gender equality and statements to that effect can be found in all documents under investigation. Gender equality, in the Swedish context, is defined as "women and men [having] equal power to shape society and their own lives. This implies the same opportunities, rights and obligations in all spheres of life" (Statistics Sweden, 2006, p. 5). This means that women and men are able to "pursue work which provides economic independence, to care for children and the home and participate in politics, unions, and other societal activities" (SCB, 2004, p. 1). The ideal of the engaged earner/carer citizen is explicitly promoted by the Swedish Steering Media actors.

The Swedish government conceptualises 'gender' as a social construct and rejects the view that gender roles are the result of biological differences between women and men. Thus, instead of drawing on essentialist gender beliefs to inform social norms in the Lifeworld, the Swedish Steering Media actors acknowledge that gender relations are socially constructed and incorporate this insight as the knowledge basis for policy making. The following excerpts from the official publication *Women and men in Sweden. Facts and figures 2004* (SCB, 2004, pp., p. 7) are remarkable:

> The concepts of feminine and masculine are social constructions, which means that gender patterns are the result of upbringing, culture, the economic framework, power structures and political ideologies. Gender patterns are formed and maintained, both at the personal, and at the level of society. This is why the Swedish Government has decided that work on gender equality should have a feminist focus that consciously tackles this structure. […] Gender equality takes shape and produces results in a range of fields including economic policy, educational policy, family policy, labour market policy, etc. The Government therefore considers it important that gender equality be integrated into all policy areas (gender mainstreaming).

Thus, the Swedish government conceptualises 'gender' as a social structure which is reproduced in social interaction and shaped by various social institutions. It is explicitly feminist in that it is aims to eradicate the social structures which create and maintain gender inequality by means of policy intervention. The Swedish parental leave legislation is an important Steering Media tool in tackling the structures of inequality which manifest themselves in the gendered division of labour in both Lifeworld and Systems. In Habermasian terms, the Swedish Steering Media are trying to colonise the Lifeworld and trying to impose a second order change which would alter the norms and beliefs which underpin the Lifeworld.

The commitment to equality in Sweden is based on the belief that "all people are of equal value, regardless of sex, ethnic origin, religion, social class, etc." (Statistics Sweden, 2006, p.5). The achievement of gender equality is measured in terms of quantitative and qualitative progress. The Swedish government aims to achieve a 50:50 ratio of representation of women and men in all spheres of society and, at the same time, wants to ensure that equal weight is given to the knowledge, experiences and values of both women and men "to enrich and direct all spheres of society" (Statistics Sweden, 2006, p. 5).

The overall goal of gender equality translates into various sub-goals, including the equal distribution of power and influence between women and men, equal opportunities to achieve economic independence, including equal conditions and opportunities in respect of employment and advancement prospects, as well as shared responsibility for children and the home. With regard to economic independence, it is stated: "Women must be able to support themselves if they are to enjoy true freedom and independence" (Naringsdepartementet, 2005). This can be interpreted as a rejection of traditional Lifeworld assumptions and beliefs about the social roles of women as dependent homemakers and mothers and is outspokenly feminist in approach. At the same time, the Swedish government incorporated the need to change men's roles in tandem with women's roles and encouraged active fatherhood, among others by the father's quota and the daddy days. Thus, the Swedish parental leave legislation is informed by the goal of gender equality *and* is an important Steering Media tool to achieve more equality between women and men.

Public support for work/life balance in the name of gender equality

Parental leave legislation as a Steering Media tool can be seen as a conscious attempt by the Swedish government to break down traditional gendered norms and the dominance of the breadwinner/homemaker model and, thus, to colonise the Lifeworld. The Swedish government aims to achieve gender equality by eradicating what they term the 'gender-based power structure'. They state:

> Today, gender equality policy in Sweden proceeds from an understanding
> that the unequal distribution of power between women and men is sustained
> by what is known as the gender-based power structure. […] The presence of

a gender-based power structure means, for instance, that society has the following characteristics:
- The separation of the sexes
- Men are considered superior and women inferior
- Men are considered the norm.
(Naringsdepartementet, 2005)

The gendered division of labour in both the labour market and the home is seen as a key indicator of the separation of the sexes. Male superiority is reflected, among others, in the higher pay rates of men, due to their concentration in the private sector, and the persistent gender wage gap (Naringsdepartementet, 2005). The Swedish parental leave legislation is designed as one Steering Media tool in the deconstruction of the gender-based power structure in that it ties parental benefits to behaviours which require a more gender egalitarian way of organising paid and unpaid work between couples.

The stated goals of introducing the parental leave legislation, which came into effect in 1974, was to achieve greater gender equality in all aspects of social life by making it possible for both men and women to combine work and family, redress within-family imbalances in the distribution of unpaid care work, and to increase possibilities for a more gender equal labour market participation (RFV, 2003). The respective Government Bill (1973:47) stated that an important goal of the parental cash benefits was to "facilitate a development that promotes equality between men and women" (cited in RFV, 2003, p.68). Thus, improving gender equality was an explicit aim of Swedish Steering Media actors in designing the legislation.

The introduction of the 'daddy quota' of non-transferable leave rights to fathers in 1995 and its extension to two months in 2002, was meant to increase paternal involvement in care work and, thus, to achieve a more gender-balanced distribution of care work and labour market opportunities (Duvander et al., 2005). Moreover, it was stressed in the more recent Government bill (2000/0I:44) that children have the right to a close relationship with both parents and the introduction of the father's quota was intended to "strengthen both parents' ability to combine gainful employment with parenthood and particularly emphasise men's responsibility for their children" (cited in RFV, 2003, p.68). Therefore, the impetus of the Swedish legislation combined the goal of achieving more work/life balance with the need to change the gendered division of labour in that men were expected to increase their engagement in unpaid work and women were expected to participate in the labour market. Thus, the assumption is that women and men have similar capabilities and responsibilities in relation to employment and care work and should participate equally in both spheres which

is reflected in the take-up of the parental leave provisions and appears to have changed the Swedish Lifeworld to a significant extent.

Take-up of parental leave provisions in Sweden: Less gendered patterns

Usage rates of parental allowances in Sweden are high. The Swedish Social Insurance Agency has evaluated the number of paid parental leave days drawn by mothers and fathers since 1974 (SCB, 2004). In 2005, virtually all mothers (95.7 per cent) of newborn babies and almost half of the fathers (43.7 per cent) took some share of their parental leave (Forsakringskassan, 2007). Thus, the take-up of parental leave provisions in Sweden reflects the explicit efforts by the Swedish government to challenge traditional Lifeworld beliefs about the roles of women and men and shows that a majority of Swedes acts out the ideal of the earner/carer citizen. The high take-up by both mothers and fathers reinforces the assumption and ideal of the employed carer, which underlies the parental leave legislation.

The number of days claimed by parents has fluctuated over the last 15 years with a peak in 1992 when over 50 million days were used by Swedish parents (Forsakringskassan, 2005). One possible explanation of the decline in the late 1990s is the falling birth rate. However, it also coincides with the introduction of the 'father's quota' in 1996 when the number of days claimed by women fell sharply and were not met by a significant increase in the days used by men. Yet, the most recent statistics show that there has been a noticeable increase in the number of days claimed by men. Their share of leave days doubled from 10 per cent in 1995 to 20 per cent in 2005. Moreover, 75 per cent of fathers used their 'daddy days' in 2005 with an average of 9.6 days being claimed (Forsakringskassan, 2006b). This suggests that the daddy days have become an established practice and that a greater number of Swedish fathers took longer breaks from employment to care for their young children since the introduction of the father's quota.

The take-up data suggest that Swedish parents are increasingly following the ideal of the earner/carer citizen which suggests that the Steering Media intervention has initiated changes towards a more gender egalitarian Lifeworld. In addition to the increased participation of men in care work, Swedish women have developed strong ties to the labour market. Seventy-four per cent of the cash benefit days paid out to Swedish parents in 2006

were claimed by parents who were eligible for the 80 per cent wage replacement benefits (Forsakringskassan, 2007) which implies that they were in ongoing employment prior to having a child. Swedish women have traditionally had high employment rates in all demographic groups (OECD, 2006c). There are no definitive figures available, but it can be concluded from the existing statistics that the large majority (close to 90 per cent) of Swedish women were employed before the birth of their first child in 2005. Ninety per cent of childless women aged 25 to 34, which are considered prime childbearing years, are employed (all figures Statistics Sweden, 2006). The overall employment rate for Swedish women in prime childbearing years was 82 per cent. Similarly, Swedish men have employment rates of 90 per cent and over in the age brackets between 25 and 54 which can be considered active fathering years.

It is, therefore, not surprising that only 13 per cent of parental cash benefit days were claimed by parents who were not eligible for the 80 per cent wage replacement benefits and, thus, received the basic level benefit (*Grundnivå*). A further 13 per cent of days were claimed as flat-rate benefits (*Lägstanivå*) by parents who wanted to stay on leave after their wage replacement benefits were used up. Both lower rate benefits were overwhelmingly claimed by women which is an indicator that some Swedish women act out more traditional roles in that they are not employed prior to becoming a parent or that they stay out of employment beyond the time deemed appropriate by policy makers. This indicates that, despite the sustained efforts by the Swedish government as a Steering Media actor which is committed to achieving gender equality and to altering traditional Lifeworld ideologies, some traditional gender patterns persist and that the changes in the Lifeworld are occurring slowly. The next section will briefly sketch the weaknesses of the Swedish parental leave legislation which suggests that there is still room in the design of the policy to enforce an even more equal sharing of parental cash benefits and, thus, of care work for young children. If the current weaknesses of the legislation were addressed by the Swedish government it might be possible to further gender egalitarian beliefs and norms in the Lifeworld.

Weaknesses of the Swedish policy approach

There are two characteristics of the Swedish parental leave legislation which do not fully support the ideals of shared parenting and gender equality: firstly, a relatively large share of

cash benefit days (180 days) can be transferred from one partner to the other. This means that the use of 120 parental cash days, or one fourth of the entire period, are predetermined while the remaining 360 days can be transferred to either parent and each couple can decide how to divide the majority of the leave between them. This flexibility in the sharing of leave leaves room for couples to default to more traditional gender roles in that mothers can take the majority of the leave. There is evidence that this is indeed occurring in some instances. The overwhelming majority of days (80 per cent in 2005) were still accessed by mothers who took an average of 105 days per year compared to 33 days for fathers (Forsakringskassan, 2006b). Moreover, Swedish women are still twice as likely as Swedish men to take up parental leave and it is usually women who access the lower paid benefits (*Grundnivå* and *Lägstanivå*).

Secondly, there are different types of parental leave mothers and fathers can access, including a dedicated maternity leave period. Under the Parental Leave Act, women are entitled to at least seven weeks of maternity leave prior to the estimated time of delivery and seven weeks after delivery. However, two weeks of this period are obligatory during the period prior to, or after, the delivery which means that mothers have to take some leave from employment whereas fathers do not. This regulation contradicts the ideal of shared parenting to some extent as it stresses the importance of mothers to take time off from employment around the time of child birth by including a compulsory leave period.

