warwick.ac.uk/lib-publications

Gendered flexible working practices: negotiating time and work in two UK asset finance organisations

Heather Griffiths

Contents

Acknowledgements

I am grateful to the two organisations who allowed me to venture into their offices, in particular those employees who were involved in co-ordinating my visit, organising the interviews and who made me feel welcome during fieldwork. I extend this thanks to all the staff who gave up their time to be interviewed and I am grateful for their willingness to engage in such insightful discussions about their everyday lives.

I would also like to thank the staff of the Department of Sociology at Warwick for supporting my studies and development since 2012. I am particularly indebted to my supervisors, Dr Lynne Pettinger and Dr Clare Lyonette, whose expert knowledge and advice has not only informed this research but also developed me as a researcher. They have guided me through with patience and humour, instinctively knowing when I need to be challenged and when I need to be consoled. I would also like to extend my thanks to my two examiners, Dr Carol Walkowitz and Prof Clare Kelliher who gave me such a positive viva experience and provided some invaluable feedback and suggestions for where to go next.

So many friends have supported me throughout the PhD process that I cannot name them all, but I want to thank them unreservedly for their enduring belief in me. I would like to acknowledge my Sociology comrades, Liz Ablett and Kristin Hübner, for always being there and making the final year one to remember. Thanks also goes to Dr Kate F. Mahoney and to everyone else in the academic community who have given their time, wisdom and support.

Dedication

This thesis is dedicated to the three generations of women in my family who inspire me to improve the world of work so that future generations of women will not face the same challenges we did.

Declaration

This thesis is my own work and has not been submitted for a degree at any other university

Abstract

This thesis explores how gender is embedded in flexible working practices in two UK asset finance organisations. Drawing on feminist theories of time and work, this study deconstructs how employees negotiated flexible working practices both inside the organisation and in the home. It asks how gender affects employees' access to flexible working practices and how the characteristics of the finance culture shape their experiences of flexible working. The findings contribute to the sociological work-life balance literature by showing how employees' subjective constructions of gender shape the way they negotiate time and work, both in the workplace and in the home. This qualitative study draws on data produced during 26 interviews with employees from two UK based asset finance companies. The data was interpreted through a conceptual framework which incorporates feminist social theories of negotiation, time and the ideal worker. These distinct but complementary theories support a feminist poststructural epistemology which recognises meanings and experiences as contextually constructed. This thesis argues that gender was embedded in the way employees negotiated their flexible working practices, where negotiations were informed by masculine constructions of time and work, which were normalised within the asset finance culture. This argument comprises of three interweaving conclusions. Firstly, subjectively constructed gendered norms around work and care were fundamental to how employees negotiated flexible working practices with their managers, colleagues, family and social networks. Secondly, managers' attitudes towards flexible working practices were subjectively constructed and changed over time, depending on their own work-life balance, their perception of business needs and their internalisation of gender norms. Thirdly, these organisations had constructed a unique cultural understanding of time which combined institutionalised working time and accelerated financial time, where both were founded on masculine experiences of work. This study shows how gendered norms are embedded in the everyday actions and interactions which initiate and sustain flexible working practices. This research contributes to theoretical and practical understandings of how gender norms are embedded in flexible working practices and the subsequent impact on the work-life balance of employees.

Chapter One: Introduction

Flexible working practices were originally designed to support educated mothers back into the workplace but since 2014, all employees in the UK have had a legal right to request a change to their working patterns. Popular and academic discourses around flexible working are still dominated by issues of care, but the emphasis has started to shift beyond childcare, recognising alternative forms of care work such as caring for those with disabilities, looking after elderly relatives or simply caring for oneself. When the government extended the right to request flexible working to all employees, they envisaged that the policy would create cultural change and challenge the assumption that flexible working is just for women, or for parents and carers (Gov.uk, 2014). However, because of deeply entrenched gendered norms around work and care, flexible working continues to be a gendered issue and the legacy of flexible working as a 'perk' for educated mothers continues to marginalise some employees from the work-life balance discourse (Fleetwood, 2007; Lewis, 2010; Warren, 2015a; Wilkinson, Tomlinson and Gardiner, 2017).

The aim of this study is to understand how and why gender remains embedded in flexible working practices within a particular cultural setting. Research on accessing and experiencing flexible working tends to focus on the role of the manager (e.g. Been et al., 2015; den Dulk and de Ruijter, 2008; Lewis, 2003), relationships with co-workers (Pedersen and Lewis, 2012; Smithson and Stokoe, 2005; Teasdale, 2013) or the division of labour within the family (Silva, 2002; Lyonette and Crompton, 2015) but less is known about the everyday actions and interactions which are required to access and sustain flexible working practices. The thesis will contribute to the small field of work-life balance research which seeks to dismantle the boundaries between work and the rest of life (Eikhof, Warhurst and Haunschild, 2007; Gambles, Lewis and Rapoport, 2008; Fagan *et al.*, 2012; Eräranta and Kantola, 2016) as I argue that these everyday actions and interactions are not confined to the workplace but extend into the home and across the rest of life.

Increasing the availability of flexible working practices is part of promoting a cultural shift towards harmonising work and the rest of life (Gambles, Lewis and Rapoport, 2008) but at the organisational level, cultures vary considerably across

the economy. Although research has attended to the experience of flexible working practices within the finance sector (den Dulk and de Ruijter, 2008; Russell, O'Connell and McGinnity, 2009; Smithson and Stokoe, 2005; Sweet, Pitt-Catsouphes and Boone James, 2016; Sweet, Pitt-Catsouphes and James, 2017) the specificities of the sectoral culture are often overlooked. In these studies, workplace culture is usually examined at the organisational or sectoral level (Bond, 2004) whereas I argue that it is important to acknowledge the location of the organisation within the broader industry sector. This qualitative study was conducted in two asset finance organisations, located in a sub-sector of financial services. Asset finance organisations occupy a unique position whereby they are in competition with the banking sector whilst also relying on banks to process their financial transactions. This study will contribute to the small body of work-life balance research conducted within the finance sector by arguing that current definitions of finance culture assume it is universally experienced, overlooking the cultural nuances within the sector.

Research motivation

I started this doctoral research in September 2014 and in June of the same year, the UK Conservative and Liberal Democrat Coalition Government extended the legal right to request flexible working to all employees. I became interested in this development when Liberal Democrat Minister, Jenny Willott - the Minster for Equalities at the time, argued that the legislation would encourage cultural change in gender roles both at work and across society. In an interview with *The Independent on Sunday* newspaper, Willott said that giving all employees a right to request flexible work was a fairer approach that could ignite cultural change in organisations (Merrick, 2014). Willott stated:

> *'Opening [the right to request] up to everybody will really get rid of the stigma with wanting to work flexibly. So, if somebody wants to go and play golf once a week or whatever … it makes it feel fairer and I think it starts changing the culture in an organisation.'*
>
> *[Merrick, 2014]*

The chance to play golf once a week would not be every employee's vision of work-life balance, particularly not for those (women) with caring responsibilities, but Willott believed the policy has the potential to create cultural change at the organisational level and beyond. The cultural effect of the policy may prove difficult to measure and the government's statutory review of the legislation is not due until 2019 (Pyper, 2018). In the meantime, the only data available which attempts to measure the availability of flexible working practices has been privately commissioned and findings vary considerably. One of the larger studies in the UK, conducted by flexible recruitment agency Timewise in collaboration with EY, surveyed over 3000 employees across the economy and found that 63 per cent of full-time workers had already accessed a flexible working practice and considered this an indication that flexible working was now 'the norm' (Timewise, 2017). This study is widely cited by mainstream commentators on flexible working but it is hard to verify how representative the findings are of the wider population and because the two organisations involved in the research actively promote flexible working, there may be a sample bias in favour of those who have flexible working practices.

As well as the extension of the right to request policy, this research is informed by my own experience of flexible working practices when I worked in the UK finance sector. For almost a decade I was employed in an asset finance organisation very similar to those participating in this study. When I started at the company in 2001, there was very little evidence of flexible working. In 2003, New Labour introduced the first right to request flexible working policy for carers of young children (see Chapter Three) which prompted several mothers in the organisation to reduce or compress their working hours, but at that time they were still in the minority. Over the years a small number of fathers across the organisation joined them, usually changing their hours so they could do the morning school run or nursery collection.

The Sales Support team I worked in was staffed predominantly by women with the majority being of child-bearing age. During my nine years working in the department, almost every one of my female co-workers took maternity leave (most of them twice) and requested flexible working upon their return. The majority reduced the number of hours they worked as well as their start and finish times, usually to coincide with school hours, which meant that by 3pm the department was never fully staffed. At the same time, I watched fathers, often in more senior

sales roles, using their remote working privileges to cover childcare emergencies or attend school assemblies, practices which were informally arranged and always irregular.

As one of the only full-time workers in the department without a flexible working practice, I sometimes resented my co-workers as they left the busy office and became frustrated with the managers who kept approving cumulative flexible working requests. We were frequently reminded how busy it was, especially at month-end, yet the number of part-time workers was increasing. Some of my part-time colleagues started to take work home with them during month-end and resumed working once their children were in bed. This option was not offered to me, so I assumed it was not available, and it started to feel like my work-life balance was less important because I was young and child-free. More and more employees in the company were starting to use their working time differently but the company's working practices, wrapped up in financial sector legislation and tradition, were struggling to adapt. I noticed flexible working was becoming more prevalent, both in my organisation and across the economy, but my experience of it was gendered and unequal, leaving me cynical about the government's claims that flexible working practices can create organisational and social cultural change.

Research aims and questions

This study explores how gender is embedded in the flexible working practices of employees from two organisations. Flexible working is an umbrella term which encompasses a wide range of working patterns which deviate from traditional working practices or the working time stated on the individual's contract of employment. The government website lists flexible working as job sharing, working from home, part-time, compressed hours, flexitime, annualised hours, staggered hours and phased retirement (Gov.uk, n.d.). Fleetwood (2007) extends and refines these to include arrangements such as term-time working and shift swapping. Fleetwood (2007) also defines flexible working practices as employer-friendly, employee-friendly or neutral but some scholars argue that the distinction is not always clear and the rationale behind many arrangements is ambiguous (Lewis, Anderson and Lyonette, 2017). Whilst flexible work is the term most widely used to

define these types of working patterns, researchers often use more specific terminology to describe the element of flexibility being studied. The concept of flexible working arrangements (FWAs) is widely used by researchers to encompass the variety of flexible working options listed above but it is not always clear whether this is referring to flexible working policies or practices. As my study is concerned with how employees experience flexible working in practice, I will adopt the terminology of 'flexible working practices' used by Kelliher and Anderson (2008, 2010). This terminology ensures a clear distinction between flexible working policies and practices and also implies that flexible working requires a sense of agency, rather than being a passive act.

Flexible working practices are one of several work-life balance initiatives and can be offered alongside others 'benefits' such as childcare facilities or subsidies, private healthcare, employee assistance programmes (EAPs) and entitlement to leave (Beauregard and Henry, 2009; Ollier-Malaterre and Andrade, 2015). As such, research on flexible working is located in the wider, cross-disciplinary field of work-life balance. As the focus of this study is flexible working practices I only refer to work-life balance within the context of workplace flexibility but understanding how I use the terminology contextualises the research questions stated below. I adopt Lewis et al.'s (2017) description which considers work-life balance as 'having the time (and energy) for both work and personal life activities' (Lewis et al., 2017: xv). As will be explored further in the Literature Review (Chapter Three), attempts by academics to broaden the meaning and inclusivity of work-life balance have so far proved unsuccessful and the terminology, and its illustration of a work-life binary, seem resistant to change. Whilst I recognise the limitations of the work-life balance metaphor, I align myself with researchers who have conceded to use this definition in lieu of a preferable alternative (Fagan *et al.*, 2012; Gambles, Lewis and Rapoport, 2008). As Lewis et al. (2017) conclude, work-life balance is the term most 'widely used by scholars, policy makers, employers, the media and the general public', (2017; xv), meaning it will be familiar to the research participants as well as the academic audience for whom this thesis is intended.

By comparing data from 26 semi-structured interviews conducted across two asset finance organisations, this research is guided by the following questions:

1. How is gender constructed in the way employees negotiate their flexible working practices inside and outside the organisation?

This study seeks to understand how flexible working practices are negotiated by employees both inside and outside the organisation and how these negotiations are shaped by, and reassert, gender norms around work and care. The meaning of negotiations is discussed in-depth in the next chapter (Chapter Two) but in summary, a negotiation is a process where the aim is to reach a mutually agreeable solution in order to get something done (Gerson and Peiss, 1985; Strauss, 1982). According to this definition, the right to request flexible working framework is a negotiation as there is no obligation for employers to accept the request. Whilst the terminology of negotiations is widely used within the work-life balance literature, less is known about the processes of negotiating, particularly how understandings of gender influence that process.

2. How does gender affect employees' access to workplace flexible working practices?

The second research question aims to find out whether flexible working practices are equally distributed across the organisation by asking how gender affects employees' access to flexible working. This question supports the first, by recognising that accessing flexible working practices is a form of negotiation, emphasising the power relations between employees and their managers and the nuanced ways in which these can be gendered. This question critiques the notion that flexible working practices are available to all employees instead asking how access is informed by internalised gender norms around work and care.

3. How does the masculine culture of finance impact employees' experiences of flexible working practices?

Finally, this study explores how the masculine norms of the finance culture affect flexible working practices in these organisations. Less is known about how flexible working practices are experienced as gendered in specific industries and their sub-sectors, so this research will acknowledge the cultural specificities of asset finance and how this impacts employees' actions and interactions. This question is informed by my own experience of working in asset finance and is designed to

challenge my assumptions about the culture of asset finance, as well as provide a more nuanced understanding of the interplay between organisational and sectoral cultures.

The qualitative data generated during the interviews is analysed using a conceptual framework which combines feminist perspectives around time and work, to deconstruct how employees negotiated their flexible working practices. The findings show that employees engaged in a series of ongoing negotiations about time and work which were informed by social and subjective constructions of the ideal worker. Flexible working practices were established and maintained through these multifaceted negotiations which crossed the boundaries between work and home, involving managers, co-workers and family members. The complementary theories within this analytical framework deepen the sociological understanding of how gender is embedded in the flexible working practices of these organisations and how these practices are experienced by their employees.

Thesis Structure

The next two chapters will form the Literature Review and expand on some of the ideas presented as part of this Introduction and Chapter Two will introduce the conceptual framework in more detail. The chapter will start by introducing sociological theories of negotiation before articulating how negotiations are gendered and what this means for organisational practices. The next section will discuss how the notion of work-life balance is based on the social construction of industrial time and that flexible working practices challenge institutionalised time which is based on a masculine conception of work outside the home. The final section of this chapter will introduce the notion of the ideal worker as part of broader theories on gendered organisations. I will argue that different forms of flexible working support or conflict with the traditional conception of the ideal worker which is universally defined as white and male.

Chapter Three continues the literature review and positions my research within the current debates on work-life balance. It will focus on the evolution of work-life

balance research and position sociological research within the wider, cross-disciplinary field. I will argue that a sociological approach to work-life balance research is fundamentally concerned with time and power inequalities, in particular the gendered segregation of work. I argue that a good sociological analysis of flexible working recognises that gender inequalities in the workplace are constructed in multiple, intersecting ways and that taken for granted, everyday negotiations are often overlooked. As part of this review I will also define the main terms used in the work-life balance literature and within this thesis.

In Chapter Four I detail the methodological approach used in this research. This chapter provides a full rationale for my research design, including my feminist epistemology and why the chosen methods were the most appropriate for addressing the aims of the research. I also explain why I consider the finance sector to be a valuable site for this study and why I have chosen two asset finance organisations as case studies. This will be followed by a detailed account of how the research was conducted in these two organisations and how the research findings will be presented across the thesis.

As the first of three data analysis chapters, Chapter Five addresses the more formal side of flexible working practices in the two organisations by focusing on the influence of the managers. This chapter considers the act of negotiating flexible working practices from the perspective of these male managers before drawing on evidence from staff to critique their claims. It will show how access to flexible working practices were not equally distributed because these male managers still adhered to a traditional concept of the ideal worker, where commitment is demonstrated by long hours and prioritising work over other responsibilities. This was especially true of the older managers who also adhered to more traditional attitudes toward gender roles. I argue that rather than being fixed, manager's attitudes to flexible working can shift according to age and life-stage, as younger managers in the sample constructed the ideal worker differently to their senior peers. This chapter also shows how the conception of the ideal worker had become normalised by employees during busy periods, such as month-end, but had a fluid meaning that would shift over time.

Chapter 6 continues the stories of the employees introduced in the previous chapter by analysing how flexible working practices were negotiated between co-workers, within the parameters set by their managers. Co-worker relationships are a relatively understudied topic within flexible work research and this chapter will explore how negotiations can be gendered and temporal. It will focus on the ways employees supported or resented the flexible working practices of their co-workers to argue that employees who share a similar construction of an ideal worker are more likely to support each other's work-life balance. It will show how this experience was gendered, as well as how it was influenced by the temporal rhythms of the workplace.

The final section of data analysis is contained in Chapter Seven, where the focus shifts from the workplace into the home to explore how these employees used flexible work practices to manage their work-life balance. This chapter shows how gender was implicated in the ways employees negotiated their work time and personal time, and I argue that negotiations around flexible working practices transcended the boundaries of the workplace to include family and friends. This chapter explores how negotiations were shaped by intersectional gender norms, life-stage and subjective constructions of the ideal worker.

Chapter Eight synthesises the findings from the previous three chapters to offer an in-depth discussion which integrates these findings with the conceptual framework introduced in Chapter Two. This chapter considers how the findings answer the research questions (stated above) and the discussion will be structured around these three questions. It shows how gendered norms were embedded in the ways flexible working practices were negotiated and how these negotiations were not just confined to the work sphere. I further argue that gendered negotiations affected employee's access to flexible working practices, as managers and employees assessed the feasibility of a flexible working request according to their own subjective construction of gender roles and the ideal worker. Finally, I use social theories of time to consider how these gendered negotiations and subjective constructions of the gendered ideal worker were affected by the rhythmic demands of month-end, to argue how the asset finance culture is defined by a unique relationship with time.

The final chapter, Chapter Nine, will offer some concluding thoughts on what the findings of this research can contribute to the wider field of work-life balance studies, as well as how this knowledge could help practitioners who are seeking to improve the gender imbalance of flexible working practices in corporate organisations in the wider finance sector.

Chapter Two: Conceptual Framework

Introduction

This chapter introduces the three key themes which are threaded throughout the thesis in the form of a conceptual framework of analysis. This framework consists of three distinct but complementary social theories which when applied holistically, provide the basis for a unique contribution to the study of flexible working practices. The first theme is influenced by sociologist Anselm Strauss (1978), who is perhaps best known for his contribution to the methodological literature. Although I acknowledge this work in Chapter Four, it is Strauss's social theories of negotiation which forms part of this conceptual framework. Negotiating is at the heart of work-life balance practices but the experience of negotiation is rarely deconstructed or fully understood.

The second theme, social theories of time, is not inspired by any one scholar but rather takes a collection of perspectives on time which I apply to this study on the gendered experience of flexible work. The final theme in the framework is based on the theories of gendered organisations, proposed by Joan Acker (1990; 2006). In particular, the notion of the ideal worker, which is widely used across the work-life balance literature, is the focus of this final theme as it provides a useful term for analysing social expectations around work and care. At the end of this chapter, I state how these themes will answer the research questions stated in Chapter One and explain how these three themes can be used together to provide an original framework of analysis.

Social theory of negotiation

The study of negotiation is often associated with business schools, where negotiating strategies and methods are learned and critiqued for the purposes of personal and organisational development. The sociological study of negotiation can also be applied in the business world, but Strauss (1978) is more concerned with identifying the power relationships inherent in negotiating and how negotiations interact with existing social orders. Negotiating is an active and reciprocal process

where the aim is to reach a mutual agreement in order to get something accomplished (Gerson and Peiss, 1985; Strauss, 1978). This is the working definition that will be adopted throughout this thesis which draws upon the social theory of negotiation developed by Anselm Strauss (1978) in his work, *Negotiations: Varieties, Contexts, Processes and Social Order.* In this text, Strauss develops a paradigm for studying negotiations in relation to social order which can be applied to any organisation comprising a group of individuals. For Strauss (1978), the social order of an organisation is itself a negotiated order, but as part of this wider theory Strauss developed a set of sub-processes which I have chosen as most relevant for my study. An important consideration for Strauss is the context in which negotiations take place and this emphasis on context is why I have chosen to use this paradigm within this conceptual framework. Not only does a contextual analysis complement social theories of time but when approached from a feminist perspective, it also highlights the presence of gender inequality within the organisational social order.

Negotiation Context

For Strauss, negotiations occur within two contextual settings, the first being the context of the negotiation itself, the second is the wider, structural context. The 'properties' of the negotiation context include variables such as the number of people involved in the negotiation, the balance of power between negotiators, the number and complexity of the issue under negotiation, as well as the options available if the negotiation is unsuccessful (Strauss, 1978). In the context of negotiating flexible working practices, the specificities of these properties could include scenarios such as: a request for flexible work being reviewed by a management team rather than one department line-manager, a new recruit requesting flexible work on their first week compared to someone who had worked in the organisation for several years, or an employee making multiple requests for flexible work which include no fixed temporal or spatial routine. An awareness of the negotiation context will be used to analyse how employees negotiate access to flexible working practices with their managers, paying attention to power relationships, the conditions in which they make that request and the actors

involved in that request. The negotiation context is also useful to analyse how employees negotiate their flexible working practices in everyday interactions with their colleagues and family members. However, the negotiation context is shaped by the structural contexts, including social norms around work, care and gender.