Moreover, while the parental leave legislation has received support from all major parties across the political spectrum for most of the time, it has also had its critics. Duvander et al. (2005) point out that one prominent criticism of the Swedish legislation, often voiced by Swedish opposition (read: non-socialist) parties, is that the necessity of being employed to receive the full benefits is discriminatory against parents with weak attachment to the labour market, such as students, the unemployed and those out of the labour force, as it offers lesser benefits to those parents. However, parental cash benefits are universal entitlements and only 5 per cent of parents who accessed them were not eligible for the 80 per cent wage replacement benefits in 2006 (Forsakringskassan, 2007). Thus, the criticism seems to apply to a very small proportion of Swedish parents.

Overall, my analysis suggests that parental leave and parental cash benefits are taken up by the majority of both Swedish mothers and fathers. The figures illustrate that are acting out

the ideal of the earner/carer citizen promoted by the Swedish government. Thus, the legislation seems to have significantly contributed to establishing the earner/carer citizen as the social norm and practice in Sweden which appears to have increased equality between women and men. Yet, the take-up remains skewed towards mothers who continue to take most of cash benefit days. Over the past years, however, fathers have increased their take-up of parental leave days and represent an increasing proportion of active carers in Sweden. It appears that the Steering Media intervention in the form of a parental leave regime, which is based on gender egalitarian Lifeworld elements, has succeeded to some extent in changing the Swedish Lifeworld towards a set of norms and beliefs supportive of gender equality and, thus, in colonising the Lifeworld.

INTERACTIONS BETWEEN STEERING MEDIA AND SYSTEMS IN SWEDEN: EMPLOYERS AS 'SOCIAL PARTNERS' AND IMPROVED WORK/LIFE OPTIONS FOR PARENTS

In the first half of this chapter, I have demonstrated that the design of the Swedish parental leave legislation reflects the ideal of the earner/carer citizen which is advocated as the social norm in the Swedish Lifeworld. This ideal is underpinned by the political goals of achieving gender equality and full employment pursued by the Swedish government. In the remainder of the chapter, I propose that the earner/carer ideal is carried into the Systems by the legislation which, as a Steering Media tool, sets the regulatory framework for negotiations about work/life arrangements in Swedish workplaces.

I aim to show in this section that the Swedish legislation conceptualises employers as having an explicit responsibility for supporting parents in raising their children. I contend that Swedish employers are institutionalised as a significant player in the work/life equation in the parental leave legislation. I aim to demonstrate that the gender egalitarian Lifeworld elements which are activated by Swedish Steering Media actors together with its social-democratic welfare state philosophy result in a variety of options for Swedish parents who are deciding on work/life arrangements upon the birth of a child.

Parental leave as a universal citizenship entitlement and employers as 'social partners'

In the Introduction to the case studies, I outlined that Sweden and Australia can be categorised into different welfare state categories with Sweden following a social-democratic welfare state philosophy which relies on universal and generous benefits that are administered by the state. This is true for parental cash benefits and parental leave which are universal entitlements to parents as citizens. However, in addition to the state, employers are seen to have an important role in ensuring social wellbeing and are conceptualised as 'social partner'. This fundamental characteristic of the Swedish welfare state approach impacts on the work/life options available to parents.

In Sweden, there are three overarching objectives for the employment guidelines of government intervention which are integrally related to gender equality. In their *Action plan for employment 2003*, the Swedish government states:

> Gender equality is necessary to attain the aims of full employment, increased quality and productivity and work and enhanced social cohesion. A gender-equality perspective is to permeate the Government's policy at all levels, in every policy area and at all stages of the decision making process. (Regeringskansliet, 2003, p.47)

The overall employment strategy of achieving full employment, economic growth and gender equality results in an approach which is guided by the belief that employers and employees (as well as their collective representatives, i.e. employer associations and unions) are 'social partners' and need to solve workplace matters through negotiation at a collective level and not at a workplace level. The following quote illustrates this approach:

> The Swedish labour market is characterised by a high degree of organisation, a broad covering of collective agreements and a well-developed social dialogue. The social partners traditionally resolve many issues by means of collective agreements without central government intervention in the form of legislation or involvement of public authorities. (Regeringskansliet, 2006, p.10)

The social partners are seen as having a vital role to play in the achievement of full employment and sustainable economic growth (Regeringskansliet, 2006). Yet, the Swedish approach is unique because gender equality is seen as a necessary condition to achieving these goals. Thus, employers are seen as a crucial partner in achieving gender equality and have a legal responsibility to support women and men to become earner/carer citizens which is seen as the basis to achieving better work/life balance.

Creating flexibility for employed carers

Currently, Swedish employers are obliged to support parents in two main ways: they have to accommodate the preferred work/life arrangement of their employees and they fund the parental cash benefit scheme collectively via a compulsory levy to social insurance. In that way, Swedish employers contribute a major share of the costs of raising children and are required, by law, to accommodate parents' care needs. I will elaborate on the obligations of employers in the next two sections and will demonstrate that the Swedish design of parental leave legislation is instrumental in ensuring employer support for Swedish parents.

Firstly, employers are obliged to grant the preferred work/life arrangement to parents unless this causes "substantial disturbance to the employer's activity" ("Parental Leave Act", 1995, Section 14). Parental benefits and leave can be taken very flexibly. Parental cash benefit days can be used in full-time or in various other fractions, such as three-quarters, half, one-quarter or one-eighth of parental benefit, and the period that the parent receives the benefits is prolonged accordingly. Parental leave can be taken as maternity leave, full leave with or without parental cash benefit, partial leave with or without parental cash benefit and leave with temporary parental cash benefit.

Both parental cash benefits and parental leave can be taken until the child is eight years old or completes the first year of school. In addition, parental flexibility is increased by the provision that each parent can take up to three distinct periods of parental leave per calendar year. Employees have to give two months notice before taking parental leave or adjusting their work schedules. This suggests that in Sweden, parents are provided with various options as to how they want to combine employment and care work which employers must accommodate. The Swedish Steering Media actors define precisely the expectations towards Systems actors, i.e. individual employers. The flexibility in leave taking, which is built into the Swedish parental leave regime, seems to give parents the opportunity to tailor the way they access the leave entitlements to their personal needs and to adjust their employment and care arrangements as their situation changes. It appears to benefit employed carers who want to achieve better work/life balance.

The second important obligation of Swedish employers is that they have to fund the parental cash benefit scheme (Duvander et al., 2005; Forsakringskassan, 2006b) and, thus, support parents by offsetting the costs of taking leave from employment. In 2005, Swedish employers contributed SEK 23.5 million to the parental cash benefit scheme (Forsakringskassan, 2006b). The provision for paid parental leave greatly increases the options for Swedish parents. They can decide to stay at home with their young children on wage replacement benefits, return to employment after a short period of time or combine part-time employment with reduced leave taking. Moreover, the legislation protects employees against the demands of their employers in that Swedish employers have to consider and grant the work/life arrangements requested by their staff.

Integrating work/life balance, labour market demands and social justice

I illustrated in the Introduction to the case studies that paid leave provisions associated with child rearing have a long history in Sweden and that the Swedish government was the first to introduce paid parental leave provisions and, thus, leave rights for fathers. I have established in the first part of this chapter that the political goal of gender equality was an important driver behind the implementation of the parental leave legislation.

However, there are alternative explanations to the Swedish approach to parental leave. Duvander et al. (2005) argue that there is a need to distinguish between official and unofficial goals of implementing parental leave legislation in Sweden. They argue that while the official motive was one of increasing gender equality, unofficially, the driver behind the implementation of parental leave legislation was an economic need for increased female labour supply. This argument is supported by Karin Sandqvist (1992) who points out that strong economic growth in the 1950s caused a labour shortage in the 1960s and 1970s and many women moved into employment. Moreover, a long-standing goal of the Swedish government has been to achieve full employment, i.e. to have every person of working age in the paid workforce (Regeringskansliet, 2003, 2006). It is clear that labour market considerations were important in shaping the Swedish approach to work/life balance.

But even if the primary motive was for increased female labour force participation, this does not explain why Swedish governments decided to place an explicit focus on gender equality

at the same time. It does not explain the insight of Swedish policy makers that reforms were needed to enable a better reconciliation of paid and unpaid work for women workers. When faced with the work/life dilemmas of an increasing share of women, why did Swedish governments decide to activate gender egalitarian norms and beliefs and advocate a sharing of paid and unpaid labour between women and men as well as a sharing of the costs of raising children between families, employers and the state?

Sandqvist (1992) offers the following explanation for these policy decisions: when faced with the dilemma of how to combine employment and their traditional responsibilities in the family, Swedish women put their issues on the public agenda and the political solution was one that set Sweden on a course for a more gender egalitarian sharing of care and paid work. Sandqvist states (1992, p. 81):

> If women were to work outside the home just as men do, who then would do the family work? And their answer was – fathers, just like mothers. In addition, good childcare services must be made available outside the home. In keeping with its overriding concern with equality, the dominant Social Democratic Party accepted this solution and incorporated these ideals into its political program.

Sandqvist explains further that the concept of social justice had been a prime concern of Swedish politics because of Marxist ideas that were transported by the Social Democratic party which governed Sweden for most of the 20th century. The party viewed the participation in paid employment as essential to women's achievement of equality and emancipation. Thus, the solution to the work/life conflicts of Swedish women was sought in a re-distribution of paid and unpaid work between women, men and the state reflecting its social-democratic welfare state philosophy. Sandqvist (1992) argues that because of strong Marxist convictions an outsourcing of housework and child rearing to less privileged women, which occurred in the US at the same time as Sweden implemented its parental leave legislation (Hertz cited in Sandqvist, 1992), was ideologically and economically impossible in Sweden.

The Swedish Government developed a political agenda of increasing female labour force participation while simultaneously facilitating gender equality which reflected the Lifeworld assumption of the earner/carer citizen ideal as well as its social-democratic welfare state philosophy. It implemented three major reforms, starting in the mid 1950s (SCB, 2004; Forsakringskassan, 2005): paid parental leave, public sponsored universal child care and

individual taxation. As will be seen in the following section, the take-up data for parental leave suggests that these three reforms have created a division of labour which is less dependent on gender as the universal mechanism to assigning tasks to individuals.

Take-up of parental leave in Sweden: Accessing a variety of work/life options

The take-up data indicate that parents and fathers in particulars welcome the flexibility built into the Swedish parental leave legislation which increases the work/life options for parents. While most parental cash benefit days were taken within the first year of the child's life (between an average of 244 and 252 days over the past five years), a large share of fathers chose to access their benefits when their child was between 13 and 24 months old (Forsakringskassan, 2006b, 2007). More specifically, for children born in 2004, mothers took the overwhelming share of days (92 per cent on average) within the first year of the child's life which means that fathers took only 8 per cent of all leave days taken by parents within the first 12 months. However, fathers' share of leave taking increased significantly in the second and third year of the child's life when, on average, they took 30 per cent and 44 per cent of cash benefit days respectively. This shows that while mothers are the primary carer for very young children, Swedish women and men share active care giving relatively equally at later stages in the child's life.

Moreover, many parents retained some of their leave days for when their child was older and parents claimed an average of around 25 days per year when their children were between three and seven years old, and slightly more days (just over 30 days) in the last year the benefit was available to them. Thus, the majority of days is taken within the first year but the flexibility of leave taking encourages fathers, in particular, to access their leave days at a later stage of their child's life.

Interestingly, while the legislation allows for great flexibility in accessing cash benefit days in different fractions, most parents took their cash benefit days in full-time. In 2006, 97 per cent of cash benefit days were claimed as days with full payment. Taking leave in fractions of one half or one quarter days was popular with only a few parents. This suggests that, while parents had the option to take leave in various fractions, virtually all parents preferred to take their leave days with the full 80 per cent wage replacement benefit or other benefit they

were entitled to and that the extension of the leave period, by accessing the cash benefits in lesser fraction, was not a common option for Swedish parents.

Employment patterns of mothers and fathers after child birth

I have demonstrated that the parental leave legislation is important in shaping parents' work/life arrangements immediately after the birth of their child and that it increases work/life options for parents by assigning specific responsibilities to employers. I aim to show that the initial pattern of leave taking influences parents' work/life arrangements beyond the parental leave period.

A survey conducted for the National Social Insurance Agency in 2003 (RFV, 2003) sheds more light on the decisions of Swedish parents to return to employment after parental leave. About one third of Swedish mothers (31 per cent) indicated that they returned to employment when their leave days finished. Three other important reasons were family finances (19 per cent), the woman's work situation or career opportunities (17 per cent) and the feeling that the child was ready for pre-school (14 per cent). Mothers' reasons were very similar to those given by fathers. Half of the mothers said they were satisfied with the length of leave whereas the other 50 per cent wished it had been longer. The responses by Swedish women appear to indicate the steering power of the parental leave legislation. Women took leave as long as they could and then returned to employment. Swedish women did not seem to question the need to return to employment after their leave days had finished to any significant extent.

Moreover, Sweden's high maternal employment rates suggest that only very few women stayed at home after their leave days were used up in order to be full-time homemakers. National statistics indicate that, Swedish mothers of children aged two and younger have employment rates between 66 and 86 per cent, depending on the number of children they have, (Statistics Sweden, 2006). This indicates that some Swedish mothers dropped out of the workforce in the first two years after child birth. It was mostly first time mothers (employment rate of 70 per cent) and women with three or more children (employment rate of 66 per cent) who dropped out of the workforce (Statistics Sweden, 2006). Economic activity rates increased again in the second year of the child's life to over 80 per cent, with

the exception of mothers with three children of more (75 per cent), which suggests that many of the women who temporarily drop out of the labour force return relatively quickly.

The OECD (2007b) also provides statistics on maternal employment rates which confirm that the majority of mothers remain employed. The overall employment rate of mothers with children aged fourteen and younger was 77.5 per cent in 2002. Employment rates were lowest for women with children under three (73 per cent) and highest for women with children between three and five years (82.5 per cent).

When parents return to employment after parental leave, more mothers than fathers adjust their employment conditions. During the first year of a child's life, between 18 and 40 per cent of mothers were in part-time employment, depending on the number of children they have (all figures Statistics Sweden, 2006). The high full-time rates of Swedish mothers during the first year after delivery can be explained by the fact that Swedish parents maintain their full-time status while they are on parental leave. As most women take a full year of leave, they preserve their full-time status during that period if they have previously worked in full-time hours. The part-time rates increased in the second year after birth to 43 to 50 per cent mainly because most mothers returned to active employment during that time after having taken parental leave. OECD (2007b) data indicates that 41 per cent of Swedish mothers with children less than six years of age were engaged in part-time employment in 2002. Only between 5 and 10 per cent of Swedish fathers were employed in part-time hours (Statistics Sweden, 2006) which suggests that it is mainly mothers who adjust their work/life arrangements to accommodate the increased care work. However, it has to be said that more than 50 per cent of Swedish mothers are employed full-time with the exception of mothers with three children who are below school age and that part-time work usually occurs in long part-time hours.

The OECD statistics confirm that the overall employment rates in Sweden are very similar for women and men. 71.8 per cent of women and 75 per cent of men were employed in 2004 which represents a gender employment gap of only 3.2 percentage points (OECD, 2006b). Moreover, Figure 4 illustrates that a polarisation of working hours does not occur to a large extent in Sweden.

Figure 4: Incidence of actual weekly hours of work among Swedish workers age 20-54 (2005)
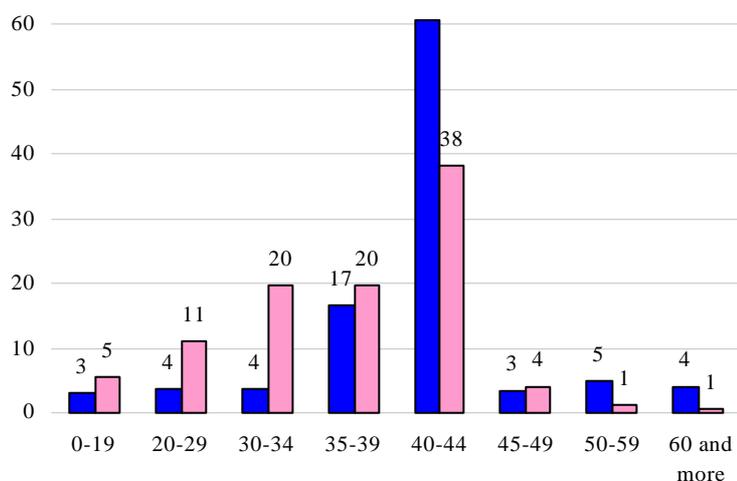
Women

Source: (OECD, 2007a)

As can be seen from Figure 4, the majority of Swedes are employed in traditional full-time hours in that 58 per cent of women and 77 per cent of men work between 35 and 45 hours per week. Only 5 per cent of women and 3 per cent of men work less than 19 hours. At the same time, only a minority of both women and men work in excess of 45 hours (6 per cent of women and 12 per cent of men). A large share of Swedish women is employed in long part-time hours, i.e. 20 per cent of women work between 30 and 34 hours per week. In combination, the figures on take-up of parental cash benefit days as well as on employment rates and hours of employment illustrate that the majority of Swedish women are earner/carer citizens and that most Swedish men, while remaining in breadwinner roles, slowly increase their engagement in care work.

Evaluations of the actual sharing of care work between Swedish mothers and fathers paint a complex picture of the interactions between the intentions of Steering Media actors and the actual behaviour changes of individuals. Ekberg et al. (2005) found that while the majority of Swedish fathers (70 per cent) participated actively in child care, the share of active fathers had not significantly increased with the introduction of the fathers' quota. However, the design of their study does not allow for an evaluation of the long-term effects of the legislative change as they evaluated the very first group of fathers who were eligible for the 'new' fathers' quota, i.e. the fathers of children born in January 1995, the month the reform first took effect. Furthermore, while Swedish fathers seemed to be more 'involved fathers'

than fathers in other parts of the world, this does not necessarily imply that Swedish fathers and mothers do equal shares of active care giving (Ahlberg, Roman, & Duncan, 2008). In summary, Swedish men participate in unpaid work more so than men in other countries but they are still not doing the same share of care work as Swedish women. Swedish women can combine paid employment and parenting but retain a larger share of unpaid work.

CHAPTER CONCLUSION

The analysis of the Swedish case study has shown that the parental leave legislation draws heavily on egalitarian Lifeworld norms and beliefs about the appropriate roles of women and men in employment and care. The Swedish government, as a Steering Media actor, promotes the ideal of the earner/carer citizen as the social norm through the design of their parental leave legislation. Traditional norms of the 'good mother' and 'ideal worker' are actively deconstructed. In combination with a social-democratic welfare state philosophy, the Swedish approach to balancing employment and care at the time of childbirth has resulted in a generous and flexible support system to parents. In this support system, employers, i.e. actors in the Systems, have an important role to play as a 'social partner', especially in funding the parental leave scheme and granting parents their preferred work/life arrangement.

Although the Swedish parental leave legislation is designed in a way that provides great flexibility to parents, there is a homogenous pattern of take-up with women taking most of the cash benefit days in a full-time fraction within the first 12 months after delivery. The majority of Swedish men take their 'daddy days' around the birth of the child but take a much lesser share of cash benefit days, mainly in the second year of the child's life. Thus, while the great flexibility of parents contained in the legislation potentially restricts the flexibility of employers, the take-up data suggests that the absence of parents is relatively predictable in practice, so that the requirement to accommodate the preferences of employed parents is unlikely to have a severe impact on workforce planning.

The more gender egalitarian ways of sharing parental leave and parental cash benefits days persist in the work/life arrangements of Swedish women and men after they return to employment. In Sweden, women and men have very similar employment rates and there is

not a strong polarisation of working hours along gendered lines. This implies that the life histories of women and men in Sweden are relatively similar and do not reflect strongly gendered life patterns.

The current Swedish parental leave legislation has many strengths and reinforces norms and structures which are beneficial to employees who want to combine paid and care work while at the same time facilitating a more gender egalitarian sharing of work. The legislation reinforces the need for every adult to be in the paid workforce regardless of sex and, therefore, the goal of full employment. This simultaneously reinforces the dual earner household as the social norm and discourages breadwinner/homemaker arrangements in which the female partner is dependent on a male breadwinner. Swedish parents do no longer default to the conventional breadwinner/homemaker model although some traditional gender patterns persist in the sharing of paid and unpaid work. However, women and men have been provided by the Swedish government with some space for crafting alternative arrangements that challenge stereotypical assumptions about the contributions and responsibilities of women and men to society and each other. Moreover, the current parental leave regime strengthens the belief that the costs of children have to be shared between all members of society and should not be carried by individuals alone.

CHAPTER EIGHT

A CROSS-COUNTRY COMPARISON OF PARENTAL LEAVE PROVISIONS AND TAKE-UP IN AUSTRALIA AND SWEDEN

In Chapters Six and Seven, I analysed the interrelationships between the Lifeworld, the Steering Media and the Systems in Australia and Sweden, using parental leave legislation as an example of a Steering Media tool. A number of themes have emerged from the analysis which highlight the main distinctions between the parental leave regimes in the two countries and the work/life options they create for parents. The first two themes are discussed under the headings of 'Gender ideals' and 'Employer responsibilities'. Each of the two themes is comprised of several elements which are summarised in Table 10.