Structural Context

Strauss (1978) sees the structural context as having a direct and significant impact on the negotiation context, as this extract explains:

> *"Negotiations always take place within social settings. The various structural conditions of the setting affect the actions of the negotiating parties, the aims they pursue through negotiation and alternative modes of action, their tactics during the negotiations and, undoubtedly, the outcomes of the negotiations themselves."* (1978: 235) [...] The structural conditions also affect how actors see social order and what they believe is, for themselves and others, possible, impossible, problematic or probable.' (1978: 12)

Strauss is including wider social structures as well as more salient contextual structures such as the industry location of the studied organisation. Within this definition he also recognises phenomena such as the division of labour and the abuse of power by those in senior positions (Strauss, 1978). Strauss's paradigm of structural contexts can also be used to look for instances of negotiations being shaped by the culture of financial services (see Chapter Three), helping to answer the research questions outlined in the previous chapter.

Gender and Negotiations

As a symbolic interactionist, descending from the Chicago School tradition, Strauss's theory of negotiation and social order has been critiqued as not adequately acknowledging the power distributions which are inherent in social structures (Stryker, 1987). Critics of an interactionist approach to negotiations

argue that organisational social orders are informed by the social order of society and that Strauss's definition of structural contexts is only concerned with conditions at organisational level (Fine, 1984). Feminist scholars have accused Strauss of omitting 'second generation gender issues', in other words, 'how gender and gendered relationships shape particular negotiated orders (Kolb and McGinn, 2009: 2). Where feminists are influenced by interactionist approaches to negotiations, power relations are integrated into the analysis. For example, Gerson & Peiss (1985) assert that gender and power are implicit in the ways men and women negotiate and that women's social dependency on men is embedded within the negotiation process:

> "Given their relative lack of structural power, women have fewer resources with which to negotiate, experience fewer situations in which they can set up negotiations, and derive fewer advantages from their negotiations." (1985: 323)

Gerson & Peiss (1985) see negotiations as contextualised within a social order where women are economically dependent on men and this condition shapes the nature and outcome of the negotiation. In the workplace, this power inequality is reconceptualised as a dependence on values, practices and assumptions which reflect a masculine norm (Kolb and McGinn, 2009). Therefore, negotiations in the workplace take place within a structural context where the economic power relations between men and women are unequal and in an organisational setting which privileges masculinity over femininity (Kolb and McGinn, 2009).

My analytical framework draws upon Strauss's concepts and ideas around the structural and negotiation contexts but incorporates this feminist critique which views gender inequality as inherent in social and organisational structures. This approach enables me to analyse structural contexts of negotiations from several vantage points, to answer the question of how employees' flexible working negotiations are gendered, focusing on power relationships and the normalisation of gender roles around work and care.

Negotiating work-life balance

The role of negotiating has been considered within the work-life balance literature, particularly with regard to work-life conflict or domestic responsibilities (see Chapter Three), but there is very little written about how flexible working practices are negotiated in practice. Where negotiating processes are examined in-depth, the context is usually on how employees (traditionally women) negotiate access to flexible working practices, such as Tomlinson's (2004) study on how women construct a business-case for their flexible working requests following maternity leave. Here, negotiations were conceptualised as interactions rather than a contextually constructed process. In their quantitative study, Greenberg & Landry (2011) explore how perceptions of power and organisational support influence employees' negotiations of flexible working practices, but once again the focus is on the ability to access flexible work, not how practices are negotiated once access has been established. My research addresses this gap by recognising that flexible working practices require ongoing negotiation both at work and in the home, and that gender differences are continually present within these negotiations and renegotiations.

Social theories of time

As a sociological study on flexible working practices, this research is fundamentally a study about time. Although it is often taken for granted in academic research as it is in life, time is central to the understanding of social life as it is implicated in everything we do (Adam, 1994; Crow and Heath, 2002). Sociological studies of time are concerned with 'the rhythms of social life' and 'the control of people's time' (Adam, 1994: 2) where the commodification of time has created unequal power relations in the way time is exchanged and distributed (Glucksmann, 2005; Sharma, 2014). As well as providing a suitable theory for organisational studies, this notion of power can also be used to critique time across all elements of society making social theories of time ideal for work-life balance research.

Construction of industrial time

A holistic approach to work and life is not a radical philosophy and prior to the industrial revolution, agricultural workers lived and worked in the same location and their labour followed the demands of the land or the home. Work was fluid and seasonal and the concept of time was less important than that of daylight. For those who laboured in a trade rather than on the land, their trade was a means to survival and so they worked for as long as they needed to earn sufficient money, even if that meant leaving a job half finished (Thompson, 1967). During the industrial revolution, people migrated from rural areas into cities to find employment and workers were retrained to think differently about time in order to become successfully integrated into the mechanised production line of the factories. To prepare workers for industrialised working regimes, structured time was introduced within the education system and children were taught to recognise that the institution had 'primary claim' over their time (Hassard, 2000: 28). Hassard (2000) considers this education to be 'conditioning the individual' to adopt and accept the legitimacy of organised time in preparation for the capitalist workplace (2000: 28).

Once in the workplace, workers exchanged their personal time for money and so time became a unit of measurement for commodification (Hassard, 1990; Sharma, 2014; Thrift, 1990). Time had become spatially and financially separated between work and home, and employees began to draw a distinction between what was their own time and what was their employer's time (Adam, 1994; Thompson, 1967). According to Thrift (1990), a new, capitalist reliance on clock-time caused the 'gradual separation of work-time from personal-time' (1990: 114), compartmentalising lives into work and leisure time. Thrift (1990) argues that this separation of time was linked to the rise in consumer culture as workers would seek to spend the money they earned on leisure activities, making the most of the free-time they had outside of work. Although Thrift recognises the presuppositions of class which frame this argument, he fails to account for the gendered way in which 'free' time was spent. Furthermore, this interpretation supports the assumption that paid labour dominates social understandings of work, rendering unpaid domestic work invisible. The capitalist commodification of time is a gendered issue,

where time spent on work in the home has attracted less economic value than time spent on paid work outside the home.

Time as a feminist issue

Work conducted outside the home was directly linked to economic production and workers' wages were generated by the company making profit; a model still dominant in today's labour market. There was no method of linking a worker's output to the company's overall profit, with workers instead paid by the amount of time they worked, as described above. In contrast, time spent on work in the home was not commodified in the same way as it was not regarded as contributing to private, or public, profit. Feminist economists argue that the model of capitalist economics is based on deeply embedded masculine values (Folbre and Nelson, 2000; Swedberg, 2003) and argue that domestic work should be economically valued as 'real work that is essential to the reproduction of the labour force' (Barker, 2013: 20). Whilst this reappraisal of domestic work is a prominent theory in feminist economics, it is still imbued with capitalist assumptions about the supremacy of (paid) labour and the dominance of 'male time' in the form of paid productivity (Bryson, 2007: 121).

The separation of work and home, which occurred during the industrial revolution, did not mean that all men left the home to work and all women stayed behind to manage the home. Working-class women often had no choice but to engage in paid work outside the home (Irving, 2008) and the notion of women staying at home was based on a Victorian middle-class ideology. Paid work was also carried out by women in the home which could include anything from needlework to minding the children of other families. Nevertheless, unpaid domestic work still needed to be done and because of its association with women's 'natural' role of caregiver, the responsibility fell to women in the household, even if they were also in paid work. For many women, the 'second-shift' where women returned home from paid work to engage in unpaid domestic duties – was a reality centuries before the term was used by feminist writers such as Arlie Hochschild (2012). As will be explored in Chapters Five to Seven, increased usage of mobile technology in organisations is improving connectivity (Gregg, 2011) and work which used to be conducted in

offices is now also happening in the home. In Chapter Five, I argue that this is because working from home still reasserts the masculine norm around work and care as it assumes the paid-labourer is able to commit to work, free from the responsibilities and distractions which may arise in the domestic sphere.

Gendered Time

A central argument within theories of social time is that rather than being a universal truth, time has multiple dimensions, meanings and understandings. As well as chronological 'clock-time', time is 'a social process which is subjectively conceptualised and experienced' (Hassard, 1990: 6). Hassard (1990) has written extensively on social time and has argued that time can be regarded as either linear or circular. Linear time is equivalent to clock-time and is the quantifiable, objective measurement which originated in industrial capitalism. In contrast, circular time is more aligned with social time, where time has a qualitative, experiential dimension and can be more easily connected to the cycles and rhythms of nature (Hassard, 1990). Some theorists contest that this approach is too dualistic and Adam (1994) says that time should be analysed in terms of duality rather than dualisms. For Adam (1994), time can be understood and experienced in multiple ways simultaneously, offering the example that it can be 1 o'clock *and* lunchtime, *and* time to walk the dog. Similarly, Adam (1994) also argues for a dissolution of disciplinary dualisms, suggesting that time should be studied across disciplines in order to move away from positivist and interpretivist conceptions of time.

Because of its connotations with positivism and interpretivism, this dualistic analysis of time is also associated with gender. With its capitalist heritage, linear time is often portrayed as a masculine construction based on a male experience of labour (Holmes, 2002; Hughes, 2010). In contrast qualitative time, and its association with subjectivity and the cyclical rhythms of nature, is considered to be more feminine (Bryson, 2007). Whilst most feminist social time theorists recognise the social construction of clock-time is based on a male conceptualisation of time, Christina Hughes (2010) warns that too much focus on the dualism of male and female temporal experiences border on essentialist (see also Glucksmann, 1998).

Studies have repeatedly shown how time-use is gendered (Fagan, 2001a; Hochschild, 1997, 2012) as well as how this gendered experience intersects with class (Lyonette and Crompton, 2015; Sharma, 2014; Warren, 2002). Colette Fagan (2001) explains how these divisions continue to exacerbate temporal inequalities at home and in the workplace:

> *'Men's current work schedules create an organizational logic in the home that undermines attempts to renegotiate the domestic division of time [...] The time squeeze is felt across the classes, but professional classes have more resources to relieve it through outsourcing' (Fagan, 2001: 1209).*

It is this masculine 'organizational logic' that flexible working practices seek to challenge by disrupting traditional working patterns and recreating temporal rhythms which are more attuned to work-life balance. Cultural theorist, Sara Sharma (2014) argues that flexible working practices which facilitate work-life balance merely represent the ways women have always worked. She says that women's working patterns have always been 'more diverse than men's and many women workers have engaged in several [working patterns] simultaneously' (Sharma, 2014: 255). Sharma (2014) warns against referring to flexible working practices as 'non-standard' working patterns as this 'implies a standard based on the male norm' and that non-gendered discourses of working time mask the fact that time remains highly gendered (2014: 255).

Including feminist theories of time in this conceptual framework allows me to challenge the taken-for-granted beliefs and practices which shape everyday routines and experiences of flexible working practices. Moreover, it offers a tool to explore how masculine norms around time are ingrained in these organisations and thus impact their approach to work-life balance and flexible working. The next section introduces the third and final concept of the framework, that of the ideal worker. As the following review of the literature will show, the notion of the ideal worker is also based on masculine norms and assumptions and the concept has been used within work-life balance research to critique the gendered organisation (Acker, 1990).

Gendered organisations and the Ideal Worker

In 1990, Joan Acker wrote her influential theory on gendered organisations, arguing that masculine assumptions are embedded and normalised within organisational structures (Acker, 1990). Acker's theory suggests that organisational processes follow an organisational logic that maintains these masculine norms, and that (intersecting) gender inequalities are sustained through practices she defines as 'inequality regimes' (Acker, 1990, 2006). Inequality regimes are taken-for-granted practices such as job descriptions, performance assessments and reward structures, which give the appearance of gender neutrality but actually privilege behaviours associated with (traditional) masculinity (Acker, 1990; Borgkvist *et al.*, 2018; Williams, Muller and Kilanski, 2012).

Acker's theory of gendered organisations is still widely used in feminist organisational studies, but it is not without its critics. Britton (2000) critiqued Acker's theory of gendered organisations as lacking in specificity for theoretical or empirical application in organisational settings. Britton (2000) also argued that because gendered assumptions are so embedded in our society and culture, attempts to remove gender regimes entirely to achieve 'post-gendered' organisations are too ambitious. Rather, the goal should be finding ways to make organisational practices less gendered and therefore less oppressive for women (Britton, 2000). I would extend Britton's (2000) critique to also include minority groups who do not conform to the masculine logic which Acker (1990) identifies.

The concept of the ideal worker is constructed in *Hierarchies, Jobs, Bodies: A Theory of Gendered Organizations* (1990) where Acker locates the 'disembodied worker' as desirable according to (gendered) organisational logic. The following extract has become the platform for many organisational researchers who use the concept of the ideal worker to analyse a range of phenomena within the organisational setting, including studies on work-life balance and flexible work:

> *'In organizational logic, filling the abstract job is a disembodied worker who exists only for the work [...] Too many obligations outside the boundaries of the job would make a worker unsuited for the position. The closest the disembodied worker doing the*

abstract job comes to a real worker is the male worker whose life centers [sic] on his full-time, life-long job, while his wife or another woman takes care of his personal needs and his children. The woman worker, assumed to have legitimate obligations other than those required by the job, did not fit with the abstract job.'

(Acker, 1990: 149)

For Acker, the ideal worker for any job is represented by a male worker who is able to focus his full attention on work because his wife takes care of all other elements of his life. This model is based on heteronormative family formations and grounded in the ideology of the breadwinner model, but Acker's contribution is to identify how the gendered organisation produces and reproduces this gendered segregation of labour.

This relationship between the ideal worker model and the segregation of paid and unpaid labour is the focus of Joan C. Williams's (2000) book, *Unbending gender: why family and work conflict and what to do about it*. Williams (2000) identifies the ideal worker as a defining characteristic of what she refers to as 'domesticity', where domesticity represents the separation of work and family and the gender norms that sustain it. Williams's definition of the ideal worker resembles that given by Acker above but emphasises how this definition excludes women who work less than full time or choose to stay at home. Williams (2000) argues that men also suffer from the ideology of the ideal worker as it perpetuates the dual economy which discourages men from participating in domestic and care work. Because 'caregivers cannot perform as the ideal workers' (2000: 13), the ideal worker norm sustains the breadwinner model but also puts pressure on men to perform in the workplace as 'success' depends on 'ideal worker status' (2000: 16).

Whilst Williams's definition is useful for understanding how the ideal worker is conceptualised within the work-life balance literature, it still subscribes to heteronormative assumptions about the family and assumes this is a universal experience. Williams's focus on the mother/father dichotomy is not unusual and this construct of the family still dominates the work-life balance literature (e.g. Blair-Loy et al., 2015; Borgkvist et al., 2018; Kmec et al., 2014). However, this focus

on the family overlooks the impact that the ideal worker ideology has on employees who are not in traditional family formations. The pressure to sacrifice life in pursuit of work harms all workers, and this recognition is lacking from most interpretations of the ideal worker doctrine.

In 2006, Acker updated her work on gendered organisations to make the meaning of inequality regimes more explicit and extended to include intersecting gendered experiences. In this article, Acker argues that studies of gender inequality in organisations, including her own, have assumed that categories of social inequality are mutually exclusive rather than 'complex, mutually reinforcing or contradicting processes' of 'dominance and oppression' (Acker, 2006: 442). Acker updates her original definition of gendered organisations to acknowledge intersecting inequalities within organisational logic and recognise that in most contexts the ideal worker is actually a *white* man. Acker (2006) also explains that sometimes the ideal worker is required to be low-skilled and compliant, meaning the role is considered more suitable for women, in particular women of colour.

Acker's work on intersectional workplace inequality is a valuable contribution to intersectional, feminist scholarship but this description of inequality regimes is also a reminder that not all jobs are designed with the white male norm in mind. However, inequality regimes have created unequal access to work, where jobs with the greatest power, authority and remuneration are designed for and occupied by white men. I will use Acker's theory of inequality regimes within my own analysis as it reflects my poststructuralist intersectional feminist approach to research. My analysis will recognise that the ideal worker is not always a white man, but rather that it is context specific, a nuance that is often lacking from studies which adopt Acker's theories. Where I do refer to Acker's original conception of the ideal worker, I will label this as the 'traditional' ideal worker. By doing so, I challenge the notion that there is one universal ideal worker model, instead arguing that the characteristics of an ideal worker are context dependent, changing over time and place. This contextual analysis of the ideal worker complements my framework which incorporates social theories of time and negotiation, as this temporal perspective on gender and flexible work offers a unique contribution to the field.

Some commentators argue that Acker's theories are outdated in 21st century workplace and her ideas are less salient now that women's participation in paid-labour is almost on a par with men's. Writing after Acker's second paper, Williams et al. (2012) argue that the model of gendered organisations is outdated and does not reflect the practices of modern organisations or their employees. Their study of female geoscientists found that gendered organisational logic was still creating gender inequality in the workplace, but not in the ways Acker described. Williams et al. (2012) found that modern knowledge workers had to engage in self-promotion and networking, activities which are shown to disadvantage women in a male environment, and advocated that theories of gendered organisations should be updated to better reflect twenty-first century work practices. However, Williams et al.'s study was conducted with 30 female geoscientists in the UK, and whilst this revised model may reflect the conditions for privileged knowledge workers, there are many female workers in the labour market without the means to utilise networks or career maps. Whilst the participants in my study have the privilege of being employed in secure, white-collar jobs, their work and career prospects cannot be compared to the highly-educated, highly-mobile female workers in Williams et al.'s study. Instead, their position in the labour market more closely resembles Acker's traditional model which relies upon structures such as annual appraisals rather than career mapping through networking opportunities.

The critique raised by Williams et al. (2012) risks creating an artificial binary between highly-educated knowledge workers in the 21st century economy and low-skilled labourers in organisations with more traditional market values. Research conducted in recent years has routinely found evidence of Acker's inequality regimes in contemporary organisations, from a Dutch University (van den Brink and Benschop, 2012) to the Australian Parliament (Crawford and Pini, 2011). Because of its relevance to the work-life balance debate, the ideal worker continues to be a popular analytical framework for those researching gender and flexible work, such as Borgkvist et al. (2018), Kmec et al. (2014) and Teasdale (2013). Acker's work continues to be widely used within work-life balance studies and Bailyn & Fletcher (2018) argue that the field would benefit from a more nuanced application of Acker's theory to investigate the 'gendered character of organizational procedures

and practices' (2018: 5). In an era of individualist, essentialist workplace initiatives such as 'Lean In' (Sandberg, 2013), mentoring and skill development, Acker's probing critique of gendered organisations is perhaps now more significant than ever (Bailyn and Fletcher, 2018).

Conclusion

This chapter has introduced the conceptual framework which I will use to analyse the data and answer the research questions proposed in the previous chapter. The framework utilises three distinct but complementary theoretical approaches and as part of this conclusion, I will explain how each concept will be used to answer my research question and offer some original contributions to the work-life balance literature.

Firstly, I will apply Strauss's (1978) theory of negotiation to analyse the temporal and structural contexts in which flexible working practices are negotiated in these organisations. Whilst work-life balance research recognises the role of negotiation, there is a lack of research which deconstructs the process of negotiation, and I will do this by focusing on the power relationships Strauss (1978) identifies as part of temporal and contextual negotiation processes. I will also consider how negotiations extend beyond interactions and becomes a subjective, cognitive process, such as negotiating competing masculinities or constructions of motherhood. Strauss's (1978) theories of negotiation, in particular the subprocess of structural and negotiation contexts, will be used to address the research aim: 'how is gender constructed when employees negotiate their flexible working practices, inside and outside the organisation?'. It will extend Strauss's application of the theory beyond the workplace and into the home to provide a more holistic understanding of how employees negotiate flexible working practices in their everyday lives, and how these interactions are imbued with social constructions of gender and gender roles.

Work-life balance research inevitably involves stories about time and by using social theories of time, I expand on current knowledge by recognising the multiple dimensions of time and their relationship to gender. As the following chapter will

show, work-life balance research is often about how individuals negotiate time and space and this study will critique this notion by using feminist theories of time. By using a conceptual framework which recognises time as socially constructed, I can also critique the way flexible working practices are managed by the two case-study organisations and interrogate the way time is constructed within the finance culture to answer the research question: 'how does the culture of finance impact flexible working practices in these organisations?'. I will use this conceptual framework to highlight the interplay between power and social constructions of time and how this may affect access to flexible working practices, as well as offer a critique of the dominance of masculine, linear time in the workplace.

This research will address the call for further research which uses these theories to critique organisations' processes and practices, using flexible working practices to frame this exploration. I will use Acker's theory of gendered organisations as an ontological concept and focus on how the ideal worker is constructed by the research participants. Taking my cue from Acker (2006), and to complement the contextual and temporal focus of the conceptual framework thus far, I will extend traditional analyses in this field by considering how the ideal worker is constructed in different contexts. The concept of the ideal worker will also help me answer the research question: 'how does gender affect employees' access to flexible working practices in the organisation?', including how the ideal worker is subjectively constructed by those in different positions of power across the organisation.

This conclusion has shown how each concept within the framework will be used to analyse the research data and answer the research questions, but this is an oversimplification of how the concepts and theories will be applied in practice. The strength of this framework is in how the theories interact and complement one another to provide an original insight into how gender is embedded in these employees' flexible working practices. Firstly, these sociological understandings of time and negotiations are connected by their emphasis on context and temporality, because for Strauss (1978), negotiations take place in a particular temporal context which influences the outcome of that negotiation. When considering work-life balance and flexible working, time is often the most critical factor being negotiated. Using Strauss's (1978) terminology, time is unique in the context of flexible working as it can simultaneously be a 'variable' and the 'issue under negotiation'. Secondly,

time is also integrated within the construction of the traditional ideal worker, as someone who works full-time, reserving their time and energy for paid-work. As part of the work-life balance discourse, flexible working is beginning to challenge these working practices and the capitalist constructions of time which support them, something which will be explored in the next chapter. Finally, the traditional ideal worker is both something that relies on negotiations with others but is also under negotiation itself. The behaviours of the traditional ideal worker are only made viable by successfully negotiating for someone else to take responsibility for all domestic duties outside of work. However, with women entering the labour-market, combined with greater cultural awareness of work-life balance, the characteristics of the ideal worker are under negotiation, a theme that reoccurs in the next chapter and throughout the thesis.