Table 10: Cross-country comparison – Australia and Sweden

Themes	Elements	Australia	Sweden
Gendered ideals	**1. Ideal**	Mothers as carers Fathers as breadwinners	Mothers and fathers as earner/carer citizens
	2. Support for ideal	Leave is unpaid; No employment allowed for parent on parental leave; Obligatory maternity leave period of six weeks for those women who decide to access their statutory parental leave benefits; Optional paternity leave period	Leave is paid; Wage replacement benefits tied to employment: qualifying period of 240 days in employment; Equal shares of leave and cash benefit days for both women and men; Mother's and father's quotas; 10 'daddy days'; Can be taken in various fractions, including reduction of working hours by up to 25 per cent
Employer responsibility	**3. Level of entitlement**	Statutory workplace entitlement (Workplace Relations Act 1996; WorkChoices Amendment 2006)	Universal citizenship entitlement (Parental Leave Act 1995; Social Insurance Act 1962)
	4. Accessing leave	Employers have to grant leave but: eligibility limited to those employees with 12+ months of consecutive service; relatively short leave period; rigid access to leave: has to be accessed full-time, in a continuous period of up to 52 weeks; all other leave taken is deducted from 52 weeks; negotiate work/life arrangements on a one-on-one basis	Employers have to grant leave and the employment/care arrangement preferred by parent: no qualifying period for leave; quotas; extended leave period; highly flexible access of cash benefits and leave; leave/benefits can be taken until child turns 8
	5. Funding of parental leave benefits	Paid parental leave can be negotiated	Employers fund parental cash benefit scheme collectively by compulsory levy to Social Insurance

As a result of the gendered ideals which underpin the parental leave legislation and the responsibility it ascribes to employers, parents in Australia and Sweden are steered towards country-specific 'Gendered trajectories'. The discussion of this third theme will conclude the chapter.

GENDERED IDEALS

Under the heading of 'Gendered ideals', I will focus on elements 1 and 2, i.e. the Lifeworld ideals which are activated by the Steering Media actors to define preferred behaviours of mothers and fathers in both countries and which are supported by the design of the legislation. I argued earlier that a more comprehensive explanation of the take-up of work/life balance policies needed to systematically theorise gender as a social structure. I presented literature which suggests that in order to achieve work/life balance, the norms in workplaces and families need to change. In this section, I compare the extent to which the parental leave legislation in Australia and Sweden challenges the stereotypical gendered assumptions and norms which have traditionally underpinned the spheres of employment and family life. I will show that these two different gendered ideals produce very different work/life options for parents in both countries.

As was demonstrated in my critical review of the literature, work/life balance issues have a legacy of being regarded as 'women and children's issues'. Despite the adoption of a supposedly gender neutral terminology, work/life balance policies maintain a focus on women and women's responsibility for care work (Smithson & Stokoe, 2005). Furthermore, there is a widespread perception in the workplace and among researchers that work/life policies are largely designed for women with young children (Barham et al., 2001; Blair-Loy & Wharton, 2002; Roberts, 2004). My analysis uncovered that, in Australia, it is not only a perception in that mothers are explicitly and implicitly established as the key target group of such policies. Conversely, the Swedish government, by means of its parental leave legislation, has made a conscious attempt to develop an approach to work/life balance which moves away from an exclusive focus on mothers.

My analysis showed that what are considered ideal gender roles by policy makers in Australia and Sweden represent polar opposites. The parental leave legislation in Australia promotes traditional breadwinner/homemaker arrangements, i.e. traditional Lifeworld elements, with 'good mothers' who are full-time carers to their children in the home and fathers who remain in permanent full-time employment as 'ideal workers' and are conceptualised as having limited involvement in the active care for their children. In contrast, the Swedish legislation advocates the ideal of the earner/carer citizen as the dominant Lifeworld norm, regardless of sex. Both women and men are regarded as capable of, and responsible for, active care giving *and* earning a living. These ideal gender roles form the basis of policy design and influence the take-up of the policy.

My comparison of the parental leave legislation and its outcomes for Australian and Swedish women and men challenges the idea of gender neutrality of work/life balance policies because it shows that the design and the take-up of the policies are gendered. Some work/life researchers have already suggested that work/life balance policies which are based on traditional and stereotypical gender roles reinforce the gendered division of labour, and thus gender inequality, instead of challenging it (S. Lewis, 2001; Roberts, 2004; Connell, 2005). My analysis of the Australian and Swedish parental leave legislation adds to this argument in that I provided evidence for a relationship between the design of work/life policies and their take-up which is more or less gendered, depending on the design of the legislation.

My analysis uncovered that the Lifeworld ideals in both Australia and Sweden are supported by a variety of characteristics in the design of the parental leave legislation which acts as a Steering Media tool. I have identified three design elements as the most important ones in supporting the gender ideals which have an important influence on the work/life options available to parents: the level of financial support to parents on leave, the extent to which leave can and has to be shared between mothers and fathers, and the degree to which employment and care work are integrated or being kept separate from each other. I will discuss the three elements in turn.

The differences in gendered ideals which underpin the legislation are reflected in the level of financial support for parents on leave. In Sweden, the ideal of the earner/carer citizen is supported in that most Swedish mothers and father who take leave have access to wage

replacement benefits. This means that Swedish parents can retain economic independence while on leave and, therefore, that they can keep up an earner/carer status even while dedicating their time to the care of a newborn child. Moreover, Swedish parents have a greater choice in terms of the flexibility of leave arrangements. They can return to employment relatively quickly or stay at home to care for their young children because they are guaranteed an income during the leave. Importantly, the high level of wage replacement benefits shows that care work is financially rewarded in Sweden. This can be seen as an important step in challenging the hierarchy between the public and the private spheres in that not only the engagement in the public sphere of employment attracts an income but also the engagement in the private sphere of reproductive work.

In contrast, the Australian unpaid statutory parental leave provisions offer only limited work/life options to parents. Australian parents, who take leave, need to rely on a breadwinning partner to support them financially while on leave or find an alternative source of income. The unpaid nature of the parental leave provisions strongly supports the ideal of the dependent female homemaker and the male provider. Care work is not financially rewarded and the hierarchy and division between public and private spheres is maintained by the Australian legislation. Furthermore, it has been demonstrated already that the Maternity Payment that the Australian government introduced instead of a national paid maternity leave scheme is not a wage replacement benefit (Baird, 2006; HREOC, 2007) and, in fact, reinforces the traditional gender ideology espoused by Australian Steering Media actors in that it is focused solely on the mother as the primary carer of a child.

Another important element of legislative design which reinforces the different gender ideals is the way in which parental leave needs to be shared between parents. Swedish parents have separate and equal entitlements to parental leave and parental cash benefits. In Australia, unlike Sweden, mothers and fathers do not have separate entitlements to parental leave provisions but need to share the leave period. Furthermore, there is a legislative requirement that Australian mothers who access parental leave have to take at least six weeks as maternity leave whereas mothers in Sweden must access only two weeks of their entitlement. Thus, there is a longer compulsory maternal leave period in Australia than in Sweden. This comparison illustrates that the parental leave legislation conceptualises Australian mothers strongly as the 'natural carers' of children who would take most, if not all, of the leave whereas there is no such expectation in Sweden.

The role of fathers is conceptualised very differently in the two countries. Australian policy makers do not ascribe to men a role in active care giving and, accordingly, do not grant dedicated leave rights to fathers beyond the option of taking one week unpaid paternity leave at the time of birth. But even this week is transferable to the mother. If their female partner wants to take all of the leave, Australian men have no entitlement in their own right. Again, the Swedish legislation takes a contrasting approach and places a strong focus on establishing both women and men as carers and workers by assigning dedicated, non-transferable shares of leave to both parents (mother's and father's quota) and offering paid paternity leave ('daddy days'). Thus, Swedish men have an entitlement to paid leave in their role as fathers and this supports the ideal of the earner/carer citizen for both women and men. The lack of such entitlements for Australian fathers stresses their role as breadwinners. Thus, the way parental leave is to be shared is guided by, and reinforces, the gender ideals outlined previously in both countries.

The third design element of the legislation which supports ideal gender roles is that the parental leave legislation can be seen to define the interrelationship between the public sphere of employment and the private sphere of care work. Australian parents on leave are not allowed to engage in any employment while on leave and have to access their parental leave entitlement full-time. In contrast, Swedish parents can access the parental cash benefits in various fractions, ranging from one eighth of a day to full-time. In addition, they are allowed to engage in part-time employment while using their benefits in a less than full-time fraction. Swedish parents also have a right to reduced working hours (of up to 25 per cent of their previous working hours) upon their return to paid work. Therefore, they are able to stretch out their paid leave period beyond the 480 days while returning to employment in reduced hours.

The Swedish legislation is designed to allow for simultaneous engagement in paid and care work for both parents which supports the ideal of the earner/carer citizen and, thus, the achievement of work/life balance and gender equality. Work/life balance becomes a feasible option for Swedish parents who are re-negotiating work/life arrangements around the time of child birth whereas in Australia, employment and active care giving appear to be mutually exclusive activities which are assigned to male ideal workers and full-time, stay-at-home mothers respectively. These differences in conceptualising paid and care work as separate

spheres in Australia but as integrated spheres in Sweden are decisive in creating different work/life options for parents in the two countries and for challenging, or reinforcing, the public/private divide.

My comparative analysis of Australia and Sweden suggests that parental leave legislation as a Steering Media tool can increase or reduce the work/life options available to parents by defining the Lifeworld norms for appropriate behaviours of mothers and fathers. Brandth and Kvande (2001) proposed, for the Norwegian context, that the welfare state, via its parental leave legislation, acts as a normative third party. My cross-country comparison provides a powerful illustration of their argument. Gender egalitarian roles and the sharing of paid and unpaid work between mothers and fathers are encouraged and facilitated by the Swedish parental leave legislation but not the Australian one which reflects and reinforces the gendered archetypes of the 'good mother' and the 'ideal worker'.

By prescribing a traditional set of gender norms, the Australian government, while purporting to promote flexibility and work/life balance, are in fact Steering Media actors which reinforce the very divide between the public and the private sphere, between paid and care work, which exacerbates rather than reduces the structural forces that cause work/life conflicts in the first place. In contrast, by establishing the norm of the earner/carer citizen, Swedish governments have used their power as a Steering Media and normative third party to implement a parental leave regime which aims to support a more gender egalitarian sharing of paid and care work and to reduce barriers to work/life balance and gender equality. The ideal of the earner/carer citizen in the Swedish legislation has the potential to challenge stereotypical gender roles and to provide a new norm for parents which challenges the public/private divide.

This finding is important because it suggests that the gender roles which underpin work/life policies, especially on a government level, need to be integral to the analysis of work/life balance in order to understand the level of take-up of work/life balance policies. In developing a conceptual framework which allows for an integrated analysis and has a conscious 'gender lens' I have provided an analytical tool which addresses this important limitation of the current work/life balance research agenda.

THE ROLE OF EMPLOYERS

Similar to the ideal gender roles in the Lifeworld, which are activated by Steering Media actors and which define the work/life options available to parents, the design of the legislation also outlines the expectations of Steering Media actors towards employers, i.e. actors in the Systems, and prescribes their role and responsibilities in facilitating work/life balance for parents. My analysis adds to conventional explanations of the low take-up of work/life balance policies because it illustrates that before parental leave policies come to play at an organisational level, they have acquired a gendered normative basis and the terms of employer engagement in work/life balance initiatives have been pre-defined by Steering Media actors via legislation. Thus, current explanations of the low take-up of work/life policies, which usually focus only on the workplace level, do not account for all of the possible influences on the decisions of employed carers to use work/life offers.