I will use this framework throughout the analysis of the findings in Chapters Five to Seven and return to it in detail during the Discussion in Chapter Eight. The next chapter will continue the literature review by introducing the literature on flexible working practices within the wider body of work-life balance studies and carving a niche for my research within that field.

Chapter Three: Context & Literature Review

Introduction

This chapter will consolidate and extend the two previous chapters by reviewing the wider field of work-life balance literature and situating my study within the current research on flexible working practices. The aim of my research is to understand how gender is embedded in flexible working practices in the UK asset finance sector, but as the volume of research conducted in this industry is sparse I will draw upon studies from a wide range of economic sectors, both in the UK and beyond. Most studies will foreground gender in their analysis and several will reflect the themes of negotiation, time and the ideal worker, which were introduced in the previous chapter.

As a broad, umbrella term for topics such as flexible working practices, the area of work-life balance is of interest to researchers across social-science disciplines, and sociological research in this area tends to be influenced by literature from business studies and family studies, amongst others. These studies can themselves be influenced by broader theories originating from economics or psychology, meaning the work-life balance literature offers a rich, multi-disciplinary perspective for studying flexible work. As well as complementing my feminist research ethic, I believe this multi-disciplinary approach strengthens the validity of the research within the field but recognise that it can also result in contradictory findings. The majority of the literature selected here will originate from sociological studies, but as work-life balance is of key interest across labour and employment studies, particularly for organisational theorists, there will, inevitably, also be literature written by researchers with a psychological background. Some of these studies are key pieces of work within the wider field, so this review will offer a sociological critique of this literature by challenging how the authors have addressed issues of power and inequality, and whether they lean toward structural or agential explanations.

The literature review will open by providing a contextual background for this study. It will begin by citing the political history of the right to request flexible working

policy in the UK before introducing the social and economic changes which led to this legislation. These changes started with women's entry into the labour market during the 20th century and this section reviews the persistent gender segregation of paid and unpaid labour. This contextual analysis is followed by the main body of the literature review, which opens by documenting the history of work-life balance policies and discourse, which explains why research in this area is often approached from a gendered perspective. I will situate my research within contemporary conceptions of work-life balance, before reviewing literature which focuses on employees' access to flexible working practices. I frame this literature in terms of power and inequality to review how researchers have approached questions around gendered access to flexible work in the past. Narrowing the focus of the literature review further, the next section will focus on studies into flexible working practices in the finance sector. There will be an emphasis on research which foregrounds the culture of finance, to examine existing knowledge on the relationship between a financial culture and the experience of flexible working practices in the sector. The final section will review the key themes within work-life balance research, paying particular attention to theoretical perspectives relevant to analysing flexible working practices. As well as reiterating the role of negotiations within flexible working research, this section provides an overview of the main concepts used throughout the thesis and those most relevant within the conceptual framework introduced in the previous chapter.

Evolution of the right to request flexible working policy in the UK

The focus of this study is employees' everyday experiences of flexible working practices but as stated in Chapter One, the research was motivated, in part, by the extension of the right to request flexible working policy in 2014. The evolution of the right to request policy in the UK provides an important historical context for this study and so this section starts by chronicling the policy from 2003 to 2014, before addressing some of the most common critiques of the right to request approach in the UK and internationally.

The first right to request flexible working policy was introduced by Tony Blair's Labour government as part of the revised Employment Act (2002). In April 2003, carers of children under six years old (or disabled children under 18) were given a legal right to ask their employer for flexible working. The definition of carers extended beyond married, heterosexual parents to include adoptive and foster parents, as well as recognising the diversity of step-families and non-married unions. In 2004, the government extended the right to request to carers of disabled or infirm relatives over the age of 18, and in 2009, six years after the initial legislation, the right to request was extended to include parents and carers of children under the age of 17. The Department of Trade and Industry (DTI) reported that the introduction of the right to request policy had created some 'dramatic changes' (DTI, 2005 cited in Pyper, 2018: 18) in the increased availability in flexible working practices for parents across the labour market. In the run-up to the 2010 General Elections, the manifestos of the Conservative Party and the Liberal Democrats included plans to extend the right to request flexible working to all employees (Pyper, 2018). Whilst the government eventually delivered on that pledge, it took another four years for the Children and Families Act (2014) to include this legislative change.

The current statutory 'right to request' application process has changed little from its original conception in 2003. Employees are entitled to request a change to their contracted working pattern, as long as they have been employed in the organisation for at least 26 weeks. A statutory request should be made in writing to the employer who is given three months to respond and all requests must be dealt with in a 'reasonable manner', as defined by ACAS guidelines. As part of the formal application, employees should give details of the type of flexibility requested as well as explaining how they think their flexible working practices might impact the business, as well as how any negative implications can be dealt with. If the employer agrees to the request, a formal change should be made to the employee's contract. The legislation includes no statutory right to appeal a rejection and instead encourages organisations to provide their own appeals procedure. Whether accepted or rejected, employees are only entitled to make one request to their employer every 12 months. Whilst the premise of the policy followed the guidelines introduced by the Labour Government, the legislation was

reconceptualised from its Employment Act (2002) heritage into a family matter under the 2014 Act. Whilst the introduction of a new government led to a series of structural changes within the Parliamentary organisation, the rehoming of this act may also reflect a shift toward a more traditional ideology around family and work within the Coalition government.

Since the right to request policy was first introduced there has been a 'considerable increase in flexible working options offered by employers' (Hegewisch, 2009: 59). Awareness amongst employees has also increased and the government funded Fourth Work-life Balance Survey found that 75 per cent of respondents were aware of their right to request in 2012, compared to just 56 per cent in 2007 (Tipping *et al.*, 2012). The government has not commissioned a fifth work-life balance survey and whilst some studies are starting to emerge through independent channels, there is a stark absence of official data on the impact of the right to request policy (Jones and Jones, 2011), particularly since the legislation was amended in 2014. This could be a consequence of the quasi-formal way the policy was introduced. The legislation was deigned to 'nudge' organisations in the right direction and, 'encourage rather than impose cultural change in the workplace' (Taylor, 2017 cited in Pyper, 2018: 15). Academics have denounced the policy as doing nothing more than offering a procedural framework, since employers are under no obligation to accept flexible working requests (Bond, 2004; Burnett *et al.*, 2010; Himmelweit, 2007). A report commissioned by the Employment and Human Rights Commission (EHRC) in 2009 found that this 'soft' policy approach was limiting the progress of cultural change both inside and outside the workplace:

> *"The 'soft' formulation of the UK Right to Request, and a lack of effective mechanisms for mediation within workplaces […] limits the potential of the legislation to lead to a positive workplace change"*
>
> *(Hegewisch et al., 2009: 59)*

The report also noted that the policy is doing little to affect gender inequalities and should not be viewed as a 'panacea' for solving work-life conflict:

"Men are disadvantaged directly, by having less enforceable rights (while often facing stronger cultural and organisational barriers); women are disadvantaged indirectly because unless men are increasing their use of flexible working, particularly for care-giving responsibilities, flexible working practices are likely to reinforce existing gender inequalities at work […] The Right to Request, and flexible working more broadly, is not a panacea for all work-family conflict. Childcare availability is the major constraint on women's ability to work"

(Hegewisch, 2009; 59 – 60)

This section has provided the policy context for this study by focusing on the evolution of the right to request flexible working legislation in the UK. I have argued that although the policy has improved access to flexible working for many workers, the 'soft' legislative approach is unlikely to transform socially prescribed gender roles around work and care. This contradicts the claims made by the Jenny Willott MP and the Coalition Government in Chapter One, who said that making flexible working practices available to all employees would challenge cultural norms around gender and care, a stance which is further undermined by the government reconceptualising the policy as a family issue under the Children and Families Act (2014). This study explores these two competing arguments to establish whether access to flexible working practices is unequal, at two organisations who claim to offer flexible working to all employees. I will deconstruct these practices to understand the subtle and nuanced ways in which gender differences are embedded in employees' experiences of flexible working.

The following section will continue to examine the social and economic context in which this study is set and introduce literature relevant to the topic. It will begin by investigating how the gender composition of the UK labour market changed during the 20th century and how this has shaped the government's approach to social policies around flexible working and work-life balance. This section will also consider how this changing labour market affected household formations and

domestic practices in the UK, and how these have been shaped by specific types of flexible working practices.

The changing composition of labour

This section is presented in two halves to reflect the connections and interdependencies between the spheres of work and home. The first half will begin by using survey data to explore women's integration into the UK labour market before reviewing feminist literature and theories which have been used to understand this shift. The second half of will review the work-life balance literature which focuses on how domestic labour has changed as a result of women's increasing participation in paid-work. This section sets the scene for the rest of the chapter which narrows the field of literature to focus on flexible working practices within the wider scope of work-life balance research.

Gender composition and segregation of the labour market

The gender composition of the UK workforce has changed significantly during the latter half of the 20th century. According to the Office for National Statistics (ONS) in 2018, 71 per cent of women were in some form of paid employment compared to just 53 per cent in 1971 (ONS, 2018b). This diversifying workforce was the result of several social and economic changes, including legislative intervention resulting from second-wave feminist activism, with the introduction of The Equal Pay Act (1970) and The Sex Discrimination Act (1975). Women were also entering the labour market because men were leaving it. During the 1980s a significant number of men lost their jobs as the manufacturing sector declined but the subsequent emergence of a new economy, promoting the value of a service industry, created more jobs for women (Irving, 2015). Gerson & Peiss (1985) argue that women's entry into the office environment as low paid, low skilled clerical workers is an example of a gender negotiation. The unequal position of men and women in the social order meant that women were 'invited' into the office by men but rather

than 'disrupting the dominant system of gender relations' in the workplace, the gender hierarchy was 'strengthened' as women adopted roles which replicated their domestic experience, swapping the role of wife for that of a secretary (Gerson & Peiss (1985: 323).

Analysing women's entry into the corporate workplace using social theories of negotiation offers one explanation for why gendered occupational segregation is so entrenched in working practices and why these gender inequalities persist. Horizontal segregation, when occupations are segregated according to gender roles, means that women are 'disproportionately concentrated within particular occupational sectors whilst being significantly underrepresented in others' (Woodfield, 2007: 5–6). Data collected by the ONS (2018a) in August 2018 shows that whilst some industry sectors are still highly gendered, the gap is closing in several areas of the economy. Women are highly concentrated in public sector services, namely Health & Social Work and Education, where women make-up 72 per cent and 79 per cent of the workforce, respectively (ONS, 2018b). In contrast, men dominate in more traditional industries including Utilities, Construction and Transport & Storage, representing over 80 per cent of the workforce in these sectors. However, many sectors are reaching near gender parity, including Wholesale & Retail, Finance & Insurance, and Professional & Technical (ONS, 2018b). Whilst these statistics show a promising convergence of men and women into some sectors, it does not account for the types of job they do or how senior those jobs are. This is the basis of vertical gender segregation whereby women are 'disproportionately present at certain levels of all occupational sectors and disproportionately underrepresented in others' (Woodfield, 2007: 6). In 2017, 8 per cent of women were working as managers, directors or senior officials compared to 13 per cent of men (McGuinness, 2018). Whilst progress is slow, more women are entering senior positions in the UK and government initiatives, such as the Davies Review to increase the percentage of women on boards and gender pay gap reporting, are at least raising the profile of the problem.

Gendered segregation of domestic labour

The gap is closing in the gendered segregation of paid-labour, but less progress has been made when it comes to unpaid labour in the home. Despite an increase in women's labour market participation, men's participation in care and domestic work has not increased at a comparable rate (Lewis, Campbell and Huerta, 2008). In the previous chapter, I argued that the gendered division of labour can be explained using feminist critiques of time. Capitalist, or industrial, time created an artificial division between work and home which contributed to the devaluation of domestic production and reproduction. This devaluation is amplified by the notion of the masculine ideal worker who serves the economy and the home by engaging in paid-work, whilst his wife takes care of all domestic responsibilities. This section will review the work-life balance literature around gendered experiences of care and housework, focusing on research which connects this phenomenon to labour market participation and social policy development.

Gendered caring

The 35th British Social Attitudes (BSA) survey found that only 8 per cent of respondents agreed that it was a man's job to earn money and a women's job to look after the family and the home (NatCen, 2018). The report argues that this shows how much attitudes towards gender roles have changed in recent years, but in the same survey, 71 per cent felt that mothers of pre-school children should stay at home or only work part-time and once the children started school, 49 per cent felt that mothers should still only work part-time. These results also vary across social groups, with older people and those with a lower education more likely to hold traditional attitudes on gender roles, a finding which was exacerbated by gender and income (NatCen, 2018). Although the amount of time fathers spend on childcare has been steadily increasing (Lyonette and Crompton, 2015) the results from the BSA survey suggest the majority of the British public still consider the care of young children to be a mother's responsibility and incompatible with full-time paid work.

In the UK, 42 per cent of all women in employment work part-time (less than 30 hours per week) compared to only 13 per cent of all men (McGuinness, 2018). This has led some commentators to argue that the traditional male breadwinner ideology is being replaced by a 'one-and-a-half' earner model (Ciccia and Bleijenbergh, 2014; Lewis, Campbell and Huerta, 2008). A lack of state funded childcare provision has created a scenario where women with children are channelled into part-time work and men into very long full-time hours and so the one-and-a-half earner is now the dominant household model in the UK (Ciccia and Bleijenbergh, 2014; Fagan, 2001b; Verhoef *et al.*, 2015).

Women who work part-time are often concentrated into low quality jobs, defined as such by their low remuneration, minimal task and time autonomy, insecurity, and lack of training opportunities and career prospects (Coyle, 2005; Irving, 2015; Lewis, 2010; Warren, 2015b; Warren and Lyonette, 2018). There is evidence that the quality of part-time work is starting to improve but this is highly segregated by class and position in the occupational hierarchy (Warren and Lyonette, 2018). Lewis (2010) argues that women tend to accept these poorer conditions as 'the inevitable price to be paid for a deviation from the socially constructed norm of rigid long hours of work which are incompatible with family responsibilities' (2010: 359). Lewis (2010) believes this is why few men choose to work part-time, but more recent studies suggest the reasons are more complex. Research in Sweden, a country renowned for its egalitarian welfare reforms, has found that mothers of young children are 14 times more likely than fathers to reduce their working hours (Larsson and Björk, 2017). The authors of this study suggest that masculine norms around full-time work and providing for the family are still prevalent in Swedish society, as is the public perception that part-time work is somewhat 'unmanly' (Larsson and Björk, 2017: 155). This link between full-time work and masculinity can be understood by using Acker's notion of the ideal worker, introduced in the previous chapter. The ideal worker ideology reinforces the breadwinner model as men feel pressurised into working toward success in the workplace rather than participating domestically (Williams, 2000).

This prevailing relationship between masculinity and the breadwinner ideology has also been found in recent research in the UK (Gatrell *et al.*, 2015) and across Europe

(Schmidt, 2017; Wada, Backman and Forwell, 2015). However, research in this field also suggests that being involved in parenting is more important to fathers today than it was in previous generations, although the meaning of being 'involved' is subjectively constructed (Dermott, 2005; Duckworth and Buzzanell, 2009; Lyonette and Crompton, 2015). Interviews with 25 British fathers found that rather than focusing on the amount of time they spent with children, fathers considered the quality of time to be more important (Dermott, 2005; see also Wada et al., 2015). They felt it was important to be available for their children if they needed them, such as attending school events or participating in their children's hobbies. Whilst these fathers felt they were more involved than the previous generation, there was still a distinction between what they considered as spending quality time with the children as opposed to being more involved in routine tasks, such as making breakfast or brushing the children's teeth (Dermott, 2005). This prioritising of 'quality' parenting time may be symptomatic of fathers' continued long working hours, but it may also suggest that fathers still consider providing for the family as a more essential involvement in parenting (Schmidt, 2017; Wada, Backman and Forwell, 2015; Williams, 2008).

With women and men both engaging in paid-work, combined with an absence of welfare provision for childcare, relatives are increasingly being called upon to assist with domestic care work. In many families it is the grandparents who provide informal childcare support and Kanji (2018) argues that grandparent care has a real value to the economy and substantially impacts the UK labour market. Kanji's data analysis, based on the UK Millennium Cohort Study, found that grandparents involvement in childcare increases the labour force participation of mothers across society (Kanji, 2018). However, grandparent care is also gendered as grandmothers provide the majority of care and may be sacrificing their own income to do so. Grandmothers are increasingly accessing flexible working practices, most commonly part-time hours, to care for grandchildren and these older women may already be in a 'precarious financial position due to an intermittent paid work history caused by prior caring' (Kanji, 2018: 538; Loretto and Vickerstaff, 2015). Moreover, older women who care for grandchildren are also more likely to care for elderly relatives as well (Grundy and Henretta, 2006) meaning that gendered forms of care continue to span across generations, begging the question, 'what will

happen when these daughters' daughters enter the workforce?' (Loretto and Vickerstaff, 2015: 244). The gendered dynamic of care is changing but slowly, and the reasons for this are complex and involve deeply embedded social norms. The next section will continue this theme of gendered domesticity but turn the attention to the division of domestic work.

Gendered housework

In *The Second Shift* (2012), Hochschild argues that (heterosexual) couples engaged in 'gender strategies' to negotiate domestic tasks but that women were still overwhelmingly responsible for routine, household arrangements. Hochschild (2012) found that some women prioritised domestic work by reducing the number of hours they spent doing paid work, and others would seek additional help, often in the form of paid labour. Lyonette & Crompton's (2015) findings support this assertion as the women in their sample felt it was their responsibility to organise the housework and therefore arrange any paid, domestic help. They also found that hiring paid domestic help had the effect of excusing men from sharing domestic tasks as it simply served to reduce the additional burden of domestic labour on women (Lyonette & Crompton, 2015). The option of hiring domestic help is only available to higher earners and some studies have found that household income and social class affect the way men and women negotiate their domestic arrangements (Hochschild, 2012; Lyonette and Crompton, 2015; Warren, 2011). This echoes the sentiments in Chapter Three which recognised that the gendered division of time intersects with class (and other social inequalities) and that some women have more resources to relieve this burden than others.

Respondents in a recent qualitative study by Lyonette & Crompton (2015) agreed that housework should be shared according to the time each partner has available but 'as a general rule' women were still carrying out more housework than men, 'irrespective of their working hours or earnings.' (2015; 37). Where men do contribute there is a tendency for them to spend time on more visible tasks such as cooking and shopping (Lyonette and Crompton, 2015) rather than more routine

jobs like cleaning (Coltrane, 2000). In heteronormative family formations, mothers are significantly more likely than any other family member to engage in routine tasks which benefit the whole household, such as preparing food, cleaning, doing the laundry and going shopping (Craig and Powell, 2018). These studies show how domestic time continues to be gendered irrespective of the amount of time spent in paid work, a phenomenon which can be explained using the feminist critiques of economics and capitalist time which were made in the previous chapter (Bryson, 2007; Fagan, 2001).

As Hochschild identifies in *The Second Shift* (2012), many couples are in a transitional phase between traditional and egalitarian gender ideologies. The literature reviewed in this section supports this theory but asserts that progress is slow and gendered norms around work and care are deeply entrenched in social attitudes, welfare policies and work-life balance practices. My research will explore the interplay between these gendered norms and flexible working practices by deconstructing the negotiations which initiate and sustain the work-life balance of employees in the sample. Rather than simply analysing gendered divisions of labour time this study will seek to understand how those divisions are sustained or challenged through flexible working practices and the way participants negotiate work and time, both in the workplace and across the rest of life.

The literature reviewed so far in this chapter has established the political, economic and social niche within which this study is situated. The remainder of the chapter will focus on relevant literature within the wider field of work-life balance. To introduce that field, the following section charts the chronology of the work-life balance discourse within the academic literature and locates this study amongst those scholars who seek to dissolve the boundaries between the spheres of work and home.

Evolution of work-life balance discourse and terminology

This section considers the interconnected history of work-life balance policy, practice and research. It will explore the evolution of discourse and terminology

from the latter part of the 20th century and consider possibilities for the future of the field. Flexible working is a core element of work-life balance policies and practices, but the terminology of work-life balance is often used as an umbrella concept to cover a variety of initiatives such as childcare facilities or subsidies, healthcare, employee assistance programmes (EAPs) and entitlement to leave (Beauregard and Henry, 2009; Ollier-Malaterre and Andrade, 2015). Whilst these entitlements are important for promoting a holistic approach to work-life balance, the focus of this study is on flexible working practices and the literature reviewed in this section reflects that focus. The section will begin by charting the evolution of the policy discourse in the literature to show how the terminology of work-life balance emerged from the discourse surrounding family-friendly policies at the beginning of the 21st century. It will then review attempts to challenge the concept of a work-life binary and move away from a focus on the family to a more inclusive definition. This section will also include a rationale for the terminology I use in the thesis, extending the discussion in Chapter One.

From family-friendly to gender-neutral

As part of a wider strategy to reshape economic and social practices in the UK, family-friendly working was promoted by the New Labour government following their election in 1997 (Stokes and Wood, 2017). Short of creating legislation to support working families, the government encouraged businesses to promote alternative working practices, such as part-time hours, to attract and retain working mothers (Fleetwood, 2007; Lewis, 1997, 2010). Although labelled as 'family-friendly', the move was designed to address a labour shortage within the core workforce during a period of sustained economic growth (Fleetwood, 2007; Lewis, 2010).

At the beginning of the chapter I charted the evolution of the right to request flexible working legislation in the UK, which explained how it took the government six years from being elected to incorporate flexible working practices into law. These legislations were designed around the family-friendly rubric which has been criticised as targeting a sub-section of employees whilst marginalising everyone

else. Firstly, the requirement to address a defined skills shortage meant that family-friendly policies were regarded as a perk for professional middle-class mothers, marginalising women who worked in peripheral occupations (Lewis, 2010). Secondly, the focus on mothers excluded fathers and women without children and so at the turn of the 21st century, the 'family-friendly' discourse was phased out and replaced by work-life balance, which was deemed to be more inclusive (Fleetwood, 2007). Despite being rebranded, work-life balance policies are tarnished by the legacy of the family-friendly discourse with working-class women, women of colour, fathers and child-free employees still feeling marginalised by work-life balance policy, practice and research (Lewis, 2010; Warren, 2015a; Wilkinson, Tomlinson and Gardiner, 2017).

The introduction of the work-life balance terminology was presented as a departure from the family-friendly discourse towards a more inclusive definition to examine workplace change. However, some scholars have argued that changing the terminology only served to make gendered norms around care and work invisible to policy makers. Work-life policies were criticised for being gender-blind, and thus not acknowledging that childcare is still a gendered issue, or that employers will continue to make assumptions about who should access work-life balance initiatives, such as flexible working practices (Burnett *et al.*, 2010; Lewis, Gambles and Rapoport, 2007; Lewis, 2010; Smithson and Stokoe, 2005). Smithson & Stokoe (2005) analysed the language and discourse generated during interviews and focus groups with over 90 employees from the finance sector and found that simply inserting the language of equality into organisational discourse does little to change wide-spread assumptions about gender roles or advance gender equality:

> *"We found that the de-gendered terms do not in practice change the widespread assumption within organizations by managers and employees, both women and men, that these issues are strongly linked to women. Both terms are overwhelmingly used in connection to working women with families."*
>
> *(Smithson & Stokoe,*
> *2005: 164)*

40

These embodied assumptions can lead to fathers feeling less entitled to access work-life balance initiatives, perpetuating the belief that such policies are aimed at mothers (Gatrell and Cooper, 2008). Reconceptualising family-friendly policies into gender neutral work-life balance initiatives created a paradox where policies originally designed to help women return to work and advance their careers ultimately reinforced the idea that family is a woman's issue (Lewis, 2010).

A holistic approach

As well as masking gendered inequalities around work and care, the concept of work-life balance has also been criticised for sustaining the binary between work and life. These arguments critique the continuing focus on work versus care and advocate a more holistic approach which recognises the fluidity of work-life balance boundaries (Eikhof, Warhurst and Haunschild, 2007). Furthermore, the terminology implies that finding a balance between work and life is an achievable goal and thereby assumes both domains have an equal weighting or value (Fagan *et al.*, 2012; Gambles, Lewis and Rapoport, 2008). Some researchers have successfully used alternative terminology, such as work-life integration or reconciliation (Eräranta and Kantola, 2016; Fagan *et al.*, 2012) to move away from the assumption that the two spheres can be balanced. In an effort to fully disassociate from the earlier family-friendly connotations, others have avoided catchy terms and positioned work as something that can be harmonised or integrated with 'the rest of life' (Ayudhya and Lewis, 2011; Gambles, Lewis and Rapoport, 2008). Whilst these alternative concepts may more accurately reflect the experience of juggling work and life, they continue to reassert the separation of the spheres and what Eikhof et al (2007) refer to as 'negative and reductionist assumptions' about the experience of work (2007: 328). Furthermore, none of these concepts have threatened to challenge the dominance of the work-life balance terminology within either academic discourse or the popular psyche.

As well as attempting to dismantle the work-life binary, some researchers are also calling for a broader, more inclusive definition of what the rest of life involves. This debate is not new but remains relevant, as the previous section suggests. Warren

(2004) argued for a more nuanced understanding of how part-time working mothers experienced work-life balance, citing several key 'life domains' which could measure work-life balance more accurately, including financial resources, leisure, friendships and health. More recently, Sullivan (2017) also advocated for wellbeing to be included in work-life balance measures, reiterating a similar argument made by Guest (2002).

As well as expanding the definition of life, there is also a growing call for expanding the definition of families or disregarding it altogether. Sullivan (2017) argues that studies of the family remain an important avenue for work-life balance research, but the language of the *family* should be replaced with *families* which more accurately reflects the diversity of family units in contemporary society. As well as challenging the heteronormativity of work-life balance research, this can also include measures which recognise life-course and the intersections of age and gender that affect work-life balance (Sullivan, 2017). Older workers are increasingly turning to flexible working practices to manage their work-life balance, an experience which is also gendered as many older women are adjusting their working time to engage in unpaid care work (Loretto and Vickerstaff, 2015). However, some researchers feel that the future work-life debates should move away from the work-family dichotomy altogether as the work-life balance of those without family responsibilities is still considered less legitimate within the workplace (Özbilgin *et al.*, 2011; O'Hagan, 2014).

As stated in Chapter One, I will continue to use the terminology of work-life balance throughout the thesis as it is the term most widely used by researchers, policy makers, practitioners and the general public. Whilst I recognise this sustains the very work-life binary I am trying to challenge in my research, as stated above, there are currently no preferable terms available. Like several of the researchers cited above, I consider my working definition of work-life balance to move beyond the exclusive dualism of work and family to consider all other elements of life. With the right to request flexible working practices now available to all employees the conceptualisation of work-life balance must be more inclusive so that all social groups and life experiences are valued. The following section will continue to critique the work-life balance discourse from those who have historically been

excluded from this research. It will start by reviewing the research on how managers' attitudes can affect employees' access to flexible working practices, then move on to review the literature on fathers' experiences of flexible working practices. This section will conclude by introducing the small but important body of research on the flexible working practices of those without caring responsibilities, which is important for this study which looks at how gender norms affect access to flexible working.

Unequal Access to Flexible Working Practices

By adjusting when, where and how we work, flexible working practices challenge the construction of industrial time and the artificial binary of work and home (see Chapter Three). By doing so, flexible working can disrupt the ideology of the traditional ideal worker but depending on the social and organisational context it also has the potential to reinforce it. This section will begin to develop this argument by focusing on how unequal power relations are embedded in the way flexible working practices are negotiated from three different perspectives. Firstly, how managers' attitudes to work-life balance, gender and the ideal worker affect employees' access to flexible working practices. Secondly, how employees negotiate their flexible working practices with their co-workers and, finally, how fathers are starting to use flexible working to challenge traditional conceptions of the masculine ideal worker.

Powerful Managers

Managers are responsible for flexible working decisions in approximately a third of UK businesses, so obtaining approval from a manager is a crucial part of negotiating flexible working practices (den Dulk and de Ruijter, 2008; Lyonette *et al.*, 2017). However, research shows that the outcome of the negotiation varies from manager to manager across an organisation, demonstrating the importance of the studying the negotiation context as outlined in the previous chapter. Lyonette et al. (2017) describe this discrepancy as 'pockets of resistance' (2017: 74) to flexible working

practices, particularly those practices which challenged traditional management styles, such as working from home. The authors found that managers struggled to adapt their traditional management styles to accommodate employees' flexible working, and not all managers embraced additional training and support to do so (Lyonette et al., 2017). Research in the Netherlands has also found that managers were prone to imposing conditions on flexible working practices and would micro-manage employees to ensure there were no negative impacts on the business (Been, den Dulk and van der Lippe, 2015).

These negative impacts were generally framed as decreasing departmental and organisational performance. Several studies have shown that managers' decisions about employees' work-life balance practices were driven by the perceived impact of these practices on the performance of their department and impact this would have on the overall performance of the organisation (den Dulk and de Ruijter, 2008; McCarthy, Darcy and Grady, 2010). More recent research has shown that since the global recession in 2008, managers have felt under increasing pressure to sustain high productivity whilst simultaneously reducing costs (Lyonette *et al.*, 2017). Studies have found that the increasing pressure on cost and performance since the recession has meant that some managers are more reluctant to support flexible working practices (Been, den Dulk and van der Lippe, 2015; Lyonette *et al.*, 2017). Post-recession, managers showed greater cost-awareness when considering employees' work-life balance requests, particularly those managers in senior positions with more authority over organisational policy and strategy (Been, den Dulk and van der Lippe, 2015).

As well as macro and micro business considerations, researchers have also found that gender matters when managers are negotiating flexible working practices with their staff. Den Dulk and de Ruijter's (2008) research also found that requests by women were 'judged more favourably than requests by men' (2008: 1233) which the authors attribute to managers' internalised norms around gender and care. In a second study conducted in Ireland, Daverth et al. (2016) interviewed managers of both genders (eleven women and twenty-four men) and found that managers who espoused traditional views of gender roles were more inclined to approve work-life balance practices through formal channels, whereas those with more egalitarian

views would implement informal practices. These studies show that gender stereotypes held by managers can affect employees' access to flexible working practices.

However, managers are employees too (Ford and Collinson, 2011; Lyonette *et al.*, 2017) and as such they are also entitled to work-life balance initiatives, such as flexible working. Ford & Collinson (2011) reviewed the relatively small body of existing literature on how managers themselves experienced work-life balance. They were interested in the way managers positioned work in relation to the rest of their lives and found that work was a significant element of their lives and their identity (Ford and Collinson, 2011). As such, managers would often work excessive hours and although many were keen to change their working practices, they felt constrained by cultural expectations (Ford & Collinson, 2011). Furthermore, these managers felt that the work-life balance discourse created an additional pressure in their lives (Ford & Collinson, 2011). However, the same study found that managers' perspectives on work-life balance shifted throughout their careers. These 'shifts' took the form of a work-life balance re-evaluation, usually because of significant life events such as births, deaths or divorces, or as a response to something at work, such as missing out on a promotion or experiencing work-related stress or illness (Ford & Collinson, 2011: 267). A similar finding was reported by Sweet et al. (2017) who described managers' attitudes toward flexible working practices as 'malleable,' and subject to change over time. They also found that this level of change was affected by the gender and age of the manager, their level of managerial experience and the extent to which the organisation supported flexible working practices (Sweet, Pitt-Catsouphes and Boone James, 2016).

The literature on how managers experience work-life balance is sparse and managers are often portrayed as a homogenous social group in heteronormative family formations. To address this research gap, Wilkinson et al. (2017) conducted in-depth interviews with thirty-six single, child-free managers and professionals across different sectors of the UK economy. Their respondents felt that their work-life balance challenges were perceived as less legitimate than those of their peers with children (Wilkinson et al., 2017). Wilkinson et al. (2017) deliberately framed work-life balance issues as 'work-life challenges' because 'they required individuals

to challenge or rethink underlying or normative assumptions within organizational contexts about work-life policies' (Wilkinson et al., 2017: 652). This perspective resonates with my own holistic conception of work-life balance described earlier in the chapter and my study will ensure that the experiences of employees (including managers) living alone is as valuable as those in heteronormative family formations. It will also push this perspective further by recognising the intersecting experiences that influence managers' attitudes, perceptions and understandings of work-life balance, including age, life-stage (including relationship status) and gender.

In summary, managers' attitudes 'may be guided by pre-existing beliefs, personal interests, *and* a sense of responsibility' (Sweet et al., 2017: 65). Managers play a crucial role in the ability of employees to access flexible working practices and their attitudes are shaped by internalised gender stereotypes, their own experience of work-life balance and the perceived effect on the performance of the department. However, managers' attitudes can change over time, either across the manager's life-course or as a result of wider structural changes such as a recession or increased cultural awareness of work-life balance. My research will contribute to this literature by considering the personal, contextual and temporal conditions which affect how managers negotiate flexible working practices with their staff. It will consider how managers' attitudes toward work-life balance are formed by gender norms, personal experience and organisational culture, to understand how these specific experiences can impact employees' access to flexible working practices and how they may be shaped by gendered differences and inequalities.

Powerful co-workers

The relationships between colleagues has been referred to as 'a relatively neglected dimension of workplace studies' (Pettinger, 2005: 39) and this is true within the field of work-life balance research (Teasdale, 2013). The role that co-workers play in negotiating and supporting flexible working practices is often underplayed or subsumed under the umbrella of organisational culture. Recognising this research

gap, Teasdale (2013) interviewed 47 women across three organisations to 'explore the implications of flexible working for co-worker relations' (2013: 400). Teasdale found that co-workers of those with flexible working practices simultaneously supported and resented their colleagues' working patterns and Teasdale explained how employees had to 'grapple with gendered notions of the ideal worker and with women's continued responsibility for care work' (2013: 409). Whilst some co-workers could understand and empathise with their colleague's work-life balance needs, others resented the additional burdens they felt as a result, such as feeling obliged to stay late or take on additional workload (Teasdale, 2013). Around a similar time, Korabik and Warner (2013) found that co-workers had a significant influence over each other's experience of work-life balance. They found that employees who perceived resentment and antagonism from their co-workers also reported higher instances of work interfering with family life. Conversely, where employees felt their co-workers supported their efforts to balance work and family, they experienced greater work-family enrichment in the form of improved mental and physical health, job satisfaction and job performance (Korabik & Warner, 2013).

Co-workers do not control access to flexible working practices in the same way that managers do, but their level of support or resentment can impact how employees experience work-life balance. Co-worker attitudes play an integral role in organisational culture and flexible working practices, and individual or group behaviours can create a supportive or hostile environment for those seeking to address their work-life balance through flexible working practices. With this in mind, my study will analyse the way co-workers develop relationships and if that affects the way they negotiate their flexible working practices. It will consider how these negotiations are gendered and how they may impact access to and experience of flexible working practices in the two case-study organisations.

Gender inequality: fathers' experience of flexible working practices.

Research on men's perception and access to flexible working practices is less common than that of women's but is increasing. Similarly to research on women's

work-life balance, research with men tends to focus on fathers. Some studies compare the flexible working experiences of mothers to fathers (e.g. Gatrell et al., 2014) whereas others focus on specific themes within work-life balance such as fatherhood and childcare (e.g. Dermott, 2005). Whilst some researchers claim to be interested in a more inclusive range of masculinities, sampling strategies still tend to focus on the father and the experience of men taking greater responsibility for childcare or domestic work. Nevertheless, these findings help us understand how fathers today are negotiating multiple social expectations, in particular the contention between the ideal worker and the ideal father (Dermott, 2005; Wada, Backman and Forwell, 2015).

One such study, entitled *Men's discursive constructions of balance in everyday* (Wada, Backman and Forwell, 2015) interviewed 45 fathers and identified two competing discourses of balance, which both foregrounded the father's feelings of responsibility toward paid work and providing for their families. The first was that of the ideal father who constructed balance as managing life's competing demands, including providing financially for the family, making time for family and domestic life, and prioritising the needs of the family over their own (Wada et al., 2015). Many of these fathers also constructed balance as making time to participate in a range of activities, which the authors labelled as the Contented Man. Examples of activities tended to centre around the family, such as volunteering at the school or participating in children's sports clubs, but other activities were classed as 'me time' and were often physical activities which the fathers said helped them manage mental health and wellbeing (Wada et al, 2015: 127). The authors suggest that the Ideal Father and Contented Man ideologies would contradict one another as the Ideal Father is driven by 'the family's collective happiness whereas the Contented Man is motivated by 'individual needs' and 'personal contentment' (2015: 128 – 129). Whilst Wada et al.'s study is a useful theoretical contribution to understanding how men construct balance between their work and personal lives, it offers little insight into how they manage work-life balance in practice, such as the use of flexible working practices.

This could be explained by the relatively low numbers of men who request flexible working practices to manage work-life balance. In another international study with

men in Australia, fathers who utilised flexible working practices considered themselves to be breaking new ground and this 'ground-breaker discourse' was used by men who had worked part-time at some point during their career (Borgkvist *et al.*, 2018). Despite these positive indications of cultural change, Borgkvist et al. (2018) found that 'most participants oriented to a masculine identity that was formed and performed on the basis of paid work' (2018: 11). This was true even if they used flexible working practices to spend more time with the family. Resonating with earlier research by Lewis (2010) and Gatrell et al. (2014), the authors found that men were heavily influenced by organisational culture and the ideal worker discourse, and therefore flexible working practices were 'framed as a privilege and an individual choice' (Borgkvist et al., 2018: 11). With the notion of the ideal worker and gendered division of labour entrenched in the gendered organisation, alternative 'ground breaking' masculinities will continue to be positioned as 'unusual' and marginalised masculinity within the organisation (Borgkvist *et al.*, 2018; Kmec, O'Connor and Schieman, 2014).

Whilst studies such as these help to explain why fathers still experience unequal access to flexible working practices compared to mothers, they continue to support the narrative that flexible working practices are there to support the work-life balance of heteronormative families with young children. If fathers feel they have limited access to work-life balance policies, then child-free men will encounter an additional barrier to accessing initiatives such as flexible working practices. As a feminist researcher I recognise that child-free men generally occupy some of the most privileged positions in society but also believe that masculinity, like femininity, is an experience intersected by issues of race, age, disability and other social categories, creating a hierarchy of male social privilege. Whilst child-free men occupy a privileged position in the labour market, they are also constrained by patriarchal social norms around gender roles and the prevalence of ideal worker norms. Understandably, the work-life balance of child-free men is an under-studied area in sociology and whilst my research is not seeking to fill this gap, it will pay attention to the diverse and intersecting experiences of men within the organisation and how they experience work-life balance and flexible working practices.

Work-life balance and flexible working practices in the finance sector

The finance sector has attracted gender scholars across disciplines (e.g. Acker, 2006; Crompton and Le Feuvre, 1992; Ho, 2009; McDowell, 1997; Savage, 1992) and several studies have applied the framework of gendered organisations to critically appraise unequal workplace practices and behaviours, including the underrepresentation of women in senior management roles (Savage, 1992); gender segregation in the City (McDowell, 1997); the gender pay gap (Acker, 2006) and gendered career paths in the accountancy profession (Crompton and Lyonette, 2011). These studies reveal a bleak picture of gender equality and as such the finance sector continues to be a valuable site for research into work-life balance practices. Within the literature, finance culture, at the organisational or industry level, is often depicted as including the role of policies, managers, colleagues, working practices and so on. However, in asking whether employees' experiences of flexible working practices are shaped by a financial culture, my study focuses on the nuances between beliefs, negotiations and practices which *construct* that culture.

Gender, work-life balance and financial time

A supportive organisational culture is cited as a key determinant of accessing work-life balance policies and flexible working practices (Beauregard and Henry, 2009; Bond, 2004; Lewis, 1997, 2010) but some studies lack sufficient description as to what this constitutes in practice. Writing more generally on the role of gendered organisational culture, symbolic interactionist Sylvia Gherardi (1995) says that within organisations, culture can be defined as 'the taken-for-granted and problematic webs of meaning that people produce and deploy when they interact [...] shaped by more general cultures and by the institutions and organizations of society at large' (1995: 12 - 13). Whilst this definition is valuable for studying interactions and recognising the influence of multiple, intersecting cultures it is still unclear how it can be used as a framework for studying organisational cultures in the context of work-life balance.

A more explicit definition is used by Sue Bond (2004) on her quantitative study into the relationship between organisational culture and work-life conflict in four financial services organisations in Scotland. Bond defines a supportive work-life culture as a set of 'shared assumptions, beliefs, and values regarding the extent to which the organisation supports and values […] the integration of employees' work and non-work lives.' (Bond, 2004: 3). The role of my research is to make visible some of these taken-for-granted assumptions, beliefs, values and practices that are integral to organisational culture, but where I do refer to a supportive culture in the context of work-life balance and flexible working practices, it will be in line with Bond's definition.

The finance industry has been accused of fostering a pervasively masculine culture (Kerfoot and Knights, 1993; Maltby and Rutterford, 2013; McDowell, 1997) and in 2009 the Equality and Human Rights Commission (EHRC) produced an enquiry into reports of sex discrimination across the sector (Metcalf and Rolfe, 2009). The report found that gendered occupational segregation was greater in the finance sector than in any other industry, with women concentrated in administrative positions and significantly underrepresented in management and senior roles. The finance industry continues to value long hours and presenteeism and combined with high levels of gender segregation and stringent regulation it can be a challenging environment for accessing flexible working practices (Maltby and Rutterford, 2013; McDowell, 1997; Metcalf and Rolfe, 2009). In the EHRC report, Metcalfe and Rolfe (2009) found that the availability of flexible working policies in the finance sector was comparable to other industries but that the long-hours culture meant that part-time work was less common. As shown earlier in the chapter, an overwhelming majority of part-time workers are women meaning that although flexible working practices were available in the finance sector, the accessibility of these practices reflected gendered norms around work and care.

The finance sector has also proved an interesting research area for social theorists of time and some of the practices which promote gender inequality can be explained by recognising the temporal specificities of the global economy and the adage that 'time is money'. Adam et al. (2002) explain how interest and credit are part of the commodification of time and have 'a specific relationship to time and

the future' (2002: 15). The facility to 'buy now, pay later' enables the purchaser to speed up time and acquire goods that they would otherwise not be able to afford until sometime in the future. Hope (2006) characterises the finance culture as a 'world where electronic speed and the drive toward immediacy generate unusual work environments' (2006: 278). Hope argues that as a result of deregulated banking and advancing digital technology, an 'accelerated global monetary exchange' has created a finance culture which celebrates this drive towards instantaneity (2006: 291). At an organisational level, this is experienced as an 'accelerated rhythm of work and longer work hours' at the behest of 'greedy' businesses (Chelcea, 2015: 362). In her ethnographic study of the banking industry in post-socialist Romania, Chelcea (2015) felt that 'corporate work discipline' had created a fast-paced environment leading to the organisation putting 'insatiable demands' on its employees' time (2015: 362). Chelcea (2015) considered a growing trend toward flexible work in Europe and the USA to represent an organised form of resistance to practices such as accelerated work and unpaid overtime.

Although several studies have been conducted in the finance sector which focus on the availability of flexible working practices (e.g. den Dulk and de Ruijter, 2008; Russell et al., 2009; Smithson and Stokoe, 2005; Sweet et al., 2016, 2017) the majority do not consider the unique culture of the sector or organisation to be an important factor in their analysis. As explained at the beginning of this section, rather than using culture as an explanatory concept, my research seeks to analyse the workplace negotiations and practices which exemplify a finance culture. However, organisational or sectoral culture is used by some researchers as an umbrella term for a more specific analytical framework, as was the case in Bond's (2004) study into the role of organisational culture on work-life conflict. Bond argued that without a supportive culture, 'the provision of [flexible working] arrangements in themselves will not necessarily lead to better work-life balance' (Bond, 2004: 14). For Bond (2004), the culture of long hours in these organisations was inconsistent with work-life balance and as a result, some flexible working practices actually had a negative effect on work-life balance.