I demonstrated in my critical review of the work/life balance literature that the current focus on the organisational level is inherently limited. For example, there is no evidence of a solid business case for work/life balance policies (Zacharias, 2006b) and work/life balance advocates need to rely on the goodwill of employers to implement policies supportive of work/life balance (Friedman & Johnson, 1997). Moreover, Rapoport et al. (1996; 2002) found that it was difficult to create sufficient 'pull' among corporate leaders to generate a momentum for systemic change in workplaces. However, my analysis of the Swedish case study suggests that legislation can create the 'pull' for employer involvement by assigning them an explicit role and responsibility for supporting parents in their attempt to achieve better work/life balance.

I demonstrated that the Swedish government recognises structural barriers to work/life balance, in particular the role of gender in creating these barriers, and tries to address those explicitly with its policy interventions within a collectivist framework. Moreover, the Swedish government appears to be prepared to facilitate work/life balance for parents by assigning responsibilities to employers and holding them accountable for supporting employed carers. In contrast, the Australian government seems to be reluctant to impose legislative requirements on employers and does not appear to recognise the structural issues which create work/life conflict. Instead, it has developed an approach which attempts to deal with work/life conflicts within a business case rationale. The Australian Steering Media

actors perceive work/life issues as individual concerns which need to be solved in workplace negotiations between employers and employees, but my analysis suggests that this approach may be fundamentally flawed.

These different approaches in Australia and Sweden create very different outcomes for employers and parents in both countries and determine the options available to parents with regard to facilitating and achieving work/life balance. While both the Australian and the Swedish governments conceptualise employers as having an important part to play in assisting parents in their attempts to achieve more work/life balance, the degree to which employers are held responsible for offering supportive workplace conditions differs dramatically in the two countries. The three key elements which characterise the interrelationships between the Steering Media and the Systems, distinguish the approaches of the Australian and Swedish governments and define the responsibility of employers to provide supportive workplace conditions are: the basis of entitlement to parental leave, the ways in which leave can be accessed and the level of employer funding of parental benefits during leave (see Table 10). I will discuss the three elements in turn.

The comparison between Australia and Sweden reveals that it is important to distinguish between parental leave benefits which are provided as workplace entitlements and those which are granted to parents as universal, or citizenship, entitlements because the level of entitlement influences the number of parents who are eligible for this work/life policy. In Sweden, all parents have access to parental leave and cash benefit days and the vast majority of Swedish parents can draw their parental cash benefit days as a wage replacement benefit. In contrast, unpaid parental leave in Australia is a workplace right which needs to be 'earned' by 12 months of consecutive employment with their company. Access to paid parental leave needs to be negotiated by all Australian employees within the industrial relations framework either individually or collectively, with the exception of female public servants who have a legislated right to paid maternity leave.

As a result of legislation design, there are vastly different work/life options available to Australian and Swedish parents who are negotiating work/life arrangements to accommodate the care needs of a newborn child. The universal entitlements deliver similar work/life options to all Swedish parents whereas the work/life options of Australian parents depend on their employment status and bargaining power. Consequently, the Australian

statutory parental leave legislation offers only limited work/life options to parents and, especially, the opportunities of parents with weak labour market status and power to achieve work/life balance may be severely restricted.

The take-up data presented in the case study chapters suggests that there are country-specific patterns of take-up which mirror the different work/life options created by the legislation. I showed that the vast majority of Swedish parents accessed parental cash benefits days. In contrast, 20 per cent of Australian parents were unable to use parental leave at all because they were not eligible for the statutory provisions. This shows that the design of the legislation immediately impacts on take-up levels.

In addition to the different levels of entitlement, parents in Australia and Sweden face different work/life options in terms of the flexibility of accessing the provisions. Swedish parents are given great flexibility in using their leave entitlements and parental cash benefits. Moreover, Swedish employers are required by law not only to grant parental leave but to accommodate the specific work/life arrangement requested by the parent, unless the employer can demonstrate that this substantially disturbs their business operations. This creates various work/life options for Swedish parents. In contrast, the only legislated requirement for Australian private sector employers is to grant up to 52 weeks of unpaid parental leave to their employees and guarantee employment upon return. In comparison to their Swedish counterparts, Australian parents face very limited work/life options because they do not have a lot of flexibility in accessing their leave entitlements and forego unused leave entitlements once they return to paid work.

The third, and possibly most important, difference as to how the Steering Media actors define the responsibility of employers to support parents is in the extent to which employers have to fund parental benefit. In Sweden, the role and responsibility of employers as a 'social partner' is institutionalised in the parental leave legislation. While the Swedish government commits employers to funding the parental cash benefit scheme collectively, there is no such requirement on employers in Australia. Indeed, the government and other Steering Media actors in Australia, such as the Committee of the Parliament Inquiry into Balancing work and family, explicitly reject calls for increased regulation and the establishment of an employer-funded national paid maternity leave scheme. Instead, the Australian parental leave legislation, or more specifically the WorkChoices Amendment (2006), includes an

expectation that employers and employees negotiate on a one-on-one basis the work/life arrangements which best suit both parties. Such negotiation can, but does not need to, include provisions for paid parental leave. The balance of power in Australia is clearly skewed towards employers which limits the ability of parents to access the work/life options they may need or prefer.

Moreover, most Swedish parents drew parental cash benefits for an extended period of time and there is a very homogenous pattern of leave taking in Sweden in that most mothers take a larger share of leave in the first year of the child's life and fathers usually take most of their leave days in the second year. Australian parents, on the contrary, display a variety of leave taking patterns. The overall take-up of statutory parental leave provisions in Australia is relatively low with just over half of the mothers and a very small number of fathers accessing their entitlements. However, parents combine the unpaid leave period with various forms of paid leave, including paid maternity and paternity leave. Those parents who do have access to paid leave on average take longer leave periods than those without. About one quarter of women do not take any leave but drop out of the workforce at the time of birth. Thus, there are clearly country-specific patterns of take-up which reflect the design of the parental leave legislation.

Interestingly, there is data which suggests that Australian men are inclined to take short, paid leave periods around the time of child birth in much the same way as Swedish men do. The great majority of Australian fathers took some form of leave in connection with the birth of a child with an average duration of 14 days. However, only a minority of Australian men had access to paid paternity leave so that the most common leave option accessed by fathers was paid 'other' leave, such as annual leave, and thus, leave that was not dedicated leave for care reasons. The point to be made here is that Australian men seem to express the same desire to be with their families at the time of child birth as Swedish men do but that the Australian parental leave legislation does not support fathers' desire to be involved with their young children whereas the Swedish legislation does. Australian fathers have to use other forms of paid leave to be able to spend time with their families, which reinforces their role as breadwinners. Swedish fathers, on the other hand, have a dedicated right to paid leave in their role as fathers which reinforces the ideal of the earner/carer citizen.

The design of the statutory parental leave benefits in Australia creates a set of work/life options in which parental leave is virtually inaccessible for Australian men because they have to remain the breadwinners of their families while their partners are on unpaid parental leave, often having to compensate for the lost income of their female partner. Therefore, Australian fathers cannot afford financially to take unpaid leave for care reasons. The take-up data shows that clearly unpaid parental leave is not a workable option for the majority of fathers. At the same time, the work/life option most strongly advocated to Australian women by the parental leave legislation is to become full-time carers of their children and dependent on their partners. The options of mothers increase if they are among the 37 per cent who have access to employer-sponsored provisions of paid maternity leave or are able to organised alternative care arrangements for their very young children. However, affordable, good quality child care for babies is not widely available in Australia (HREOC, 2002b, 2005). I propose that the unpaid nature of parental leave is the most powerful element of the Australian legislation in cementing women's dependency on a male breadwinner and in reinforcing the public/private divide along gendered lines.

In addition to the analysis of take-up data, I presented statistics on the return to work decisions of Australian mothers and Swedish parents. In both countries, the take-up of work/life policies is significantly influenced by the design of the policy and not only determined by the organisational context in which it is implemented as the work/life balance literature would suggest. In Australia, job-related reasons for a return to work were clearly secondary to Australian mothers. Only a small minority of mothers indicated that they returned to work because they were worried about their job, although the figures were slightly higher for those mothers who returned to employment very quickly. In contrast, job-related concerns were more prevalent for Swedish women than for Australian women which might reflect the stronger attachment of Swedish women to employment. However, in both countries job-related reasons were not the key determinants in decisions about the take-up of work/life policies as the work/life literature suggests.

Instead, financial reasons were the most important determinant of the return to paid employment for Australian mothers. Swedish parents, on the other hand, indicated that the number of parental cash benefit days determined the length of the total leave period. Again, the design of the legislation is crucial in explaining this phenomenon. Swedish parents do not suffer a severe drop in income in the same way that Australian parents do because they

receive parental cash benefits while on leave. However, once the leave days are finished, most Swedish parents return to paid employment. This shows that most families in Australia and Sweden cannot afford to have one partner permanently out of the workforce. Parents who have access to paid parental leave can afford to stay out of the workforce for longer periods of time than parents without such benefits.

This implies two important points: firstly, the return to employment is not a matter of 'free choice' but closely related to family finances. Secondly, in a situation where the state or employers contribute to family income, via paid parental benefits, parents are able to take (more) leave to care for a young child. Both points may seem obvious, yet they are often overlooked in the discussion of the low take-up of work/life balance provisions which favour organisational explanations over others. The design of the parental leave legislation and the ways in which it distributes the costs of child rearing between individual parents, employers and the state seems to be of paramount importance.

I propose that the extent to which parental leave provisions are taken up by parents does not only depend on the work/life options which are created by the parental leave legislation but also on the costs which are associated with the use of those options. Again, the approaches by the Australian and Swedish governments to sharing the costs of taking parental leave between social actors represent polar opposites. The Australian government relies firmly on the business case argument to deliver parental leave provisions to parents. This approach is consistent with a liberal welfare state ideology and shifts the costs of reconciling employment and care work from the state/employers to the individual family and, due to its traditional gender ideology, to Australian mothers.

In contrast to the Australian approach, the Swedish legislation does not rely on a business case argument to justify its parental leave regime. Instead, parental leave is designed so that the costs of raising children are shared between parents, employers and the state. This seems to reflect not only the ideal of the earner/carer citizen but also a social democratic welfare state philosophy in which raising children is a collective task which needs to be shared by all social actors. Thus, while the Swedish legislation creates flexibility for employees and ensures employer support via the parental leave legislation, in Australia, it is largely individual mothers who carry the costs of leave taking.

The Australian government relies on the workplace relations system to deliver a basic support policy which is provided as a citizenship entitlement in Sweden. This implies that, instead of using their power to hold employers accountable for creating workplace conditions which are more conducive of work/life balance, the Australian Steering Media actors relinquish this power to employers and need to rely on their goodwill to do 'the right thing' for their business and their employees by implementing work/life balance policies. However, in the current legislative framework employers can simply ignore calls to implement work/life balance policies, including paid parental leave. The Australian Steering Media actors seem to have created a regulatory framework which conceptualises the public sphere of employment and the demands exerted by employers over their staff as categorically more important than the private sphere of care work and the demands by employed carers to be granted time off employment for care-related reasons. This perceived priority of the public sphere, which is reflected in the design of the parental leave legislation, reinforces the hierarchical public/private divide and maintains the idea of employment and care work as separate and conflicting life spheres.