The finance sector continues to provide a rich source of data for researchers concerned with gendered organisations and work-life balance. With its pervasively

masculine culture which privileges presenteeism and long hours, work-life balance and flexible working practices are often in contention with an environment driven by immediacy and profit. My research will add to the small body of literature which considers how a financial culture shapes employees' experiences of flexible working practices, but the most pressing research gap is to recognise that the finance sector is not a heterogeneous industry. Comparing the flexible working practices of employees from two organisations within the same sub-sector will highlight the similarities and differences in the way finance culture is experienced in these organisations. Furthermore, in an effort to deconstruct the culture of financial services, my research will consider the relationship between the finance sector and time and how this shapes the gendered experience of flexible working practices in these organisations.

Key themes in work-life balance research

This section introduces the key themes within the research literature on flexible working practices which are relevant to this research and the conceptual framework introduced in the previous chapter. It will start by summarising the mutual benefits of flexible working practices for employers and employees, a theory which is popular with businesses and practitioners but critiqued by social researchers. One of the key benefits of flexible working promoted to employees is the ability to minimise work-life conflict, and the next section will explore this concept and its relationships to the boundaries constructed between the spheres of work and home (see Chapter Two). The final theme of work intensification and extensification is related to the concept of boundary management and is often used to critique the mutual benefits argument. The concept of work intensification is widely used within work-life balance research; extensification is less common but valuable for this study because of its relationship to time and the notion of the ideal worker.

Mutual Benefits

The mutual benefits discourse is popular with policy makers, practitioners and businesses as a rationale for increasing the availability of flexible working practices. Sometimes referred as the 'dual agenda' or 'synthesis' argument (Kim, Bailyn and Kolb, 2017) , the mutual benefits agenda is based on the premise that flexible work has both social and economic advantages from which both the employee and employer benefit (Lewis *et al.*, 2017). Employer benefits are generally tangible, financial benefits such as improvements in production and employee retention (Hegewisch, 2009), although the two categories are interdependent. For example, employees may experience reduced fatigue as a result of their flexible working practice and therefore be more productive and make fewer mistakes (Hegewisch, 2009). Flexible working practices may improve employee morale resulting in higher motivation and commitment, therefore reducing employee turnover and employment costs (Hegewisch, 2009). Tangible benefits for employers can also be less tangible for employees, and this balance depends on the type of flexible working practice. For example, employees who work from home can experience reduced stress and work-life conflict (see below) and the employers who promote remote working to all employees can save on the cost of renting building space (Kim, Bailyn and Kolb, 2017). Part-time workers free up time to manage their work-life balance and the reduction in hours means staffing costs are reduced (Kim, Bailyn and Kolb, 2017).

However, some researchers have argued that in times of austerity the balance of power has shifted in favour of the employer. Lewis et al. (2017) have said that work-life balance practices, such as flexible work, are being utilised by employers to manage employee needs and austerity cuts simultaneously. The authors argue that the emphasis on the work-life balance discourse within organisations is 'being appropriated to position increasingly employer-led practices as mutually beneficial' (2017: 597). Employer-led, or employer-friendly (Fleetwood, 2007) flexible working practices are designed around the employers' requirements for a flexible workforce, usually to manage inconsistent workloads caused by seasonal fluctuations or demands caused by the 24/7 economy. In contrast, employee-friendly (Fleetwood, 2007) flexible working practices are usually designed to attract and retain staff, and can often be found alongside other work-life balance initiatives

such as entitlements to family leave, childcare assistance and employee assistance programs (Beauregard and Henry, 2009). The mutual benefits discourse is based on the premise that most flexible working practices are somewhere in the middle of this spectrum and offer a win-win scenario for employers and employees. I will touch on the concept of mutual benefits throughout the thesis, and the notion of employer- and employee-friendly flexible working practices, as these concepts provide a useful basis for the more detailed analysis enabled by the conceptual framework, introduced in the previous chapter.

Boundaries, borders and conflict

As explained in Chapter Two, industrialisation created a physical separation between the home and the workplace and this dichotomy created the two distinct spheres of work and life. The metaphor of boundaries and borders is used within work-life balance literature to describe the apparent inability to penetrate this divide and the notion that boundaries and borders can be blurred or crossed is a central theme across the literature. Some authors talk about balancing borders (Kreiner, Hollensbe and Sheep, 2009), but boundaries and borders are more likely to be crossed (Clark, 2000), dissolved (Wajcman, Bittman and Brown, 2008) or blurred (Pedersen and Lewis, 2012). Individuals can experience 'spillover' between the two boundaries, when one sphere influences the other with positive or negative consequences (Guest, 2002). Irrespective of the terminology chosen, they all represent a form of negotiation where various instances of time and work are negotiated between the two spheres of people's lives.

Flexible working practices are positioned as a mechanism for boundary management but it is contested as to whether they reduce or increase instances of spillover as this can depend on the nature of the job role (Wajcman, Bittman and Brown, 2008) and the type of flexible working practice (Hofäcker and König, 2013). Much of the work-life balance research is concerned with the level of conflict between the two spheres and whether crossing or blurring the work-life boundary can increase or reduce this conflict.

Broadly, work-life balance research is a story about conflict – conflict between the spheres of work and life and between our roles and responsibilities at work, within the family and across the rest of life. These forms of conflict are integral to work-life balances studies across the academy, but the terminology of work-life conflict is more prominent within the field of organisational behaviour where the psychological impact of conflict is a primary concern. This section explains the application of the conflict terminology within work-life balance research and introduces 'role-conflict' which recognises the multiple roles that actors occupy within their public and private lives. The study of work-life conflict is often about how individuals negotiate their work lives and private lives, but these negotiations are rarely analysed and deconstructed sociologically, and so my research will address this gap in the literature. Whilst my research is not focusing on conflict, it is concerned with how employees negotiate their flexible working practices and how these negotiations are gendered and is therefore making an important contribution to the conflict literature.

Work-life conflict is where work is experienced as impacting on an individual's personal life and some scholars contrast this with the term 'life-work conflict' when life impacts on work (e.g. Hamilton et al, 2006). The terminology debate around work-life conflict mirrors that of work-life balance where choosing the term 'life' over 'family' is deemed more inclusive of those for whom work and life does not include dependent children. Work-life or work-family conflict is considered by some researchers as a form of 'interrole' conflict, where the pressures from 'the work and family domains are mutually incompatible' (Greenhaus and Beutell, 1985: 77). Some authors have reconceptualised time-based role-conflict as role-overload, to recognise the time pressures associated with balancing multiple roles and responsibilities. Duxbury et al. (2008) define role-overload as a situation where 'the collective demands imposed by multiple roles are so great' (2008: 130) the individual is unable to satisfy those demands with the time and energy resources at their disposal. Role-overload is the feeling that 'there is too much to do and too little time to do it in' which, with an emphasis on how time feels, hints at the qualitative dimension of time but Duxbury et al.'s (2008) reliance on large-scale survey data and quantitative analysis means that the findings only measure linear time.

Greenhaus & Beutell (1985) saw work-family conflict as having three dimensions: time-based conflict, strain-based conflict and behaviour-based conflict. My research will focus on the time-based element of work-life conflict but will extend the analysis using social theories of time which recognise that linear, clock-time also has a qualitative element which emphasises how time is valued and experienced by individuals.

Work Intensification & Extensification

Linked to the concept of boundaries and conflict is the notion of work intensification, and less commonly, work extensification. In the work-life balance literature, this terminology is used to measure levels of work-life conflict and wellbeing. The term 'work intensification' has been adopted by scholars to explain the increased effort many workers now feel they are required to put into their work (Green, 2001; Kelliher and Anderson, 2010). Work intensification is considered a symptom of a wider social acceleration and is defined by a feeling of working harder, faster and under increasing pressure (Green, 2004; Korunka *et al.*, 2015) and emerged as a result of the additional pressure exerted on the manufacturing industry during the 1980s (Green, 2001, 2004). The phenomenon has since spread into the service and knowledge industries as a result of increasing competition and technological advancements (Kelliher and Anderson, 2010), which Green (2004) considers to be a key factor in work intensification in the corporate world. Green (2004) links technological change to new forms of working organisation, where the two have combined to increase managerial control over the labour process. Examples of new forms of work organisation include task flexibility, lean production and performance-linked bonus payments (Landsbergis, Cahill and Schnall, 1999; Green, 2004).

Work intensification has also been linked to more precarious forms of employment (Burchell, Ladipo and Wilkinson, 2005) and part-time workers are overwhelmingly found to experience an intensified workload (Kelliher and Anderson, 2010; Warren and Lyonette, 2018). For example, Lewis (2010) found that employees who had reduced their hours felt they were accomplishing as much as they did when they

used to work full-time. However, Russell et al. (2009) argue that work intensification was gendered as their quantitative analysis found that the link between part-time work and reduced stress was only significant for women. The authors suggest that men who worked part-time were less likely to feel their workload was 'proportionately reduced' (2009: 90).

In the same study, Russell et al. (2009) found that employees who worked from home also reported greater levels of pressure than those who regularly worked in the office. Similar findings were reported by Kelliher and Anderson (2010) who found that remote workers reported working more intently on tasks. However, Kelliher and Anderson also found that work intensification did not always equate to higher levels of stress as the workers they interviewed were 'generally satisfied' with their work- life balance and their jobs (2010: 91).

As well as the intensifying of work effort, some scholars also recognise the extensification of work, which is generally considered to be a temporal intensification of work, where employees work longer hours putting in 'extensive effort' (Green, 2004; see also Worrall and Cooper, 2007). Others adopt a more specific definition which sees the extension of work time to stretch beyond the workplace (Brannen, 2005). Jarvis & Pratt (2006) consolidate these explanations to define extensification as 'the distribution of work across different spaces/scales and time' (2006: 2). Their research chimes with my own, as they consider 'the overflow of work into wider social life' and 'explore the hidden costs of extensification', which are absorbed by the household through paid or unpaid 'substituted labour' (Jarvis and Pratt, 2006: 21). These studies show how work intensification and extensification are intrinsically linked and how the concepts are relevant to my own study, which explores the gendered experience of time and work-life balance. Social theories of time will be used to understand how work intensification and extensification is experienced within the two case-study organisations and the concept of an ideal worker can help explain why it occurs. I use both terms throughout the thesis, where intensification refers to increased workload and pressures, and extensification is work which extends beyond an employee's contracted hours, often beyond the workplace and into the home.

Conclusion and Research Questions

Through learning the history of the work-life balance debate, and the terminology and discourse surrounding it, I have positioned my study as one which adopts a holistic approach to work-life balance which challenges the socially constructed boundaries between work and home. Across this chapter and Chapter Two, I have shown how flexible working practices transgress these boundaries by extending work across time and space, but that research which recognises this tends to emphasise time as a limited, linear concept, a lack of which causes conflict between the two spheres.

I have also demonstrated the links between the literature on work-life balance and flexible working, and the conceptual framework introduced in the previous chapter. The act of trying to balance work and the rest of life requires time, work, and gender relations to be negotiated. I have argued that this negotiation is gendered and the inequality began when men 'invited' women into subordinate roles within the corporate workplace (Gerson & Peiss, 1985). Throughout this literature review I have highlighted how men and women negotiate time differently as a result of deeply embedded norms around work and care. Introducing work-life balance policies for mothers required a new form of negotiation which involved managers and co-workers, where it was not only time and work that had to be negotiated but also traditional concepts of the ideal worker. I have shown how the traditional ideal worker ideology reinforces the breadwinner model, channelling women into part-time jobs which are often lower quality than those of their full-time co-workers. By charting the evolution of work-life balance policies and research into flexible working, I have argued that men are now beginning to challenge traditional masculinities and constructions of the ideal worker in order to spend more time at home and participate in care work, although progress in this direction is slow. I also argued that there are discrepancies in managers' attitudes toward flexible working and by utilising the conceptual framework previously introduced, I argued that this is asignificant factor in why it important to recognise the context in which these negotiations are taking place.

By using a conceptual framework which recognises the act of contextual negotiation and social theories of time, I will contribute to the work-life conflict

literature by considering how time and work are negotiated across the boundaries of work and home. I ask, **'how is gender constructed in the way employees negotiate their flexible working practices between the boundaries of work and home?'** recognising that flexible working practices are not fixed in time or space and that work and home are two interdependent spheres.

My second research question links to the first as it continues the theme of negotiation but focuses on the role of power in negotiating access to flexible working practices in the workplace. I ask, **'how does gender affect access to flexible working practices offered in the workplace?'** By analysing the interplay of power and inequality in the organisation, I will consider how managers' attitudes and perceptions around gender roles and work-life balance can shape employees' access to flexible working practices, and also recognise the role of co-workers in this negotiation. My intersectional feminist epistemology will seek to find explanations beyond simple gender binaries to understand how these employees negotiate access to flexible working practices in order to manage their work-life balance. The literature review across Chapters Two and Three has explored how access to flexible work is unequally distributed across genders, but also according to family formation and life-stage; by recognising the diversity of household formations and heterogeneity of work-life balance experiences, I explore whether flexible working practices really are available to all employees in these organisations.

This study will add to the small body of research conducted in the finance sector and foreground the influence this culture may have over employees' work-life balance choices. My research will ask **'how does the culture of finance affect employees' experiences of flexible working practices?'** Research in this area tends to focus on how finance culture impacts employees' access to flexible working practices, whereas I want to deconstruct the organisational culture to understand how flexible working practices may be reasserting or reconstructing cultural values. Furthermore, the literature often refers to finance culture as universally experienced across the sector and I will challenge this notion, using the conceptual framework identified in the previous chapter, to highlight practices which may be specific to the sub-section of financial services occupied by my two case-study

organisations. Finally, I will examine how these practices sustain the masculine culture which has been identified in the sector and consider how these practices affect employees' access to and experiences of flexible working practices.

Chapter Four: Methodology

Introduction

This chapter charts the methodology behind the study and is presented as a chronological account of the research process. I start by exploring my epistemological influences and return to these throughout the chapter as they are integral to the methodological choices I made within the research design. The next section is the longest in the chapter as it provides comprehensive contextual information about the case-study design and details of the two organisations which participated in the research. It explains why I settled on a comparative case-study design and charts my experience of gaining access to two suitable organisational settings, before explaining the location of these organisations within the wider finance sector and their specific business functions. As part of this explanation, I provide details of the flexible working policies at both organisations, as this is key contextual information for answering the research questions and analysing the data. I then move on to the research methods used and explain the rationale behind choosing semi-structured interviews, how pilot interviews shaped the final topic guide, and details about the interview setting. The following section explains my analytical methods before moving on to the final part which offers a comprehensive ethical reflection on my research experience, honouring the tradition of qualitative feminist research methodologies.

Feminist Epistemology

In this section I reflect on feminist epistemology and how this has shaped my research design and subsequent findings. Throughout the research process I have endeavoured to follow a feminist research ethic which recognises the experiences of women as unique but also diverse (Ackerly and True, 2010). My approach to gender studies highlights inequalities between men and women and the cultural and structural norms that sustain them, whilst simultaneously challenging the inclusivity of historically androcentric knowledge (Ackerly and True, 2010; Preissle

and Han, 2012). Staying true to the conceptual framework I identify in Chapter Two, in this section I will situate my own feminist epistemology within the relevant historical trajectory of feminist research methodologies.

Feminist scholarship emerged within second-wave feminist activism to critique the androcentrism of research and offer a platform for women's marginalised voices and experiences. Influenced by empiricist and Marxist doctrine, feminist standpoint theory critiques unequal social structures from a woman's perspective. In its purest sense, feminist standpoint epistemology explores the world from the vantage point of women (Smith, 2003: 406) by recognising that all knowledge is socially situated (Harding, 2004; Hekman, 2004). Taken to its extreme, feminist standpoint epistemology positions itself as a privileged form of knowledge production, based on the assumption that feminist methodologies are more valid than other philosophies (Harding, 2004). Standpoint theorist Sandra Harding considers feminist standpoint as a 'critical theory' which challenges existing 'relations between the production of knowledge and the practice of power' (Harding, 2004: 1) offering empowerment to oppressed groups by valuing their experiences and treating them as research subjects as opposed to research objects (Harding, 2004). Although its proponents argue that standpoint theory is not an ideological position that universalises a particular woman's experience (Smith, 2003), standpoint theory has been criticised for its tendency to overlook intersectional experiences and its inability to adapt to postmodern and poststructuralist perspectives (Hekman, 2004).

A response to this critique is that there are multiple feminist standpoints which offer a diverse range of theories and methods for researching marginalised standpoints (Naples and Gurr, 2014). Hill Collins (2000) characterises standpoints as a form of 'group knowledge' where members of that group face common challenges and 'reoccurring patterns of experience' (2000: 29). Referring to the experiences of black women in the United States, Hill-Collins asserts that although African-American women are a diverse group who face intersecting forms of oppression, there are themes which 'characterize [sic] U.S Black women's group knowledge or standpoint', such as the struggle against violence (2000: 29). Some commentators consider Hill Collins to be a pioneer of intersectional feminist

thought, carving out a standpoint which recognises the intersection between race and gender (Frost and Elichaoff, 2014).

The term intersectionality was first conceived by feminist legal scholar, Kimberlé Crenshaw, in 1989, developing a language with which to critique mainstream feminist research which privileged the white woman's experience as universal (Davis, 2008; Sigle-Rushton, 2013). Intersectionality recognises the heterogeneity of women's experiences and the power inequalities inherent in women's intersecting social experiences. The increasing visibility of intersectional research across academic disciplines complements the interdisciplinary nature of gender studies and provides feminists with a way to acknowledge and celebrate differences amongst women (Davis, 2008). An intersectional approach enhances feminist analyses of power, privilege and exclusion by identifying the complex interaction and stratification of social categories such as gender, race, class and sexuality (Davis, 2008; Sigle-Rushton, 2013). The list of social inequalities that can be considered intersectionally is potentially limitless, although Sigle-Rushton (2013) suggests that researchers should pay careful attention to how and why they select particular analytical categories. Sigle-Rushton (2013) argues that the selection of categories has the power to shape how inequality is understood within the research and 'whose situation is highlighted' and whose is 'obscured' by producing 'specific subject positions' (2013: 134).

Feminist standpoint theories provide a strong foundation for feminist research and critical scholars like Hill Collins have shown how diverse this methodological framework is by incorporating intersectional thought within feminist standpoints. However, the emphasis of all standpoint theories is on shared experience and I believe that women construct multiple realities and identities, depending on the specificities of context and time (Frost and Elichaoff, 2014). The following section will explore this poststructuralist epistemology and conclude with an explanation of how this theoretical thought underpins my research methodology and overall design.

Poststructuralist feminism

Some scholars use the terms postmodernism and poststructuralism interchangeably (Gannon and Davies, 2012), but my epistemology is most closely aligned to the following definitions of poststructuralism, which will be used throughout the chapter and across the thesis where appropriate. In its broadest sense, poststructuralism considers knowledge as constructed through discourse and influenced by contextual power relations. Poststructuralism underpins the theoretical assumptions integral to qualitative research. It disregards the presumption that there is one discoverable truth, but rather that individuals construct multiple meanings to makes sense of their social reality (Jones, 2004). Critics of poststructuralism argue that this reliance on relativism is an inherent weakness of poststructuralist research because it fails to generate any definitive knowledge of the social world (Tyler, 2012; Calás and Smircich, 2014; Fox, 2014). Poststructuralists recognise relativism as the greatest strength of this approach because it highlights the historically obscured contextual power relations of 'traditional' knowledge (Fox, 2014). By paying attention to power relations, poststructuralist research also recognises the role of the researcher in constructing and interpreting qualitative data (Fox, 2014). As Jones (2004) argues, 'There is no such thing as presuppositionless research' as the research process is one where the researcher is 'continually making choices', including the theories they apply, the sample they choose and the data they select during analysis (2004: 258). In an effort to recognise the effect of their own subjectivity, poststructuralist researchers engage in reflexive practice but some critics question how studies can be conducted according to ethical principles if the data can be interpreted in a multitude of ways (Gannon and Davies, 2012).

A poststructuralist feminist epistemology is primarily concerned with how gender is produced through discourse, focusing on the language and institutionalised ways of thinking (Hines, 2008) that recreate and sustain gender differences and inequalities. Gannon & Davies (2012) explain how, 'An enduring focus of feminist post-structural theorizing is on the process of subjectification and the discursive regimes through which we become gendered subjects' (2012: 73). Rather than seeing gender as predetermined through social structures, biology or essentialist projections, poststructuralist feminism is about agency and the possibilities for

action (Gannon and Davies, 2012). West and Zimmerman argue that gender is actively constructed through interactions and behaviours and by 'doing gender', we are responsible for creating and sustaining gender differences between men and women (West and Zimmerman, 1987).

This deconstruction of gender challenges the idea that gender is a shared identity by highlighting the power relations within society and critiquing feminist notions of a shared, female experience (Calás and Smircich, 2014). This claim is problematic for some supporters of standpoint theory who argue that the shared experience of being a woman is central to feminist politics (Hines, 2008). Some critics would question whether poststructuralism is simply incompatible with feminist politics (Hines, 2008) because if 'gender oppression has no single cause' then there can be no universal solution and 'no clear way forward for feminist theory or politics' (Tyler 2012: 19).

With its focus on discourse and interaction, poststructural feminism is well suited to feminist organisational research. Tyler (2012) argues that poststructuralist critiques of language and discourse can be used to highlight and challenge the embedded nature of gendered power in organisations. Poststructuralist frameworks, such as Acker's (1990, 2006) theory of gendered organisations, provide a tool for critically analysing the relationship between discourse, gender, power and organising, as well has how masculinity is normalised and rendered invisible in organisational knowledge (Calás and Smircich, 2014).

The contextual and temporal specificity of meaning construction (Gannon and Davies, 2012) inherent in poststructuralist epistemology has informed my conceptual framework, introduced in Chapter Two. The emphasis on context is a central theme within social theories of negotiation and time and this epistemology is also visible in the way I have conceptualised the ideal worker as fluid and subjectively constructed. Moreover, an epistemology which recognises the contextual construction of knowledge is well positioned to answer the research question of whether the finance culture impacts these employees' experience of flexible working. As an epistemology which is critical of broad, structural explanations in favour of active agency and possibility, poststructural feminism is

integral to studying how gender is constructed when employees negotiate flexible working practices. Moreover, by deconstructing how power is produced and sustained through discourse, a poststructuralist epistemology offers a critical analysis of the power relations which effect access to flexible working practices, in order to establish whether flexible working is evenly distributed within the organisations.

As well as shaping my analytical framework, this poststructuralist feminist epistemology has informed the research design and the remainder of the chapter will justify methodological decisions made throughout the research process. The following section will provide the rationale for using a comparative case-study method of data collection before charting my experience of gaining access to each of participating organisations.

Researching organisations

As explained in the thesis Introduction (Chapter One), this research was motivated by my previous career in the finance sector. I had witnessed how access to flexible working was segregated by gender and was interested to find out whether my experience was symptomatic of a financial culture or unique to the organisation I was employed in. I was also motivated by the inception of the Children and Families Act 2014 which widened access to flexible work and wanted to understand how and why gender is embedded in flexible working practices. Comparative case-study research is ideal for answering these types of questions (Gray, 2018) and my specific research questions.

The two organisations are similar in that they are located with the same sub-sector of financial services but they have very different approaches to flexible working practices. As shown earlier in the chapter, Nordica have a flexible working policy which means that all employees are automatically enrolled into a flexitime practice. At DBK, there is no formal policy but all types of flexible working practices are promoted across the organisation, although access to them is granted at the manager's discretion. By comparing two organisations I will identify the similarities

and differences in how flexible working practices are experienced by the employees in the sample. A comparative case-study approach isolates flexible working practices as the key variable for explanation but within poststructuralist feminist epistemologies, also recognises that flexible working can be experienced differently by individuals within the same organisation. As well as comparing at the organisational level I will also compare data across the whole research sample. This multi-layered comparison draws upon the central themes within poststructural feminism, namely recognising the importance of contextually constructed realities and how this produces multiple understandings of gender.

As the following section will explain, various sampling methods were used to gain access to the two case-study organisations, and because they were both located in the same sub-sector of financial services the key variable (Ackerly and True, 2010) became the different types of flexible working practices promoted by each organisation.

Accessing organisations

Obtaining fieldwork access in organisation studies is a known challenge for researchers, and McDowell believes that, 'A great deal depends on luck and chance, connections and networks, and the particular circumstances at the time.' (McDowell 1998: 2135). It is not unusual for access negotiations to begin through personal connections (Ozcan, Han and Graebner, 2018), a process which can be easier if the researcher is familiar and empathetic with those being studied (Gray, 2018). As the following paragraphs will show, I felt that my history of working in the finance sector put me in a strong position when beginning access negotiations and I began the process by utilising my network of contacts. However, although gaining entry to the first case-study organisation was quick and painless, accessing the second was less straightforward and more closely followed McDowell's (1998) description of context and serendipity.

In January 2016 I began by emailing contacts at three financial service organisations. The first contact was an ex-colleague who worked for an international commercial vehicle manufacturer which had its own asset finance

division; the second email was sent to facilitators of a training programme I had attended at my university, both of whom were employed by a well-known High Street bank which sponsored the programme; the third was a former partner at an international consultancy firm who I knew through personal connections. I also had one face-to-face meeting with a representative from an organisation who have offered a small grant to support my doctoral studies. They had several contacts with large national and multi-national finance corporations and agreed to contact them on my behalf.

In all cases initial contact was made by email which can be an effective way to approach key informants and I provided a brief overview of the study and benefits of participation (Ozcan, Han and Graebner, 2018). Despite receiving positive responses from everyone I contacted, I was only able to secure access to one organisation using this method (Nordica, see below). In several cases my original contacts provided details for potential gatekeepers, but I was unable to negotiate face-to-face meetings with anyone from the larger financial institutions.

Access to Nordica

I secured access to my first case-study organisation within weeks of my first round of emails. Less than a week after making contact with an ex-colleague, he had sent my email on to a potential gatekeeper at Nordica Finance. This gatekeeper agreed to meet and discuss the research proposal in more detail. This meeting represented the first of many where I revisited my previous persona of corporate sales executive to build rapport, something I will discuss in greater depth in the Reflection at the end of this chapter. The meeting was conducted at 8.30am over coffee, at a mutually convenient location which was on my gatekeeper's daily route to the Nordica office, an arrangement which already told me something about his long workday routine and willingness to be flexible for business matters.

A fortnight after this meeting I received an email from my gatekeeper at Nordica confirming that the senior managers of the organisation had approved my access

request and offered two full days for interviewing during April 2016. They asked that I attend a senior management meeting in advance of the fieldwork to present my research proposal and answer any questions others in the team may have. Negotiating entry through multiple levels of gatekeepers is not unusual in organisational research and my contact at the organisation could be considered an informal gatekeeper, with his manager, the Managing Director of Nordica, the formal gatekeeper who had the authority to grant my access (Reeves, 2010; Gray, 2018).

Whilst the presentation was a success and a useful opportunity for me to visit the office premises prior to fieldwork, their request raised some ethical concerns. The company asked that once I had analysed the data, I provide them with an executive summary of the results. This model of access through reciprocity (Gray, 2018) will be familiar to many researchers, especially in organisational studies, but I was conscious of the ethical implications. To guarantee anonymity of the participants in such a small organisation the executive summary only offered a high-level assessment of the initial research findings and did not provide the interview evidence for these claims (see Appendix xi). I felt this was the most ethical way to honour both the agreement I had made with the participants and also recognise the willingness of the company to host me and facilitate data collection with their staff.

Access to DBK

After my initial success with Nordica, gaining access to a second organisation proved more challenging. Success eventually came through snowball sampling as one of the participants at Nordica sent my contact details, and a synopsis of the research, to several business contacts within the finance sector. Amongst them was DBK, an asset finance company which was known to me but had originally discounted because I had no personal contacts there and no knowledge of potential gatekeepers. As this organisation was also located in asset finance it was ideal for a comparative research design, so I focused my efforts on pursuing my new

contacts at this organisation. The HR Manager was identified as the first informal gatekeeper, and throughout the summer of 2016 I sent a series of emails and made numerous phone calls to this contact. After several months with no response I was surprised to receive an email from this gatekeeper confirming the Managing Directors had agreed that the company would participate in the research and to contact her departmental assistant to discuss how to proceed.

Less than a week later I had arranged a fieldwork visit for November 2016. After a brief telephone conversation with the department administrator it was agreed that the fieldwork visit would be simple to arrange, and no further meetings were required. All further correspondence was conducted over email until I arrived at the office premises on the first day of planned interviews. This organisation asked for nothing in return, even when I mentioned the executive summary I provided for Nordica. Whilst this left me with no explicit ethical problems, I recognised that granting access whilst asking for nothing in return had left me with a positive impression of the company which had the potential to create researcher bias. As organisational researchers, we feel a huge sense of relief when a company grants access for fieldwork. This relief can take the form of gratitude, especially if the organisation makes the process so smooth, as it was in both my case-studies. Whilst we should acknowledge the time and effort that these organisations and their staff provide on our behalf, we must also remain critical of the power dynamic between the researcher and the organisations they are studying.

The Case-study Organisations

This section introduces the two case-study organisations selected to participate in the research. According to Creswell (2013), good case-study research includes a comprehensive description of the cases as this is part of providing an in-depth understanding of the setting. This description is also pertinent for answering the research question, 'is there a relationship between the financial culture and how employees experiences flexible working practices?' To understand the location of asset finance within the wider financial services sector, the first part of this section will explain what asset finance and leasing means and how it relates to other sub-

sectors, such as the banking sector. I will then introduce the case-study organisations and describe the products they sell and the assets they finance as these different business models have subtle but important implications for the organisational culture. As part of this description, I provide details of the flexible working policies at each organisation, as this policy context is important for understanding how flexible working practices are accessed and negotiated, as well as confirming the types of flexible working practices available.

An overview of asset finance and leasing

The finance sector encompasses an extensive range of financial activities, from hedge funds to pet insurance. As companies which provide financial leasing, the participating organisations are classed as Division 65 organisations within the broader definition of Financial Intermediation, under Section J or the Standard Industrial Classification of economic activities 1992 (Metcalf and Rolfe, 2009). Specifically, both organisations offer business-to-business (B2B) finance for acquiring assets, known as asset-based finance. According to The Finance & Leasing Association (FLA), asset finance is used by businesses to 'obtain the equipment they need to grow' (FLA.org.uk, n.d.). By means of large credit facilities, assets can be leased for a monthly charge (included in the interest payments) and used 'over an agreed period of time' (FLA.org.uk). The onus is on encouraging business growth and development (FLA.org.uk), and as such, asset finance plays a key role in wider economic growth. Asset finance is used by businesses across the economy, with equipment from photocopiers to commercial airliners being leased through credit agreements, provided by organisations similar to the two case-studies here.

The two case-study organisations use similar business models, standard for this type of finance activity. The finance company borrows large amounts of money from the state central bank, and because the value is so high they secure a favourable interest rate. Like banks, asset-based finance companies make profit by charging customers to borrow a portion of the money acquired from the central bank, charging them higher interest rates to generate profit upon repayment. Similar to a mortgage, the risk associated with the lease is levied against the asset

being funded, so if a customer defaults on their repayments the finance company is entitled to repossess the asset to recover their costs. This model of asset funding through credit agreements is commonplace in the UK for both large companies and private consumers. Quick profits can also be made through selling additional services such as insurance products, although tightened regulations since the Payment Protection Insurance (PPI) scandal in the UK has seen a reduction in this type of up-selling. Whilst there are no official figures on the number of companies choosing this type of asset finance over loans from High Street banks, The Financial Times has reported that small business in the UK increased their use of specialist asset finance by 12 per cent in 2018 from 2017 (Arnold, 2018).

Nordica Finance

The first asset finance company – which I refer to by the pseudonym Nordica or Nordica Finance - operates within the commercial vehicle finance sector and is the dedicated provider of leases and loans for customers of Nordica Trucks in the UK. The industry definition of a commercial vehicle is one that is used for transporting goods or materials rather than passengers. It covers everything from small panel vans to articulated lorries, although Nordica Finance UK exclusively finance heavy goods vehicles (HGVs) manufactured by Nordica Trucks and it is rare that they fund vehicles bought from other manufacturers. The model for purchasing commercial vehicles, including HGVs, mirrors the private car industry, except that transactions are conducted business-to-business (B2B) rather than with private consumers. Like cars, business customers seeking new commercial vehicles will order their vehicle through dealer franchises located across the country. The sales representatives at the dealerships are often 'incentivised' to direct customers toward their own dedicated finance company rather than familiar, and often cheaper, High Street Banks. Buying new HGVs outright is impossible for most businesses, with new vehicles costing anything from £40,000 for a basic model to upwards of £100,000 for specialist equipment.

Nordica Finance UK is owned by the same parent company that owns Nordica Trucks International, based in Scandinavia. The headquarters of Nordica Finance UK

are in the same town as the UK manufacturing division, and Directors from each corporate unit meet regularly. Gaining access to conduct fieldwork at Nordica Finance UK was a direct result of this relationship between company Directors. Although owned by the same global enterprise, the two organisations have their own reporting responsibilities and separate management structure. At Nordica Finance UK, there are four Directors (one of whom was my gatekeeper) reporting to one Managing Director. Each Director was responsible for one area of the business. The Sales Director had eight direct reports whose role was to manage the relationship between Nordica Finance UK and the truck dealership franchise in their region. These were highly mobile jobs, where employees were often referred to as the 'sales guys' by the administrators. The 10 administrators were in the Business Administration department and were responsible for providing administrative support to the Sales team.

The remaining departments included the finance and accounting function and a small credit control department who were responsible for assessing risk and making decisions on lending, as well as collecting overdue payments. With just over 40 staff in total Nordica Finance UK is classed as a small or medium sized enterprise (SME). Support functions such as HR were centralised in Scandinavia, and operational decisions were overseen by an international level of Board Directors. Nordica Trucks International began manufacturing in Scandinavia at the turn of the 20th century and through a series of mergers and acquisitions, diversified its operations and spread out across the globe. The Head Office and board of directors remains in Scandinavia and the research respondents believe the 'Scandi' culture is still very much part of the organisation.

Nordica's Flexible Working Policy

Nordica had a flexitime policy which entitled all employees to a flexible working practice which gave them a degree of flexibility over the hours they worked (Chung, 2017). The policy meant that employees could adjust their start and finishing times, as well as accrue extra hours to take back in lieu at a later date. The policy stated

that a standard working day was 7.5 hours and that the core hours of work were 10.30am to 3.30pm. Outside of this timeframe employees could use 'Flexi Hours' from 7.30am up until 6.30pm. Employees were required to take at least 30 minutes (unpaid) for lunch, which ensured the organisation met the legal requirement to provide a 20 minute break for every 6 hours of paid work. The policy also stated that the time taken for smoking breaks should be considered as an unpaid break and employees must have enough flexitime accrued to cover this time. This also applied to time taken to attend appointments (not defined) which were arranged during working hours. Managers had the authority to decline requests for flexitime usage, although there was no detailed guidance about how these decisions were to be made.

The policy stated that 'adequate cover must be provided during normal office hours' of 9am to 5pm, and employees were 'expected to consider other members of staff' when making a request. This was reiterated at the end of the policy with the following statement:

> "Please bear in mind that we are a very small organisation and it must be emphasised that we rely on close cooperation between colleagues to make the scheme viable."

As well as adjusting start and finishing times, and for accommodating appointments, flexitime could be accrued and used as additional holiday allowance in the form of 'Flexi Days'. Employees were only entitled to one Flexi Day per calendar month, with each day requiring management approval. Employees could accrue up to 10 hours flexitime and have a shortfall of no longer than 3 hours, both of which were monitored on monthly basis. Other forms of leave, such as sickness or compassionate leave, were exempt from the flexitime policy. Managers were entitled to a revised policy which allowed them to accrue hours in the same way as other employees, but the policy stated that at the end of every month, 'all accrued hours will be cleared down and replaced with 5 Manager Hours' which they could use in place of Flexi Days.

In 2012, the organisation invested in biometric software to automate the administration of the flexitime policy, replacing the requirement to manually clock-

in or out via a log book. The policy stated that the system comprised of a 'biometric reader and reporting software'. The reader enabled employees to login to the company's mainframe system using finger print scanners, and each time they logged in or out their working hours were automatically calculated. The reporting software advised employees and their managers how much flexitime they had accrued and used at the end of every month, and managers were able to run more detailed reports about attendance and usage.

The flexitime policy was an internal policy which was used alongside the standard guidelines required by the right to request legislation (see Chapter Two). All employees used flexitime, but there was no evidence of any other form of flexible working practices in the organisation. I was advised that one employee used to work part-time but at the time of interviewing, all employees were full-time and worked 5 days a week. Employees did not have the ability to work from home, but managers could log-on to the system via company laptops and phones although they rarely worked from home and all came into the office on a daily basis. Flexible working at Nordica was framed around the flexitime policy meaning there was little variation in employees' flexible working practices. This contrasts with DBK where the flexible working policy was less defined but flexible working practices were numerous and often used simultaneously.

DBK

DBK – the pseudonym used for the second case-study organisation - is a Dutch asset finance company which offered credit to businesses across several industries and funded a broad range of asset types. They had categorised these industries into 8 distinct sectors: Agriculture, Food, Healthcare, Clean Technologies, Construction, Transport, Industrial and Office Technologies. Established in 1969, DBK operated across 30 countries and had recently been acquired by a large Dutch co-operative bank. Like Nordica Finance UK, the international presence of the DBK brand allowed them to borrow large amounts of money from the UK central bank at preferential rates and generate profit by charging customers higher interest rates on their loans.

Although their customer base of eight industries was far broader than Nordica Finance UK, DBK still positioned itself as a financier with specialist industry expertise developed through strategic partnerships with manufacturers and suppliers. This was the key operational difference between DBK and Nordica Finance UK - Nordica Finance UK was a subsidiary of Nordica Trucks International, DBK was not affiliated with any one manufacturer. Nordica Finance UK was designed to support the sale of Nordica Trucks by providing financial solutions to Nordica Truck customers, but DBK targeted businesses one level higher in the supply chain.

DBK's business model was to provide commercial finance to manufacturers, dealers and distributors, through partnership agreements. These partnerships provided manufacturers and suppliers the means to offer credit-based leasing to consumers of their equipment. DBK provided the financial experience and administration, as well as shouldering the financial risk. Consumers of the equipment would be unaware that they were entering a financial agreement with DBK as the new partnership enterprise was marketed as the manufacturer's in-house finance company. This is common practice in the finance sector, particularly for credit and insurance agreements where manufacturers and suppliers cannot afford to take the financial risk associated with credit and leasing.

The UK office of DBK was substantially larger than Nordica Finance UK, with almost 200 employees. Because of DBK's diverse customer base, several departments were divided across the eight industry sectors. At the time of conducting fieldwork, these had been consolidated into four groups: Food & Agriculture (colloquially referred to as 'Food and Ag'), Construction and Transport, Healthcare and Office Technology. Other departments, such as Credit Control, worked across all four sectors and the work was distributed according to financial exposure (the value financed), known as 'small-ticket, 'middle-ticket, or 'big-ticket' transactions. Those who worked remotely were organised differently again, because many of them represented the partnership company between DBK and the supplier. So, although they were employed by DBK, their business cards were branded with the logo of the partnership company. This complex, matrixial internal structure contrasted with Nordica Finance, where the only division was between fleet (large operators)

and retail (everybody else) business. DBK also had its own UK based HR department, a wholesale financing division, and an end of lease team who managed the resale of assets coming off finance.

DBK Flexible Working Policy

DBK's flexible working policy was based on an adaptation of the right to request flexible working legislation which meant that all employees were entitled to flexible working practices subject to their manager's approval. Employees at DBK had access to a variety of flexible working practices, including working from home or remote working, reduced hours, adjusted start and finish times and even shift work. Employees could discuss a flexible working request with their line-manager or directly with the HR department. The majority of requests were initiated with a verbal request and confirmed in writing via email. Unlike the right to request flexible working policy, most flexible working practices at DBK were not contractual changes. Rather, they were informal arrangements based on trust but not contractually enforced.

Although the company did not ascribe to any one type of flexible working practice, there was an emphasis on the ability to work from home. Employees were issued with key-fobs which enabled them to log on to the company's server from their personal computers and access the same systems and programs as they would in the office. At the time of interviewing, DBK was in the process of replacing the key-fobs with a smart phone app which replicated the process but meant that employees could use their own phones to access company systems, rather than rely on a separate piece of equipment. Of the 12 office-based employees in the research sample, all but one had taken the option to work from home, but this was usually on a temporary basis.

Managers across the hierarchy, and employees whose jobs involved some field-based work, were issued with a company mobile phone where they could access emails. In line with a companywide initiative to promote healthier working patterns, the company had recently released a policy advising employees they

should not be working whilst on annual leave. However, this policy was only designed to promote cultural change as there were no ramifications for employees who did work whilst on leave.

Having earlier described how I gained access to the case-study organisations, this section introduced the two case-study organisations and described their location within the financial sector, their business function and their policy approach to flexible working practices. Following the chronology of the research process, the next section will explore the process of sampling interviewees and the challenges I faced. At the end of this section I reflect on the limitations of the sampling techniques I used and consider how this may have affected the research outcomes.

Sampling Strategy - Interviewees

Poststructuralist feminist epistemologies view gender as actively constructed by women and men as they engage in an ongoing process of creating and recreating gender identities through discourses of masculinity and femininity (Pini, 2005). Therefore, in order to understand how gender is embedded in flexible working practices in these organisations, it is important to understand the experiences of both men and women. As was discussed in Chapter Three, although many women have challenged traditional gender roles by entering paid-work in general, men have not embraced feminine roles at the same rate. Some scholars argue that 'the transformation of men remains as the biggest obstacle in the course of gender equality at work' (Irving, 2015: 181) so understanding men's gendered experience of flexible working is a vital part of challenging gender inequality, both at work and across society.

Including men in the sample also supports my intention to promote a more inclusive definition of work-life balance, and enables me to answer the research question: 'how does gender affect access to flexible working practices offered in the workplace?' I wanted to ensure I heard the experiences of parents with young children, parents with older children and child-free employees of all genders. The number of participants I interviewed was partly dictated by the length of fieldwork,

which was agreed as two days at each organisation. Saunders (2012) says there is no 'hard and fast' rule for sample sizes in organisational research and that the choice of participants should be determined by the focus of the research. The normal range of participants has been estimated at 15 to 60 (Saunders and Townsend, 2016) and Saunders (2012) suggests that for a comparison of two case-studies, two samples of 12 participants is sufficient. However, as a poststructuralist feminist researcher with an interpretivist ontology, I am critical of such guidelines as I feel the quality of the data produced is more valuable than the number of cases studied (Saunders, 2012; Saunders and Townsend, 2016).

To try and obtain a diverse sample and allowing for one interview per hour over the course of two working days, I aimed to interview 10 – 12 participants from each organisation. Ultimately, I interviewed 26 employees with 12 from Nordica and 14 from DBK. This included 15 men and 11 women, with an age range of 23 to 59 years old. Of those, 16 had children with ages ranging from two years old to adults in their late twenties; 10 interviewees were child-free. The sample included employees from across the organisational hierarchy including one executive director from each company. The vast majority of participants identified as White British (n. 21), three were Asian (Indian and Pakistani), one Mixed Other and one White Other. No employees identified as LGBT+ and fifteen were in heterosexual marriages, with a further three cohabiting with a partner of the opposite sex, four were living with their parents and four were living alone. This demographic information is also formatted as a table in Appendix iv.