I argue that such an employer-centred approach cannot create an equitable solution to work/life conflicts which benefit all employed carers. The solutions resulting from an approach which relies on the industrial relations system and business case considerations for delivering a central social benefit, such as paid parental leave, do not address the core of work/life issues, i.e. the structural barriers to combining employment and care work, and provide inadequate support to affected individuals.

My analysis showed that both the Australian government and the dominant literature on work/life balance focus on the organisational level which accepts the business case rationale as the bedrock assumption of all policy intervention. However, such a mono-dimensional view is potentially detrimental to achieving better work/life balance because it can be misused by policy makers and employers for their own purposes as Lewis (2001) demonstrated with the example of the British 'Welfare to Work' reforms. She showed that the 'flexibility' which was created by the legislation was employer flexibility and that this exacerbated work/life conflicts rather than reduced them.

Similar to Lewis in the UK, I showed that the 'flexibility' which is created by the Australian parental leave legislation largely benefits employers who can decide to offer work/life

policies to employees on a case-by-case basis. In this situation, paid parental leave can be provided entirely at the discretion of individual employers and effectively become a management tool within a corporate incentives structure. Instead of being a universal entitlement to women and men in their role as carers, work/life benefits are 'perks' which need to be justified in economic terms by management and employees. It is in this context that the influence of organisational culture on the take-up of work/life policies becomes paramount.

I propose that, in the Australian context, the access to and take-up of work/life balance policies becomes a cost/benefit consideration on the part of the individual parent and their employer. Connell (2005, p.380) argued that "within market ideology, gender equity cannot exist as a universal ethical obligation" but that gender equity needs to be regarded as one chosen goal which is subject to a cost-benefit calculation. I contend that this observation also holds for the decision to offer, or take up, work/life balance policies.

The provision of workplace conditions which are supportive of greater work/life balance is not a universal obligation for Australian employers and can be adopted by a company as a matter of strategic 'choice' because it may perceive a business case for implementing work/life balance policies. At the same time, employers may decide not to offer work/life balance policies, including paid parental leave benefits, because the cost of the policy would outweigh the benefits to the company in terms of retention and attraction of staff, Public Relations gains and improved morale. The take-up data on paid parental leave suggests that employers are offering benefits very selectively as paid leave schemes are expensive.

Similarly, the decision to take up work/life policies represents a cost/benefit consideration for employed carers. From the work/life balance literature it is known that employees may not use the employer-sponsored benefits because the perceived, or actual, costs of doing so, such as the resentment of colleagues, freezing of salaries and career opportunities, may appear to be too high (Blair-Loy & Wharton, 2002; McDonald et al., 2005). Blair-Loy and Wharton (2002) showed that powerful supervisors can provide a buffer against unsupportive corporate cultures which allowed some employees to use work/life policies and that take-up was lower for employees without such protection.

I argue that the design of statutory unpaid leave as a minimum workplace entitlement, coupled with the expectation to bargain for additional benefits, leaves little choice to employed carers but to directly negotiate with their employers and to face individual cost/benefit considerations. In this context, individual organisational cultures become critically important because they influence the ability of parents to negotiate access to work/life balance policies and impact on the costs and benefits associated with the take-up of policies. The Australian government does not protect employed carers by providing a universal right to paid time off employment for care reasons. Such a universal entitlement, however, would become a lever for employed carers in the negotiation process as it does in Sweden and Norway.

Indeed, organisational cultures do not have the same impact on take-up of policies in Sweden. Haas et al. (2002) found in their study of Swedish fathers in different organisations that organisational culture did not have a significant influence on the take-up of parental leave provisions. Likewise, Brandth and Kvande (2001) have demonstrated for the Norwegian context that the normative expectations defined by the Norwegian state via its parental leave legislation became a lever for parents' ability to request time off from employment without suffering negative career consequences. They quote a typical sentiment expressed by the fathers they interviewed: "You cannot do much about the paternity quotas because the state has decided that fathers have an obligation to be home!" (Brandth & Kvande, 2001, p.263). I have shown that the Swedish state consciously gets involved in work/life negotiations between mothers and fathers as well as between parents and employers as a normative third party. Thus, it provides a 'buffer' for employed carers, male and female, against employer demands via its parental leave legislation because it is a universal entitlement and is based on gender egalitarian ideals. In Sweden, using parental leave is a majority practice, normatively accepted, politically supported and employers need to contribute to the costs of leave taking in their role as 'social partners'. The legislation has created the 'pull' for all employers to support parents in their pursuit of more work/life balance.

It is here that the limitations of the current work/life literature which is largely limited to an organisation focus in a liberal welfare state context become most obvious. My cross-country comparison illustrates that while the influence of organisational culture has a strong influence on the take-up of work/life balance policies in Australia, this situation is caused by

the lack of universal entitlements to employed carers which are provided by governments in other countries, as exemplified by Sweden. In countries where employed carers can fall back on universal legislation, normatively and financially, the impact of (unsupportive) organisational cultures on the take-up of work/life balance policies is drastically reduced.

My comparative analysis suggests that it is the specific interplay between Lifeworld, Steering Media and Systems which determine the available work/life options and the costs of taking up those options. In the case of Australia, the interplay between traditional gender roles, Steering Media intervention which prioritises employer needs and employers that offer work/life balance policies based on business case considerations, creates a situation in which Australian mothers have to carry the main costs of workplace flexibility and are held accountable for their work/life 'choices' at an individual level. In Sweden, the interaction of gender egalitarian norms, Steering Media intervention which guarantees universal entitlements to parents and employers that are held accountable for supporting employed carers in their pursuit of work/life balance, interact to create a situation where the costs of policy take-up are shared by mothers, fathers, employers and the state and in which policy use is facilitated.

This implies that work/life conflicts cannot be solved at an organisational level because of the limitations imposed by the business case rationale. In a social and political context in which employer interests are conceptualised as inherently superior to employee demands and in which the state categorically rejects responsibility for providing universal entitlements, equitable solutions to work/life conflicts cannot be achieved. In such a context, employees need to rely on their labour market power, the generosity of their employers and the support of their colleagues and immediate supervisors to obtain work/life options which can be taken for granted by parents in a social and political context which delivers universal benefits. My comparative analysis suggests that it is necessary to broaden the work/life agenda to incorporate the role of government and the impact of social norms and beliefs in discussing the problem of work/life balance and in designing solutions to achieve it.

GENDERED TRAJECTORIES

The interplay between Lifeworld, Steering Media and Systems has an impact on parental behaviour. The gendered ideals which underpin the parental leave legislation steer parents in Australia and Sweden towards country and gender-specific trajectories. Feminist authors who write in the constructionist paradigm have argued that gendered ideals and gendered social systems are reproduced by everyday interactions of women and men and that 'doing gender' according to traditional rules is vital to reproduce the gender status quo (Connell, 1987; West & Zimmerman, 1987). Bem (1993) identified the different life histories, which are the social outcome of 'doing gender', as 'gender polarisation' which manifested itself in different life trajectories for women and men. Thus, parental leave legislation becomes an important element in maintaining the gendered status quo or in challenging it.

I showed in my analysis that, in combination, the gendered ideal which underpins the legislation and the extent to which the legislation holds employers accountable for supporting employed carers create very different work/life options for parents. Moreover, in my discussion of Australia and Sweden, I presented employment data for both countries which showed that there are large differences in the employment patterns of Australian women and men whereas these differences were not so stark for Swedish women and men. I will present a comparison of the key indicators in this section to illustrate that the life histories for women and men are vastly different in Australia and Sweden and argue that the parental leave regime has an important impact on shaping those gendered trajectories. I maintain that work/life conflicts are not the individual concern of some parents, but are social issues with structural causes that require collective solutions. I propose that Steering Media intervention, in the form of parental leave legislation, can become part of the solution as well as exacerbate the conflicts.

In my critical review of the work/life balance literature, I pointed out that work/life conflicts are largely characterised as issues of individuals which need to be addressed at an organisational level by policy interventions and supportive managers (e.g. Gerson, 2004). However, I demonstrated that both Gambles et al. (2006) and Rapoport et al. (2002) had criticised the focus on the individual because it does not address the structural issues which underlie work/life conflicts, such as the design of workplaces and the availability of good quality, affordable child care. Moreover, Charlesworth (2005) argued that the focus on the

individual ignored the gendered structures which cause work/life conflicts. In addition, the steering effect of parental leave legislation on the behaviour of individuals has been well documented by public policy analysts (e.g. Brandth & Kvande, 2001; Bird, 2004; Ekberg et al., 2005) and their research contradicts the notion of individual choice as an explanation for take-up, as suggested by Hakim's (2004a; 2004b) preference theory, which is prevalent in the literature on work/life balance which focuses on the organisational level.

My analysis of the parental leave provisions in Australia and Sweden adds to the argument that work/life arrangements are influenced by structural forces, such as the design of the parental leave legislation, and do not solely come about as a matter of personal choice and supportive organisational cultures. Moreover, I demonstrated that, far from being an individualised problem, all parents are faced with the decision of how to re-negotiate their work/life arrangements at the time of child birth and the take-up data showed that there were strong country-specific patterns of work/life options most commonly pursued by parents in Australia and Sweden.

The take-up rates are country and gender-specific because, in both countries, it is women who take up most parental leave both paid and unpaid/low paid. Yet, the difference between the two countries is that, in Australia, caring for young children is clearly the realm of women whereas in Sweden there is not such a clear-cut gender divide. This illustrates that parental leave acts as a Steering Media tool to reproduce the gendered status quo in Australia while it is used in Sweden to challenge stereotypical gender assumptions. I showed that from the second year onwards, on average, Swedish fathers take between one third and almost half of all leave days. This suggests that while active care is largely provided by women in the first 12 months after delivery, the care work is much more equally shared between Swedish mothers and fathers after the initial intense care period. This also implies that Swedish women usually do not drop out of employment and return to the active workforce relatively quickly.

My analysis revealed that, in contrast, the take-up of parental leave in Australia is clearly gendered in that women take virtually all of the leave following child birth both unpaid and paid. Men usually continue in a breadwinner role and do not take extended periods of parental leave although the majority of Australian fathers take a brief and paid period of leave immediately after child birth. A significant number of women drop out of the

workforce around the time of delivery and the majority of mothers who do return to employment dramatically adjust their working conditions, in particular the number of hours they work.

The parental leave legislation not only assigns the responsibility for care work but also shapes the engagement of parents in paid work. In the Australian case, the parental leave provisions act to create a peripheral workforce, engaged in part-time, casual or self-employment, which is usually not eligible for work/life policies once they return to employment. Lewis (2001) argued that work/life policies were marginalised policies which had limited impact on the values and assumptions underpinning contemporary workplaces. My analysis showed that, in Australia, not only do work/life policies in their current form represent policies on the fringe of business operations; they also actively marginalise the people who use them. I illustrated in the previous section that the cost of policy take-up appears to rest with the individual employee in a policy regime which has institutionalised employer flexibility at the cost of employed carers.

I argued earlier that the wage replacement benefits act as an incentive for Swedish parents to be employed prior to child birth and return to employment after an initial period of full-time care. In contrast, the Australian parental leave legislation does not, to the same extent, encourage parents to be employed prior to having a child mainly because it is unpaid. The only real benefit Australian parents gain from accessing their leave entitlements is a job guarantee upon return to employment. Alternatively, they just drop out of the labour market and find new employment once they return.