Whilst I feel it is important to recognise alternative family formations and progress work-life balance research away from heteronormative, white, middle-class families, the aim of this research was not to seek out unique cases or intentionally highlight the experiences of marginalised groups. Rather it was to recognise and embrace the diversity of household formations and how flexible working practices are used by those inside or outside traditional family formations and recognise how these could be affected by intersectional inequalities. Understanding why people do not use flexible working practices is as important as understanding why they do. Therefore, all employees would be eligible to participate in the study, but it soon

became apparent that there was no discernible binary between those with defined flexible working practices and those without.

The Nordica Sample

I discussed my purposive sampling strategy with my gatekeeper at Nordica both verbally and in writing (see Appendices ii and iii). Rather than select participants to suit this strategy, my gatekeeper took the decision to ask staff to volunteer for the study and the result was a strategy more closely resembling convenience sampling. Whilst asking for volunteers may be a more ethical approach, as I would not want to interview employees against their will, it did create a potential sample bias. There were more men than women in the sample and also a higher representation from some departments than others. Employees from the Business Administration Department represent 42 per cent (5/12) of the sample but only made-up 27 per cent (11/41) of employees across the organisation.

This high representation of from one department could be explained by an informal discussion I had with one of the Business Administration interviewees who said that several members of the team were coaxing each other to volunteer. An additional explanation is that the Business Administration Director had also volunteered to be interviewed which may have validated participation for the rest of his team. However, 80 per cent (4/5) of the Business Administration sample were men and of those men 75 per cent (3/4) were Business Administrators under 25. This was not an accurate representation of the department, as Business Administration was the only team in the company to have achieved gender parity (including the manager). My epistemology recognises that the research findings are context specific and as I do not intend for the findings of this research to be generalisable, this over representation of young male employees does not impact the quality of the research but should be considered as integral to the theoretical outcomes of the study

This distinct absence of women from the Business Administration sample could be an example of invisible gender inequality within the team. However, this male sample bias was present across the wider sample population as 67% (8/12) of Nordica interviewees were men, despite the company achieving near gender parity across the organisation. Furthermore, only male managers volunteered to be interviewed despite achieving near gender parity in senior manager positions at both organisations, partly as a result of the flat hierarchies at both companies. Whilst I value men's work-life balance experiences as well as women's, this absence of women's voices in the sample is significant to the research findings and raises several questions about the importance of work-life balance at these organisations, and whether the positive discourse from these interviews reflects the reality for all employees. I have continuously reflected upon this outcome throughout the research process and it is a question I return to at times within the thesis and consider as part of the general conclusions.

The DBK Sample

To maintain continuity for quality case-study comparison, I discussed a similar sampling strategy with my contact at DBK. To reflect the sampling process that took place at Nordica, I suggested that DBK also ask employees to volunteer for the interviews but that I had a particular sample in mind. I made this request in writing but having learned from my experience with Nordica and the resulting unequal sample, I was more specific about my requirements. This request was easier at DBK because the task of co-ordinating the fieldwork was delegated to an administrator in the HR department who was keen to provide me with exactly what I needed to progress the research. DBK was also a much larger organisation than Nordica (a total of 200 employees) so there was a greater chance of achieving my targeted sample.

My contact emailed all employees about the research but because more than 12 volunteers responded she was able to select a pool of participants which reflected the sample demographic I requested. However, one interviewee told me she was

encouraged to volunteer for the research and the following extract shows how she was considered a good example of the type of flexible working practices the company offered:

> *"They're trying to say, 'I think you need to go to this [interview].' I don't think it was a choice actually I think it was, well you need to put your name down for this. Because it does show how flexible the company can be for someone like me […] I probably was one of the prime examples for this working flexible hours around the financial industry."*
>
> *[Mena, 36, Credit Administration Assistant]*

This quote suggests that some employees at DBK were encouraged to participate in the research if they were positive examples of the company's approach to flexible working practices. Whilst this is only one example across the whole sample, it suggests there may be a sample bias toward employees who had successfully negotiated flexible working practices meaning those who were unable to access flexible work were underrepresented. However, as will be discussed in the findings chapters (Chapters Five to Seven), some employees who had accessed flexible working practices were still not wholly satisfied with their arrangement.

Limitations and sample bias

As a feminist researcher I believe it is important to recognise who is absent from the research and because this sample was selected on a volunteer basis, the voices of those who felt most disenfranchised by flexible working practices may not be included in the study. As discussed above, these absent voices highlight implicit power dimensions within the organisation which will reverberate as wider inequalities in the labour market, in work-life balance and across society.

A second limitation to this approach is the lack of control I had over the anonymity of respondents. At DBK, the HR administrator preserved the anonymity of

participants by co-ordinating interviews directly with volunteers, only copying me in on the emails to confirm the time and date of the interview. At Nordica, the approach was more informal, and I discovered that the full list of participants and interview timetable had been sent to all employees involved in the research. In addition, one participant was delegated the responsibility of contacting any absent or late employees, as my original contact was in a meeting for the duration of my fieldwork. This casual approach could suggest the organisation did not consider the nature of my research to pose a threat to any individuals involved. However, disclosing the list of participants could also be viewed as a tactic for minimising deviant or disruptive behaviour, as both the manager and colleagues of interviewees could hold them accountable for any negative or controversial responses. For this reason, I have reflected upon my moral and ethical obligation to ensure the anonymity and confidentiality of the participants, whilst trying to maintain the integrity of an approach that privileges contextual analysis of the data (see also Ethics at the end of this chapter).

Finally, a widely recognised limitation of qualitative research using case-studies is that the findings are not designed to be generalisable. Research reliability could be tested by transferring certain elements of the research design or findings across to other industry sectors for example, or by studying other types of flexible working practices. However, as Goodwin & Horowitz (2002) argue, the role of qualitative sociological research is not to develop universal theories, rather it is to build upon and develop historical knowledge. Comparative qualitative research can provide 'richly nuanced narratives and analyses' and develop general explanations which challenge or advance conventional concepts or theories (Goodwin and Horowitz, 2002: 44).

Interviewing

As a qualitative research method, interviewing is bound by the ontological belief that people construct meaning from their experiences in order to make sense of the social world around them (Jones, 2004). Constructivism is a core sociological ontology which is why interviewing has become one of the most commonly used

method within qualitative research (Bryman, 2012; Jones, 2004; Roulston, 2010). For Roulston (2010), it is this link between theory and method which is key to producing quality research. Interviews are one of the methods most favoured by feminist researchers as they offer a space for the voices of oppressed groups to be heard (Smith, 2003). However, poststructuralist feminist epistemology challenges this notion of women as a universally oppressed group, instead recognising women's experience as a unique, contextualised experience. Interviewing is still a common method for poststructuralist feminist researchers but they emphasise the contextual construction of interview data and the idea that interviewees present multiple, sometimes contradictory versions of the self within the interview setting (Alasuutari, Bickman and Brannen, 2008).

Feminist interviewers are mindful of the unequal power dynamic between researcher and participant and aim to foster a comfortable environment that breaks down this traditionally hierarchical relationship between interviewer and interviewee (Oakley, 2004; Puwar, 1997). Feminist research ethics require researchers to attend to this notion of power through reflexive practice (Ackerly and True, 2010) but poststructuralist feminists are critical of the assumption that the hierarchy between the researcher and the researched can ever be truly eliminated (Alasuutari, Bickman and Brannen, 2008). Structural characteristics such as differences in class, ethnicity and age create a complex power imbalance when women interview other women (Alasuutari, Bickman and Brannen, 2008)

Interviewing employees enabled me to ask about their routines as well as what flexible work and work-life balance meant to them. To explore how employees negotiated their flexible working practices at work and at home I encouraged employees to think about their work and personal routines simultaneously and what role their flexible working practice played in the way they constructed this routine. Interviewing employees from across the hierarchy meant I could approach the question of negotiating access to flexible working practices from the perspective of the manager and their staff, looking for similarities and differences in how they constructed time and work.

Semi-structured interviews were also a pragmatic choice for conducting several interviews in quick succession. Interviews are relatively quick to conduct which means researchers can arrange several interviews in a short space of time and collect insights from a wide variety of people (Bryman, 2012). This makes interviews a commonly chosen method in case-study research (Ackerly and True, 2010; Gray, 2018) and allowed me to make best use of the small amount of time I had to conduct fieldwork. I also felt that the relatively unobtrusive nature of interviewing (Bryman, 2012) would be more appropriate for comparative research. Whilst ethnographic research is useful for understanding cultures and culturally specific behaviours (Bryman, 2012), the time commitments involved would have rendered quality comparative research impractical within the timeframe of the PhD.

Topic guide

Conducting interviews continuously over two consecutive days meant there was no time for reflection or adjusting the interview questions between participants within the same case-study organisation. To prepare for this, it was important to spend time producing a topic guide (Appendix viii) that would elicit quality data in order to answer the research questions. To ensure each interview was completed within the allotted hour, I used prompts to structure the time and to ensure I covered the required topics with each respondent. Because this was comparative research it was important to ensure there was continuity between interviews, in order to identify similarities and differences between the interviewees' responses and to compare data across the two organisations. Jones (2004) says that a comprehensive topic guide and complete list of interview questions is a vital part of preparing for in-depth interviewing. It means that the researcher has defined what is 'relevant and meaningful' and the prompts are designed to guide both the interviewer and interviewee through the interview process (Jones, 2004: 358). In semi-structured interviews such as those used in my study, Jones believes it is the responsibility of the researcher to get the balance right between 'restricting structure and restricting ambiguity' (Jones, 2004: 358).

The first topic guide was created in preparation for the pilot interviews and was based on three distinct sets of questions asking about paid work, leisure time and domestic arrangements. Each question was assessed for its specific purpose and its relationship to the wider study, which not only justified why I was asking it but also helped to determine which questions were the most or least valuable when editing and refining the interview questions. Following advice from my supervisors, more weight was given to discussing paid work in the second draft of the questions in order to focus more on the organisational culture. This included a question asking interviewees to compare their experience of flexible work in the finance sector to other industries they may have worked it, but most importantly it enabled me to ask questions about how interviewees managed their work and leisure time as well as their family commitments, whilst still situating the discussion within the context of their paid work. For example, asking interviewees about their typical working hours and start or finish times could prompt the interviewee to talk about their morning or evening routines. This would then introduce who or what is involved in that routine, such as doing the school run or whether they had a long or short commute. The semi-structured nature of the topic guide allowed me to interweave discussions of paid-work with family, leisure and domestic responsibilities, reflecting the idea that work and life are integral to each other rather than artificially separated. To test this topic guide, I conducted three pilot interviews, the details of which are discussed in the following section.

Pilot Interviews

This semi-structured interview format was trialled during three pilot interviews with employees from the asset finance company where I used to work. I was still in regular contact with my previous employer as I had continued to work with them as a part-time consultant during my doctorate. This gave me access to a wide range of potential interviewees for the pilot study and I was able to select respondents based on my ideal sample (Appendix iv). To replicate the final interview process and adhere to ethical practices, the pilot interviewees were provided with an information sheet and signed a consent form guaranteeing their anonymity and confidentiality. They were informed that their responses would not form part of the thesis data but inform the final research design. As well as testing the interview

questions with a range of participants, the pilot study was also an opportunity to trial several interview locations to see how this affected the data creation.

As well as providing an opportunity to rehearse the interview structure and timings, the pilot interviews highlighted a common theme which I felt was important to focus on in both the revised topic guide and data analysis. Data from the pilot interviews helped me understand the nuances of accessing flexible working practices and the interplay between flexible working policies, the attitude of the line-manager and the dynamics of a team and its team members. One strong example was during the interview with Lily, when she explained how her company had recently introduced a type of flexitime policy which allowed staff to accrue overtime and take the time back in lieu at a later date. However, although this flexitime allowance was stated in the employee handbook there were minimal guidelines on how the policy should be applied in practice. Lily said that flexitime usage was decided by each department manager and could be hard to predict. She had witnessed some difficult negotiations between some of her co-workers and their line-manager, including one team member who was encouraged to use flexitime when they were feeling unwell and wanted to go home. Lily also said that because there was no centralised time-management system there had also been disagreements between line-managers and staff about how many hours they had accrued. As well as highlighting the prevalence of negotiations in flexible working practices it was also an insight into how managers are often required to put organisational flexible working policy into practice, an action which will be shaped by their own philosophies around work-life balance (see Chapters Five and Eight).

Fieldwork Interviews

Fieldwork was conducted at Nordica in April 2016 and at DBK in November 2016. At each site, interviews took place over two consecutive days with 6 -7 interviews conducted sequentially from 9am to 6pm. In both organisations, interviews were scheduled prior to my arrival and allowed 45 minutes to an hour for each interview. At Nordica the average length of each interview was 45 minutes and at DBK it was 42 minutes. At Nordica, all interviews were located in my gatekeeper's personal

office whilst he attended a sales meeting elsewhere in the building. At DBK, interviews were held in a small meeting room located in a quiet corner of the office. The decision to interview respondents at their place of work was inherent in the research design. Elwood & Martin (Elwood and Martin, 2000) say that choosing an interview location is partly pragmatic but also based on a consideration of how a space can impact the power relations between participants and researchers. In McDowell's researchers of elite bankers in the City, she found that although some employees chose to be interviewed outside the office space, 'most people were happiest with a neutral space in the workplace, for example in a meeting room.' (McDowell, 1998: 2139). McDowell reflects that one disadvantage of this setting was that in some cases, it was 'more difficult to broach issues about domestic responsibilities.' (McDowell, 1998: 2139). Whilst most employees I interviewed seemed comfortable talking about their personal life during the interview, there were one or two who talked about work for the majority of the interview, only mentioning their families when specifically prompted by an interview question.

McDowell (1998) also considers her position as a 'white, heterosexual, middle-aged woman interviewing a range of younger people, mainly white, and in the main explicitly heterosexual, about power relations in daily interactions in the workplace' (1998: 2140). Whilst this was not representative of most of my interviews there were several instances where I felt that my gender, age and sexuality was affecting the power relations and rapport in the interview space, and one man I interviewed engaged in overt displays of masculinity throughout the interview. Arendell (1997) asserts that gender identity is a 'major factor' in the interactions between interviewer and interviewee but is something which has received very little attention in the methodological literature (Arendell, 1997). Arendell explained how, 'Some men's presentation of their masculinity and superordinate status were persistent and pronounced' (1997; 362). Whilst this was not something I experienced in all cases, these power relations will have influenced both the data that was produced and some of the findings that emerged as a result.

Demographic information

At the end of each interview employees were asked a series of demographic questions (see Appendix vii) which included questions such as age, ethnic origin, household status, and caring responsibilities (if any). Sensitive questions about issues such as sexual orientation or gender identity were not included. Whilst I am conscious to recognise diverse households and intersectional inequalities, I felt that asking interviewees to disclose information about gender or sexual identity whilst in their place of work was unethical. As this information was not vital in answering the research questions I felt it could cause unnecessary discomfort and even stress to interviewees. Honouring the tradition of in-depth interviewing, I felt that interviewees would freely volunteer this information if they felt comfortable in doing so and if they considered it an important part of their identity construction. None of the respondents identified as anything other than straight or cis-gendered. There are several explanations for this; firstly, that they did not feel comfortable enough to confide this information during the interview process. Secondly, that they felt comfortable but did not consider this information relevant because I had not asked them about it. Lastly, employees from minority groups may have not volunteered to be interviewed (see above), were rendered invisible in the organisation or simply absent altogether in this population.

Recording

Each interview was recorded, and interviewees gave verbal and written agreement to this before the interview began. I used two MP3 recording devices simultaneously to ensure all data was captured. Because I was interviewing for over six hours each day this was vital because the battery-life of the recording equipment could be unreliable over an extended period. Although two electronic recordings were made only one copy was uploaded and stored and all files were cleared from both devices after this upload to maintain confidentiality. Only one participant asked for reassurance that the recording would only be heard by me

and I confirmed that I would be the only ones to listen to the recordings and they would never be made available to the company.

Analysis

I personally transcribed each interview directly into NVivo 11 and used the software throughout the analytical process. Having the audio files and transcripts in one program was beneficial during the analytical process as it allowed me to navigate between the transcript text and the voice of the interviewee. As well as being useful to confirm instances where I had misheard or misunderstood the language used by interviewees, it also helped ensure rigour in the analytical process. As Butler (2015) explains, researchers can read meanings differently from verbatim transcripts compared to how they were first heard during the interview. The ability to revisit the interview setting by listening to the audio file allowed me to reflect on my interpretation of the data, and this action was a valuable part of the iterative analytical process.

This iterative approach was a central tenet of my analysis which was influenced by grounded theory, as developed by Strauss and Corbin (1998). My methods do not faithfully adhere to the principle tenets of grounded theory, rather I have utilised several components of the theory to analyse the co-produced data and develop a conceptual framework (Ackerly and True, 2010). Specifically, I constructed analytical codes and categories from the data without applying any preconceived frameworks or theoretical concepts, engaged in constant comparison during each stage of analysis, and used memos to explore relationships between categories and refine my categories and theories (Charmaz, 2006)

The first phase of analysis was to open code the data, making comparisons and asking questions in order to generate initial concepts and categories (Gray, 2018). This involved using words and phrases to describe actions, processes and language of interest, as well as in-vivo codes to preserve the authenticity of the interviewees' voice. As Charmaz (2006) describes, in-vivo codes 'anchor your analysis in your research participants' world' (2006: 57) and several of these codes were preserved

through the entirety of the analysis. The second stage of analysis was based on a form of axial coding which involved revisiting the data and applying the most significant and frequent codes generated during the initial phase to produce categories and sub-categories (Charmaz, 2006).

I conducted an initial round of coding on the data generated from the first-case study before doing the same for case-study two, only moving onto axial coding once all the data was open coded. This approach inevitably meant that a loose analytical framework was generated from the first case-study before I began analysing data from the second case-study. Gray (2018) says that sometimes the two phases of coding described in the grounded theory literature are less distinct in practice, and that in a single coding session the researcher can move between open and axial coding.

The final step of analysis was to validate the story I was developing by returning to the data with these final categories and ensure they applied to the majority of my participants (Gray, 2018). Part of this step was to consider whether categories applied to one or both case-study organisations and also to reflect upon those participants who may not fit the explanation I was developing. Recognising those who did not fit comfortably into the story was part of ensuring my research followed a feminist research ethic (Ackerly and True, 2010) and in the findings and conclusions I have tried to include these minority voices alongside those who fitted more comfortably into the developing framework.

Ethics

The research was conducted in accordance with The University of Warwick's 'Statement on the Ethical Conduct of Research' and the British Sociological Association's 'Statement of Ethical Practice'. The Sociology Department's own Ethical Review Checklist was also completed before commencing fieldwork, having been reviewed as part of the PhD upgrade procedure. Because participants were interviewed at their place of work, and because they knew I had arranged my access at organisational level, I was acutely aware that participants may think I was representing the organisation rather than being an impartial outsider. It was

important to ensure participants felt comfortable in my presence and able to be honest about their experiences and relationship with the organisation. I used several tactics to ensure participants were sure of me and my motivation, including providing them with an Information Sheet which clarified details of the study in advance (see Appendix v), giving them clear opportunities to ask questions, and by building a strong rapport (see Reflection for more on rapport building).

At the start of each interview I introduced myself and my affiliation with Warwick University, and thanked each interviewee for their time. I asked them if they had read the Information Sheet (Appendix v) which was provided to them prior to the interview via email. Most had read it in advance and each interviewee was offered a hard copy and a few extra minutes to read it if they had not done so previously. Jones believes that the best data is obtained when the interviewee knows what the research topic is and why it is of interest, even if this is done in 'relatively broad terms' (2004: 259). I verbally assured interviewees that everything they told me would be kept confidential and not discussed with anyone else within the organisation, and that they had the right to withdraw at any time, even long after the fieldwork was complete if they wished. They were also told that if direct interview quotes were used in the thesis or subsequent publications they would be completely anonymised. Participants were also told that the organisations would be anonymised in a similar way.

All participants were informed that the interview would be recorded on two MP3 audio devices and the files stored electronically and transcribed in full. I then presented every interviewee with a consent form (see Appendix vi) reiterating what I had verbally told them and gave them an opportunity to ask questions about anything discussed so far. At this point I began the recordings and once the consent forms were signed I assured each interviewee that there were no right or wrong answers and gave them another opportunity to ask questions before proceeding. At the end of each interview I reminded participants of their right to withdraw and gave them my business card, so they had my details to contact me directly. The only participant I heard from after I left the field was the interviewee from Nordica who assisted with the snowball sampling (see above).

The first organisation I accessed asked for an executive summary of the findings (see Appendix xi), in return for facilitating access to their company and employees. I informed the participants of the first organisation about his with the reassurance that it would be a very high-level summary with no direct quotes, so any information provided could not be traced back to them. Whilst I believe that telling interviewees about the executive summary was the correct ethical decision and I was confident that I could honour this commitment to complete anonymity, this admission may have affected the quality of the data produced. Respondents may have been warier about providing honest, critical accounts if they felt there was any chance their employer may be able to trace those comments back to them.

Finally, there is also the question of what ethical research means as part of a poststructuralist epistemology. My research is context specific and should therefore consider situational ethics alongside the more procedural concepts considered thus far. As discussed at the beginning of this chapter, my feminist research ethic honours the relationship between the researcher and researched and recognises the connection between power and intersecting social inequalities. However, my experience suggests that the ethics of this epistemology are complex as the following example will demonstrate.

At the end of their interviews, several respondents asked if they could read the thesis when it was complete which I considered a validation of my commitment to anonymity, but it could have also been a way for them to check exactly how I had represented what they had told me and had honoured my commitment to anonymity. Ackerly and True (2010) argue that a truly ethical approach to feminist research offers respondents the opportunity to review the research report prior to publication to ensure they are happy with the way their stories have been represented. This approach is based on a moral philosophy which emphasises the role of trust between the researcher and to share my findings would be part of honouring that relationship (Tracy, 2010).