I outlined in the case study chapters that Swedish women and men had very similar employment rates whereas they were greatly different for Australian women and men. In both countries, there is more information on the employment patterns of women largely because women make greater adjustments to their work/life arrangements than men in Australia and Sweden. This is why I will generally focus on female employment in my comparison but will include men wherever possible.

The heavily gendered patterns of take-up of parental leave in Australia seems to set in concrete a division of labour between the partners which continues long after the parental leave period has finished. Similarly, the more gender egalitarian sharing of parental leave and

cash benefits by Swedish parents is reflected in their employment rates and hours of employment. Swedish women gain employment and retain it over their life course to a much greater extent than Australian women do. Swedish women have higher employment rates than Australian women in all demographic groups. Importantly, for women in prime childbearing years, there is a difference of 15 percentage points in the employment rates of Australian and Swedish women. Men in the two countries have roughly equal levels of employment.

The stronger labour market attachment of Swedish mothers is also reflected in their return to work decisions in that very few Swedish mothers dropped out of the workforce in the first two years after child birth whereas every fifth Australian mother exited the labour market around the time of child birth and did not take any parental leave. Moreover, those Swedish women who temporarily drop out of the labour force return relatively quickly. Similarly, Australian women who return to employment do so very quickly, largely out of financial necessity, but fewer Australian than Swedish women return to employment overall.

This trend of higher return rates of Swedish mothers can also be seen in the OECD figures presented in the case studies. The OECD provides comparable statistics on the maternal employment rates in its member states (see Table 11). This data confirms the national statistics in that the employment rates of Swedish mothers are significantly higher than those of Australian mothers. The figures are particularly striking for women with children under 6 years in that only 45 per cent of Australian mothers were employed compared to 77.5 per cent of Swedish mothers; a difference of 32.5 percentage points. The employment rates are much more similar for school-aged children where the difference between Australian and Swedish mothers decreased to 10 percentage points which suggests that the employment rates of women seem to be heavily influenced by the availability of out-of-home child care.

Table 11: Maternal employment rates in Australia and Sweden (2002)

Maternal employment (all figures 2002)	Australia	Sweden
Employment rates for mothers with youngest child aged under 6: 1990 and 2002	1990: 42.4% 2002: 45% (+ 2.6)	1990: 85.0% 2002: 77.5% (- 7.5)
Employment rates for all mothers	56.7%	77.5%
Employment rates for mothers with children under 3	45.0%	72.9%
Employment rates for mothers with children aged 3-5	45.0%	82.5%
Employment rates for mothers with children aged 6-14	67.3%	77.4%

Source: (OECD, 2007a)

The differences between Australian women and men and between Australia and Sweden are even more obvious when not only employment rates but hours of paid work are compared. I showed in my analysis that there is a strong trend towards polarised working hours in Australia which occurs largely along gendered lines. This trend is not very prevalent in Sweden where the majority of both women and men are employed in traditional full-time hours. Table 12 illustrates that, in 2005, the share of part-time work on total employment was twice as high in Australia as it was in Sweden (OECD, 2007b). Moreover, the share of part-time work has decreased since 1990 in Sweden while it has increased in Australia. Importantly, only 19 per cent of Swedish women worked part-time in 2005 compared to 41.7 per cent of Australian women. The overwhelming proportion of female part-time work in Sweden consisted of long part-time work (20 to 34 hours).

Table 12: Comparison of hours of employment in Australia and Sweden (2005)

OECD Country profiles	Australia	Sweden
Paid working hours		
Long hours (45 + per week) in 2005	Men: 40% Women: 15%	Men: 12% Women: 6%
Short hours (<20 per week) in 2005	Men: 6% Women: 21%	Men: 3% Women: 5%
Share of part-time employment on total employment in 1990	Men & women: 22.6% Women: 38.5%	Men & women: 14.5% Women: 24.5%
Share of part-time employment on total employment in 2005	Men & women: 27.3% Women: 41.7%	Men & women: 13.5% Women: 19.0%
Growth in female (total) part-time employment: 1990 – 2005	+ 3.2 (+ 4.7)	-5.5 (-1.0)

Source: (OECD, 2007b)

On the other hand, Table 12 also shows that Australian men were more than three times more likely to work in excess of 45 hours per week than their male Swedish counterparts (40 compared to 12 per cent in 2005) (OECD, 2007a). Similarly, Australian women were 2.5 times more likely to work long hours than Swedish women (15 compared to 6 per cent). Only 5 per cent of all Swedish women worked short part-time hours (20 hours or less) compared to 21 per cent of Australian women. The majority of Swedes, both female and male, work between 35 and 45 hours (58 per cent of women and 78 per cent of men) whereas less than half of Australian employees work traditional full-time hours (36 per cent of women and 52 per cent of men). It can be argued that the large number of Australians, and particularly Australian men, working excessive hours maintains the 'ideal worker' norm and creates a 'long-hours' culture in Australian workplaces especially for men which has been identified as structural causes of work/life conflicts. Brandth and Kvande (2001) suggested that, with increasing globalisation, the '50-hour-man' might become the new norm in Norwegian workplaces and this possibility definitely exists in Australian workplaces.

Overall, Australian women have a much weaker attachment to the labour market than both Australian men and Swedish women. By OECD standards, relatively few women are employed, almost half of all Australian women are engaged in part-time hours, every fifth woman works less than 20 hours per week and less women than men work long hours.

These figures show that while the number of dual income households has become a majority practice in both countries, there are great differences between Australian and Swedish dual income couples in terms of hours spent in paid work by both partners. Dual income couples in Australia largely represent 1.5 earner households because Australian women in general and mothers in particular work very short hours. In contrast, the dual earner/dual carer household is the norm in Sweden where women and men work more similar hours which cluster around traditional full-time hours and long part-time hours. A polarisation of working hours is much less common in Sweden than in Australia. Australian couples retain the androcentric principle of a male breadwinner but have adjusted women's role to include participation in a limited amount of paid employment while maintaining the responsibility for care work whereas Swedish couples have moved towards more egalitarian principles in that both women and men are in employment on full-time or close to full-time conditions and increasingly share the care for children.

My comparative analysis of the case studies demonstrates that these gendered trajectories, or life histories, are socially constructed. My thesis is that the decisions individuals take with regard to their work/life arrangements at the time of child birth are not only related to their biology or their individual preferences but are shaped by social structures, importantly by gendered norms and beliefs prevalent in their society and its institutions. I showed that these gendered norms and beliefs are reinforced by Steering Media tools, such as parental leave legislation, because policy makers draw on gendered Lifeworld elements in designing legislation. I demonstrated that the Australian parental leave legislation is underpinned by traditional assumptions about the roles of women and men, conventional gender norms and androcentric household models which are all supported by the Howard government. In contrast, the Swedish parental leave legislation relies on gender egalitarian assumptions, norms and household models and gender equality has been an important political goal of Swedish governments for decades. Thus, in both countries the gendered ideals which underpin the Steering Media tool of parental leave legislation have been influential in shaping the life histories of women and men at a crucial point in their lives: the moment they become parents.

I propose that the default model which is offered to Australian parents by the Steering Media actors in the form of parental leave legislation is the traditional gender arrangement of

the breadwinner/homemaker couple. Therefore, in the absence of universal support for a more egalitarian sharing of paid and unpaid work between the parents, individual women and men are steered into this work/life arrangement. Thus, mothers and fathers take a decision within constrained options, rather than freely choosing the traditional work/life arrangement out of personal preference. My analysis suggests that the current statutory parental leave provisions are inaccessible to many Australian parents because the family loses a major share of its income while one partner is on unpaid parental leave. The existing parental leave regime appears to fail parents because it does not accommodate the realities of dual earner families and higher employment rates of women before having children.

As a result, the take-up data indicate that the statutory parental leave provisions create a plethora of individual solutions which reflect a combination of financial necessity, availability of alternative care arrangements, job-related demands and personal preference. However, the uniting element in all of those solutions is that it is overwhelmingly mothers who accommodate the increased care work in their work/life arrangement and that fathers are largely unaffected, in terms of their employment conditions, by the arrival of a new child. The traditional gender ideology which underpins the parental leave legislation is reflected in a traditional division of labour along gendered lines which appears to manifest itself at the time of child birth and persists long after the parental leave period has finished.

In contrast, my analysis suggests that Swedish parents do not have to decide anymore between employment and care for their children but can choose to have both. The Swedish government has established a parental leave regime which allows parents to be both an earner and a carer. This regime is based on gender egalitarian assumptions and norms which has facilitated an assimilation of life histories of Swedish women and men. The ideal type of the earner/carer citizen is promoted by the legislation and represents the work/life option which is most strongly advocated to both mothers and fathers.

The normative steering capacity of the Swedish legislation is strong because it creates a fairly homogenous pattern of leave taking which reflects the ideal of the earner/carer citizen, although more women than men follow the ideal. The majority of Swedish parents return to employment and to their previous jobs after parental leave and traditional homemaker/breadwinner arrangements are rare. I argue that Swedish parents no longer need to decide on a traditional household model because they have been provided by the

Swedish government with an alternative default model, the earner/carer citizen model, which challenges stereotypical assumptions about the contributions and responsibilities of women and men to society and each other and, therefore, challenges the gendered status quo.

CHAPTER CONCLUSION

The Australian example shows that equitable approaches to work/life balance cannot be achieved by placing the costs of policy use onto the individual parent. In contrast, the Swedish example demonstrates that improved work/life balance can be brought about by sharing the costs of policy take-up between different social actors and, thus, by approaching solutions to work/life conflicts collectively rather than individually. The need for a collective approach necessitates a broadening of the work/life balance debate to explicitly include policy intervention at a government level.

I demonstrated in this chapter that the division of labour between parents is initially set up by the parental leave provisions but continues far beyond the actual parental leave period. In fact, it places mothers and fathers on gendered trajectories with regard to their work/life arrangements. My analysis suggests that there are structural factors, namely the design of the parental leave regime in a country and its gendered ideals, beyond the control of the individual which shape the options available to parents in their decision on a new work/life arrangement around the time of child birth.

Moreover, the Howard government has curtailed its actions by handing over their steering power, inherent in the parental leave legislation, to employers. Instead of buffering employees against employer demands, the Australian legislative and policy framework exacerbates work/life conflicts, including in the case of parental leave, by placing even greater power in the hands of employers. Systems imperatives, above all the need for labour market flexibility and cost control, create the frame of reference for government intervention because the Howard government gives priority to employer interests over employee interests. I propose that this is an important contributor to the low take-up of work/life policies in Australia. Conversely, Swedish parents who take up parental leave are better protected against employer demands and cost/benefit considerations by universal,

legislated and collectively funded parental leave provisions. The Swedish government leverages its power as a normative third party to support work/life balance and to achieve more gender equality by challenging the gendered status quo of the public/private divide.

CONCLUSION

The aim of my study was to produce more comprehensive explanations of the low take-up of work/life balance policies beyond those explanations which focus on organisational factors. I wanted to demonstrate that the take-up of work/life balance policies has a gender dimension and is influenced not only by workplace organisations but also by government policy and social norms and beliefs as well as the interplay between them. I have done this through the analysis of parental leave as one example of work/life balance policies. The model could equally be applied to work/life policies more generally, such as part-time work and tele-work. This final chapter will outline how I addressed those aims and provide alternative explanation for the low take-up of work/life balance policies in Australia by placing work/life arrangements in their gendered social and political context.

WORK/LIFE BALANCE THROUGH A CRITICAL 'GENDER LENS'

In order to provide alternative explanations of the low take-up of work/life balance policies, I needed to evaluate the existing ones and identify their weaknesses. In my critical review of the work/life balance literature and its approach to investigating work/life issues, including the low take-up of work/life balance policies, I integrated existing criticisms and identified five key limitations of the existing literature. These are:

1. Conceptual issues as to what constitutes work/life balance,
2. The voluntary limitation of researchers and theorists to an organisational focus and solutions,

3. The strong focus on individual employees and companies,

4. The failure to systematically theorise gender, and

5. Taking for granted the social and political context of English-speaking countries, especially the US and the UK and, thus, a liberal welfare state regime.

This critical review of existing literature became the basis for developing an alternative approach to investigating work/life balance issues, particularly the low take-up of work/life policies.

My study advances current conceptual approaches to investigating work/life balance by integrating feminist explanations of the conflicts between employment and private life into the concept of work/life balance and, thus, to systematically theorise gender. I discovered that the concept of work/life balance has a radical core because it challenges the strict divide between private and public spheres as well as the fundamental principles of the male organisation. The feminist critique of the gendered public/private divide illustrated that the idea of work/life balance is a reminder that paid and care work as well as non-work aspects of life cannot be neatly separated into independent categories but are inherently interrelated in the lives of real people.

Moreover, I contribute a perspective to the work/life balance literature which moves beyond the focus on individuals and organisations. The feminist literature stressed that it was important to include the influence of the state as well as gendered norms and assumptions in the analysis of issues related to the reconciliation of employment and private life. Building on the analysis of feminist researchers and integrating them with the work of Habermas, I crafted a conceptual framework which is able to depict the three levels of organisations, governments and social norms, beliefs and assumptions, theorise their interrelationships and incorporate an explicit gender lens.

Finally, my study contributes to a reframing of the work/life balance concept by using a comparative approach which allows for highlighting the importance of the social and political context in which work/life arrangements are situated. Using as case studies two countries which have institutionalised vastly different approaches to work/life balance, namely Australia and Sweden, allowed for an identification of the strong impact of the social and political context on the work/life options available to parents and the costs associated

with the take-up of those policies. This extends conventional explanations of the low take-up of work/life balance policies by illustrating that the policies have a gendered normative basis and the terms of employer engagement in work/life balance initiatives have been pre-defined by Steering Media actors via legislation *before* work/life policies come to play at an organisational level. Thus, I was able to show that current explanations of the low take-up of work/life policies, which usually focus only on the workplace level, do not account for all of the possible influences on the decisions of employed carers to use work/life offers.

I decided to investigate parental leave policies as one example of work/life balance policies because it determines the behaviour of individuals at a crucial time in their lives, the moment they become parents, and because the design and take-up of parental leave policies is well documented.

ADVANCING THE WORK/LIFE BALANCE DEBATE

The key innovation of my study is the development of a conceptual framework which allowed for an integrated analysis of organisations, government intervention and gendered norms, attitudes and beliefs, i.e. the Systems, Steering Media and Lifeworld, across two different national contexts. The analysis of the two case studies and the comparison between the two approaches to parental leave, in particular, and work/life balance, more broadly, contributed to the existing work/life literature in several ways.

Firstly, my analysis showed that, so far, most policy makers in organisations and governments have taken the liberal idea of the gendered public/private divide for granted and have designed policy solutions which are based on rather traditional gender ideals. Work/life policies in their current form do not reflect the interrelationships between the public and the private sphere in the lives of employed carers and generally do not buffer against employer demands. Thus, conventional work/life balance policies appear to reinforce rather than challenge the gendered division of labour and the public/private divide and, thus, may exacerbate rather than reduce work/life conflicts. The Australian case study suggests that conventional work/life policies at both organisational and government levels which do not take into consideration the implications of gender as a social structure and do

not aim to address the hierarchy between women and men create limited and costly work/life options for employed carers.

Secondly, the analysis has also demonstrated that work/life policies are not *per se* incapable of capturing the interrelationships between the public and private spheres and facilitating more balanced work/life arrangements. The Swedish case study suggests that it is possible to design work/life policies which acknowledge that care work and employment are integrally related and which assist individuals in combining both activities in their own lives without pushing the costs of doing so onto those individuals. The example of the Swedish parental leave legislation shows that once gender equality is incorporated as a policy goal the gendered structural relationships between the public and the private sphere, between employment and care work, between the lives of women and men, become visible and are problematised. The work by Rapoport et al. (1996; 2002) on the Dual Agenda project illustrated that when gender equality is incorporated as an explicit objective of corporate policies, it is possible to redesign workplace policies and processes to create better work/life balance. My analysis of the Swedish case study suggests that the same is true for legislative frameworks: once gender equality is included as a policy objective it is possible to design work/life policies which actively support work/life balance by deconstructing structural barriers which prevent it.

My investigation of the Swedish parental leave legislation suggests that the turning point in government policy was the realisation that female employment needed to be accompanied by an infrastructure which addressed the care work that women had traditionally performed for no pay in the private sphere. The strong commitment to equality and social justice by Swedish governments led to the view that care work could not be outsourced to less privileged women, and thus could not maintain its subordinate status, but needed to be regarded as a collective social responsibility. Consequently, care work has been shared by all social partners: by parents who, if they stay at home, are supported by wage replacement benefits which are funded collectively by employers and administered by the state which, once parents return to work, also provides a universal, good quality, highly subsidised child care infrastructure. Although I do not claim that Sweden has achieved complete gender equality, Swedish governments have, nevertheless, recognised the structural implications of gender inequality on work/life arrangements and the take-up of policies. They have

explicitly addressed these structural inequalities in the design of the parental leave legislation and achieved better outcomes in terms of work/life balance for both women and men.

Thirdly, the comparison between the take-up patterns of parental leave provisions in both countries illustrated that work/life decisions are not a matter of free choice but are shaped by structural forces, such as the parental leave legislation, social norms and beliefs as well as workplace structures and cultures. The analysis showed that the take-up of parental leave policies closely aligned with the design of the legislation and individuals and employers largely complied with the imperatives expressed, implicitly or explicitly, in the legislation. Thus, government intervention acts as a Steering Media in shaping the behaviours of individuals and corporate decision makers.

In summary, my research has added to current explanations of the low take-up of work/life balance policies by demonstrating that the social and political context in which work/life arrangements are negotiated is crucial in determining the use of the policies. In Australia, work/life options available to parents are limited by traditional gender norms and assumptions which underpin the policy and the costs of policy use rest with the individual because the government does not provide universal rights to employed carers. In this context, the influence of organisational culture on the decision to take up work/life policies becomes paramount because the ability of supervisors and colleagues to buffer policy users against employer demands and negative career consequences has to replace the universal protection which is given to employed carers in other countries, e.g. Sweden, by universal legislation. In the Australian context, the decision to take-up work/life balance policies becomes a cost/benefit consideration in which the supportiveness of organisational culture is a key variable.

This illustrates that in order to reduce the impact of unsupportive organisational cultures it is not sufficient to focus policy interventions exclusively at the workplace level. Instead, the creation of a normative, legislative and organisational context which is conducive to the take-up of work/life balance policies needs to include policy makers at a government level and needs to address the gendered norms, assumptions and beliefs which underpin current workplaces and families as well as contemporary work/life balance policies. Without the support of government intervention on behalf of employed carers and without a challenging

of traditional gender ideologies and their replacement by gender egalitarian norms and beliefs, such a supportive context cannot be brought about.

FUTURE DIRECTIONS

The implications of my research are largely conceptual and methodological. I have shown that the many investigations of work/life balance issues are inherently limited by their focus on workplace organisations because researchers are unable to challenge many of the structural issues which cause work/life conflicts in the first place. Thus, future research in the area of work/life balance would benefit from the insights generated in other disciplines and, especially, from feminist research. In this complex area of social inquiry, multi-disciplinary approaches appear to be the most promising avenue as was illustrated by my research project which drew heavily on the work of researchers in sociology and political science.

Moreover, the social and political context in which work/life balance negotiations take place needs to be factored in much more explicitly. My study illustrates that cross-country comparisons are an effective research strategy to make visible the structural barriers to work/life balance which exist in a national context.

My conceptual framework could be applied to different social contexts and could be used to evaluate the parental leave regimes, or other approaches to work/life balance more broadly, across a range of countries. For example, a similar analysis of the interrelationships between social norms and beliefs, government intervention and organisations, i.e. the Lifeworld, Steering Media and Systems, could be conducted for the work/life policy of part-time work. Empirical research in the field could evaluate the impact of gendered norms and beliefs, government policy and organisation context on the take-up of work/life balance policies of research participants.

My findings could be used to inform policy making, especially in Australia. I have demonstrated that the current legislative framework in Australia is unsupportive of work/life balance despite claims to the contrary. The normative basis of the legislation needs to change to at least accommodate the new realities of Australian parents who are largely

organised in dual earner couples who cannot rely on a full-time homemaker or a breadwinner wage. The Swedish example shows that Australian society, which suffers an acute skills shortage, would benefit from being more visionary and institutionalising gender egalitarian norms so as to maintain more women in the active labour force and increasing equality between women and men. In 2007, Australia is only one of two OECD countries that have not established a universal paid maternity leave scheme and where political discussions about paid leave are still predominantly concerned with paid maternity leave instead of shifting the debate towards paid parental leave which would include men in their role as fathers. In such a context, there is plenty of room for a federal government, as a Steering Media and normative third party, to get involved in negotiations of work/life arrangements on behalf of employed carers. Such involvement has the potential to redefine the work/life interface so that employment and private life become more compatible and less segregated into separate spheres along gendered lines.

In Australia, there has just been a change of government and it is likely that some elements of the political context, in which work/life arrangements have so far been negotiated, are going to change soon. However, the fundamental issues of the Australian approach to work/life balance identified in this research have not been explicitly addressed during the election campaign and, thus, are unlikely to receive immediate political attention. Most importantly, no commitment was made to implementing a national paid maternity leave scheme. Moreover, while aspects of the WorkChoices reform may be overturned and mechanisms to facilitate collective bargaining reintroduced, there will still be ample room for individual bargaining. The inequality within the Australian system, in terms of access to paid parental leave, is not fully addressed by reintroducing collective bargaining but will potentially be reduced. In addition, the minimum standard which includes the provision for 52 weeks unpaid parental leave has not explicitly been targeted for change so that the entitlement to statutory parental leave will continue to be a workplace right. What has been suggested is that a Labor government might extend the parental leave period to 24 months and that it would set up a cross-departmental Office for Work and Family. While the specifics are not known at this stage, it will be interesting to see what the future holds for employed carers in Australia under the new leadership at the federal government level.

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