I have decided that, although it may challenge the above theories of feminist research ethics, I will not volunteer copies of the thesis to research participants. I am concerned that although I have been sensitive to accurately portray the version

of self that each interviewee presented, they may not recognise or appreciate the identity they constructed for themselves in the interview setting. Furthermore, as stated earlier in this chapter, participants from Nordica knew which of their colleagues were participating and despite my commitment to anonymity, they may be able to identify each other based on the contextual information I provide throughout the thesis. I feel that providing copies of the thesis to participants, in some cases, may challenge the central tenet of ethical decision making, that the harms may outweigh the moral goals (Tracy, 2010).

The following section continues this reflexive approach to relational research ethics (Tracy, 2010) as I consider my position as a doctoral researcher returning to a fieldwork setting which evoked spectres of my past self. For poststructuralist feminist researchers, the notion of being an insider or outsider is theoretically and empirically complex (Alasuutari, Bickman and Brannen, 2008) and the following reflection considers how this subjective construction of identity affected the research process and eventual outcomes.

Reflection: Rapport as an insider or outsider

In this section I will interweave a discussion around interview ethics and rapport building, with my personal reflections on returning to asset finance as a social researcher. This biographical account reflects upon the thoughts and feelings I experienced when visiting the case-study organisations which draws upon insider/outsider narratives in feminist theory. This research was inspired by my own experience in asset finance, where I worked for almost a decade before returning to Higher Education as a mature student. In pursuing a doctorate I was seeking to change career and perhaps atone for past underachievement, whist also transforming my identity from corporate sales to academic researcher (Drake and Heath, 2011). Throughout the doctoral process I have been reconciling these two elements of my life and the aim of this final chapter section is twofold. Firstly, to engage in deep reflexive practice in accordance with my sociological and feminist research ethic, in particular with the process of interviewing and generating rapport with participants. Secondly, I hope to move beyond the discomfort I have felt

throughout this research process, while returning to my past professional life as a means to develop a new one. As such, this section adopts a more evocative tone (Alkhaled, 2017) in contrast to the conventional analytical style used throughout the rest of the thesis. Alkhaled (2017) argues that this narrative approach, based on feminist autoethnography methods, can offer a powerful account of the researchers experience whilst still being faithful to the reflexive tradition within qualitative research methodology

As explored earlier in the chapter, there are significant advantages to being familiar with one's research setting. As well as benefitting access negotiations, cultural familiarity can also create rich, quality data by improving the interview experience for participants. As Sandra Acker (2000) explains, 'I am less apprehensive that I will fail to understand the research or the departmental organization that the participant is describing to me, and that makes me more relaxed, which in itself may contribute to a better interview.' (2000: 11). However, Acker also warns that that over familiarity could mean the researcher misses information if participants assume you have prior knowledge about a situation or phenomena (Acker, 2000). As a feminist, sociologist researcher, it was my responsibility to manage the social interaction between myself and my participants to produce the most valuable data, but also conduct the interaction in a way that recognised the power dynamic within that social context (Jones, 2004). As a novice researcher I was conscious of finding the right balance between being an insider and outsider, as well as recognising the impact this would have on my research and research participants.

In her reflective piece on interviewing female academics, Sandra Acker (2000) says that:

> *"The interviewer's extensive knowledge of the field and the people*
> *in it, plus her own experiences, put[s] her in a better position to*
> *generate trust, sharing, and emotional expression than [is] the case*
> *for interviews conducted by "outsiders," i.e., the rest of us."*

> *[Acker, 2000: 3]*

Acker (2000) evokes the influential work of Ann Oakley to explore how researchers can use their insider status to build rapport and that this is a powerful tool of feminist research. I have felt a strong affinity with Oakley's work since I was first introduced to it during my undergraduate degree. In considering the insider/outsider question, Oakley asserts that, 'A feminist interviewing women is by definition both "inside" the culture and participating in that which she is observing' (Oakley, 2004). Oakley challenged the masculine construction of research objectivity by advocating an approach whereby the interviewer 'refuses to stay detached and carries an obligation to reveal some of her own feelings in order to introduce greater reciprocity into the interaction.' (Acker, 2000: 3). This reciprocal model of rapport building resonates with the sales training I received during my finance career, so it felt natural to adopt a similar style during social research interviews; although this only added to the ethical discomfort I experienced throughout the fieldwork process. I felt it was important to be empathetic with the employees I was interviewing, but I sometimes felt I tried a little too hard to relate to my participants, perhaps as a way to compensate for the uncomfortable feeling that I had somehow bettered myself by retraining as a social researcher and seeking a doctoral qualification.

Acker (2000) uses Bank's (1998) framework of researcher typologies in order to understand why some insider/outsider perspectives are uncomfortable as well as the effect this has on the research produced. According to this framework, I was an 'indigenous outsider': socialised within the indigenous community (finance) but assimilated into an oppositional culture (academia) (Acker, 2000; Banks, 1998). Despite my prior knowledge of the finance sector, within this typology my beliefs, perspectives and knowledge marked me as an outsider to my participants (Banks, 1998). According to Acker's assessment, this typology has a 'good vantage point for critical perspective' but being a 'border-dweller' could result in the researcher exploiting the trust of the community they are studying (2000: 9).

Herein lie the ethical implications of conducting research within a familiar setting. According to the institutional guidelines, I had adequately addressed the ethical considerations around trust and exploitation by producing an information sheet for each participant (Appendix v), discussing and signing a consent form and

conducting a thorough debrief after each interview. I had informed participants exactly who I was and what my motives were, as well as how their interview data would be used for present and future research and for continuity, I informed every participant that I worked in asset finance before becoming a researcher. Nonetheless, these bureaucratic procedures and ethical practices could not overcome the feelings of negativity I had toward the finance sector and my experience within it. I had to carefully articulate my interview questions to ensure they were not imbued with this negativity, or the assumption that my research participants must want something more out of life, like I did.

The typology of an indigenous-outside was useful for understanding why I was wrestling with ethical discomfort, as well as offering a framework suitable for a thesis Methodology chapter. However, like most frameworks it was too simplistic for describing the deep and complex relationship I had with my research and research participants. Acker (2000) also recognises the typology as more a heuristic matrix, within which researchers will transition around and between locations. For me, this description was too fixed and did not accurately reflect the slippage and fluidity (Merriam *et al.*, 2001) of my insider/outsider status or the power dynamic that was created as a result. As Nancy Naples states in her reflexive piece, 'Outsiderness' and 'Insiderness' are not fixed or static positions, rather they are ever shifting and permeable social locations' (Naples, 1996).

As I progressed through the research I felt this shift occur. As I analysed the data, discussed the findings with my supervisors and explored the theoretical literature looking for a framework to explain my findings, I became more detached from the research setting. This was partly because I became more critical of the data as I tested out interpretations, but I believe it was mostly a sign that I was maturing as a researcher. Whilst I still had an affinity with my interviewees my perspective had changed as I felt more distant from them than I had at the beginning. As I reach the end of the doctoral process, I can now appreciate what Acker (2000) means when she says that, 'we are none of us always and forever either insiders or outsiders.' (2000: 11).

Reflection: writing up the research

Writing-up the data analysis and formatting the thesis meant I had to make conscious choices about how I portray the story of these employees. The first draft of my findings chapters (Chapters Five to Eight) tried to include data from almost all interviewees as I felt that this was the most accurate way to portray my findings and honour the contribution of the participants. However, this approach made my writing disjointed and the overall message - how negotiating time and work was a gendered experience - became lost in a myriad of voices. Initial drafts of the thesis included quotes from employees across the organisations which meant that some who featured in Chapter Five were never heard from again until Chapter Eight, where I tried to consolidate these wide-ranging experiences into a coherent argument.

From the outset it was important to me to recognise that work-life balance is a holistic experience which transcends the workplace into the home. I wanted to portray this within the thesis itself but the writing-up method I originally chose was not allowing me to do so. Influenced by the writings of Sharma (2014), Hochschild (1997, 2012), McDowell (1997) and others, I also wanted to write a thesis that was accessible to the reader by creating a narrative across the text. With support from my supervisors, I took the decision to select several participants from each organisation whose experiences best represented the themes which emerged from the data analysis. I chose employees whose data and lived experiences encapsulated the idea that flexible working negotiations were complex, ongoing and not confined to the office. Rather than demonstrating the number of times a particular theme occurred, this approach showcased the richness of the data and emphasised the contextual nature of its construction by focusing on individual experiences.

As I progressed through the chapter drafts I found that by focusing on fewer employee narratives I was able to provide a more in-depth interpretation of the data and develop a more coherent argument across the thesis. However, I was doubting whether this decision was ethically the correct one. These employees had given up their time to speak to me and by doing so they were expecting their voices to be heard. By excluding approximately half the sample in my written document,

was I breaking the ethical agreement I had made as a feminist researcher? Equally challenging was the notion that I had neglected a lot of rich and fascinating data, particularly from employees who worked in sales, whose stories were not included in the final draft because, as mobile workers, their experiences were considerably different to the majority of the sample.

Throughout this chapter I have reflected upon my position within the research and how that position informed the decisions I made throughout the process. When writing-up the research I chose to include the narratives of participants who exemplified key themes and debates which emerged across the entire data set. The stories I have chosen enabled me to demonstrate how flexible working was negotiated across the spheres of work, home and the rest of life. This approach still emphasised the similarities and differences between these experiences - a central tenet of a comparative methodology - whilst also developing a cohesive argument around the central themes within the findings. Returning to my feminist research ethic, the work of Sharma (2014), Hochschild (1997, 2012), McDowell (1997), among others, reassured me that this was a legitimised approach to writing-up research and one which challenges the objective, scientific approach of traditional research methodologies.

Conclusion

This chapter has charted the methodological process of this study, beginning with an exploration of the epistemologies which directed the research design. I introduced feminist standpoint theories as an influential part of my epistemological journey but critiqued them in favour of poststructuralist feminism which recognises gender as being contextually constructed and reconstructed through discourse and action. This approach has shaped the research questions, which consider how gender is constructed within flexible working practices in asset finance. As well as informing the research questions, this emphasis on context has influenced the research methods used and enabled me to critically reflect on their strengths and limitations. As part of this commitment to emphasising context, I introduced the two case-study organisations in detail before justifying why comparative cases were selected and explained how the data was collected and analysed. The final

section honoured the traditions of qualitative feminist research by critically reflecting on the choices I made throughout the research process as well as the fluidity of my position within the research itself.

The next chapter will be the first of three chapters to present the findings of this research. These analytical chapters journey across the organisational setting and into the home, starting with a critical analysis of power relations within flexible working practices which focuses on how time and work are constructed by managers in the sample. This will be followed by Chapter Six which centralises the role of co-worker relationships within flexible working practices and Chapter Seven will shift the focus onto the co-ordination of time, work and relationships within the home.

Chapter Five: negotiating time and work with managers

Introduction

Management play a vital role in facilitating flexible work practices within the organisation and a significant body of research has focused on managers' attitudes to work-life balance (e.g. Been et al., 2015; den Dulk and de Ruijter, 2008; Ford and Collinson, 2011; Lewis, 2003). This chapter aims to understand how managers control access to flexible working practices in the two organisations and consider the outcome of these negotiations from the perspective of their employees. Data from both case-studies will be presented consecutively, starting with Nordica and followed by DBK. The first section will introduce the two most senior managers in the Nordica sample and compare their attitudes towards flexible working practices, focusing on how their subjective constructions of the ideal worker changed over time and how this impacted their employees' access to flexible working practices. The second section focuses on interviewees from Nordica's Business Administration department to understand how their experiences of flexible working practices were affected by an increased workload caused by the month-end reporting deadline. This section shows how the flexible working policy at Nordica was designed around the fluctuating workload caused by month-end and how this process, and the way it restricted access to flexitime, had become normalised by managers and employees alike. The final section at Nordica will turn the spotlight back on to the two managers, to show how working-mothers experienced unequal access to flexible working practices, depending on the department they worked in and the attitude of their manager. The second half of the chapter will focus on interviewees from DBK, also beginning with the two most senior managers in the sample. This section contrasts the organisations flexible working practices with those at Nordica to show that DBK privileges flexible space over flexible time. It will show how time and space are negotiated differently, introducing the role of trust in these negotiations. The next section will show how those with caring responsibilities have unequal access to flexible working practices,

because of internalised gender roles and conflicting constructions of ideal workers and ideal carers.

Managers at Nordica

There were two managers in the Nordica sample, both were white men but there was an age difference of almost twenty five years meaning they were at very different stages of life and considered themselves to be from two different generations. This section will consider how this age difference affects their experience of work-life balance and attitude toward flexible working practices in the organisation. The data analysed here will show how these two managers have different perceptions of what makes an ideal worker but as will be explored in Chapter Seven, their behaviours did not always reflect these contrasting attitudes.

Young, bright (single) guys

Richard was the only Executive Director in the sample and the manager of the Business Administration Department. Like nearly all the male managers at Nordica, Richard was white and within ten years of retirement. At 59, Richard had worked in asset finance most of his career having been at Nordica for 18 years and MoneyCo for 13 years previously. He came into the office every day as he felt it was his responsibility as a manager, saying he should be there for when 'issues or problems' arise and to ensure 'things are getting done promptly'.

The Business Administration department were responsible for providing administrative support for the regional sales team and their core tasks were generating, checking and processing financial contracts, preparing credit proposals, and responding to calls and emails from colleagues across the organisation. Richard described Business Administration as a 'dynamic' environment which did not suit everyone:

"It's a really dynamic environment of which [staff] have little control […] My team's relatively young now, that's a deliberate ploy […] We're getting bright guys who can cope with the job and do a good job […] I suppose I shouldn't say it really but I am a bit ageist because I think we've employed some older people and they just haven't lasted, they've done a month and they can't hack it. So, my decision was then to go for younger people, straight out of uni - really bright, enthusiastic."

[Richard, 59, Business Administration Director]

Richard described a frenetic atmosphere where administrators were expected to be responsive, with 'little control' over their workload. Richard said he preferred younger workers because older employees had struggled with the demands of the role. This resulted in a recruitment strategy to target young graduates, who Richard felt could better cope with the expectations of the role. The use of the term 'guys' in this quote is an example of subtle gender practices in the organisation but did not necessarily mean Richard favoured male employees for the role. Contemporary use of the word 'guys' has come to mean a collective group of (often young) people which may include all genders, but it has been criticised as standardising the male norm and making gender differences (and inequalities) invisible (Kleinman, 2002). However, Richard's recent recruitment history does indicate a gender bias in favour of young, white, men. In the 12 months prior to the interview, Richard had recruited three new team members which included two male graduates (both in the sample) and one female graduate, all under 25 years old. Furthermore, throughout the interview he referred to 'guys' and 'girls' to distinguish between genders, indicating that his use of the term 'guys' in the above extract was a direct reference to the recent male recruits in the department (who will be introduced later in this chapter).

For Richard, young, highly educated and ambitious employees make the ideal workers. Being so young also meant they were less likely to have responsibilities outside of work and being ambitious may also mean they were more willing to please. The drawback of Richard's construction of the ideal worker is that ambitious

employees would always be looking to progress. Richard's answer was to encourage them to stay by offering to pay for further qualifications and professional training, but he knew this was only a short-term solution:

> *"Because the company's small, we know we will lose them after a period of time. But during that time, we will have used and abused them, and they will have used and abused us. And that's fine because they are getting something from it and likewise, we're getting something from them."*

> *[Richard, 59, Business Administration Director]*

Richard's construction of the ideal worker included a temporal dimension where long-term commitment to the organisation was not expected. This contradicts traditional constructions of the ideal worker as one who is committed to climbing the organisational career ladder (Williams, Muller and Kilanski, 2012). Richard's requirement of the ideal worker was based on traditional masculine norms around work, but he also recognised the realities of the contemporary labour market where jobs are no longer for life. He wanted staff who could 'cope' in an environment where they had very little control over working practices, who could also think fast and maintain enthusiasm. Richard justified age discrimination by arguing that younger employees were best suited to survive the 'dynamic' environment of the department and graduates were fast, enthusiastic learners. Richard's interpretation of the flexitime policy (see Chapter Four) meant that his ideal worker also needed to manage their own time and be able to successfully negotiate with their colleagues.

Richard's Business Administration team was entitled to work flexitime in accordance with the company's policy (see Chapter Four). The Administrators in the team were required to negotiate their flexitime with their co-workers to ensure the office had 'adequate cover', as required by the policy. The importance of having the core hours covered was expressed by many participants from departments across the organisation. However, Richard was the only manager who had engineered a staffing solution which ensured his team took responsibility for this themselves. To ensure negotiations were as simple as possible for his team, and for

himself, Richard decided to partner each member of staff with a 'buddy'. As well as explaining the rationale behind this practice, the following extract from Richard is another example of the way he subtly used gendered language in everyday interactions. As well as the masculine connotations of the word 'buddy', he also used the term 'manned' when referring to the requirement to have the office 'covered':

> *"As long as you've got those core hours covered and the office is manned from nine 'til five, the teams sort of work it between themselves anyway. I don't normally have to intervene. They're all pretty good actually because we sort of buddy them up"*

> *[Richard, 59, Business Administration Director]*

Richard referred to this strategy as giving each team member a 'partner' and this process of pairing up team members was how Richard was putting the company's flexitime policy in to practice. This practice will be explored in more detail later in the chapter, but for Richard, it meant he could focus on other aspects of management rather than co-ordinating his team's flexitime use. However, this practice contravened a core principle of the policy, that: the *department manager* must be made aware of how staff intended to use their flexitime to ensure the department was 'adequately covered during core office hours' (see Chapter Four and Appendix ix). Richard's decision to extract himself from flexitime negotiations suggests he did not consider this a valuable use of his working time. Richard felt able to use the privilege of his organisational position to bend the rules of the policy and absolve himself from the responsibility of managing his team's flexible working practices. Possible reasons for this will be considered in the next section, where Manager of the Financial Accounting team, Stephen, claimed he was the only manager in the company who supported alternative flexible working practices outside the flexitime policy.

Stephen was a white, male, 35 year old Accounting Manager who described himself as the only non-executive member of the management team. Stephen had worked his entire career at Nordica and considered himself representative of a younger generation of workers who were juggling career ambitions with raising a family. Stephen did not feel his work-life balance was supported by his colleagues in the senior management team, suggesting they had more traditional views of parenting and work:

> "There is a clear age difference, or at least what I see as a generational difference between what they expect parents should be able to cope [with.] I think they're much more, this is the work, you commit to doing that work when you join so if you can't then fulfil them that's your problem [...] I think there's an understanding of the right for mums to request more flexible working and all that sort of stuff, but I'm not sure if they necessarily agree with the principle of it. So, we do what we have to do, but I'm not sure they have that sort of feeling towards it.'

> [Stephen, 35, Accounting Manager]

Stephen attributed his colleagues' negative attitudes toward work-life balance and flexible work to their age and life-stage. He felt that his generation appreciated the value of flexible work and the ability to balance work with parenting responsibilities. As the youngest senior manager, Stephen's construction of the ideal worker challenged Richard's more traditional model as he felt parents should be able to manage their caring responsibilities alongside their paid-work. He said that although his management colleagues recognised their legal obligation to consider flexible working requests, he did not believe they agreed with the principle of doing so. Despite his progressive attitude toward flexible work, Stephen still referred to the right to request flexible work as a policy for 'Mums'. This subtle gendering of a legislation which applies to *all* employees suggests that Stephen, like Richard, may also be making gendered assumptions about flexible work (Burnett *et al.*, 2010).

107

Stephen cared about flexible work because it mattered to him. He had two daughters who were five and three and shared responsibility for the childcare with his wife. Stephen said he and his wife 'have to work as a pair to get everything covered'. Stephen was one of only two men in the Nordica sample who used flexitime to take children to school or nursery, supporting his assertion that very few of his colleagues have young children. His morning routine involved walking his eldest daughter to school, coming home and unloading the dishwasher or putting the washing on, before setting out to work. He would come into the office every day, arriving at about 9.30am and usually worked until 6pm or 6.30pm. Stephen often used flexitime to look after his children and despite being an advocate for increasing the availability of flexible working practices in the organisation, he also recognised the potential barriers to doing so.

Stephen said that the function of his accounting team meant it was easier to be spontaneous with flexitime requests:

> "Accounting, it's not customer facing particularly so as long as somebody is in the office to answer any questions that come up, you're not going to get a deluge of calls or people asking stuff all of a sudden, so you can be bit more flexible I think."

> [Stephen, 35, Accounting Manager]

He attributed this to the fact his department was not customer facing and did not receive a substantial volume of phone calls or queries from other departments. Stephen felt that in the Accounts team, an ideal worker did not need to be able to cope with a pressurised environment or provide customer service, which meant they could afford to be more flexible with their time. However, he recognised the requirements in Business Administration were quite different:

"In the Business Administration role, you could get a load of deals come through late in the day and they want to get the work done. So, they are a bit more required to man telephones at certain hours."

[Stephen, 35, Accounting Manager]

Stephen felt that it was harder to be flexible under those conditions and that the Business Administration department adhered to a more traditional conception of the ideal worker, where workers had to stay late to get the work done or answer the phones. Stephen also echoed Richard's use of gendered language, where rather than using the organisation's terminology of providing cover, he used the phrase 'to *man* telephones', perhaps another indication that the ideal worker in the Business Administration context was based on the male norm. This use of gendered terminology amongst the management team also suggests that such language goes unchallenged and is in everyday use by those in positions of power. This is one example of how gender inequality is subtly embedded within the organisational culture and in a small company, with no onsite HR department to critique management behaviours, they go unchecked, gradually becoming normalised into operational discourse.

Stephen also sympathised with Richard by describing the difficulties of negotiating flexitime within the team:

"It becomes a bit of an issue because they always want people here at 5pm. I mean you've got three out of the five people all saying they want to leave before 4pm […] You never get a load of people who say, 'I want to do 8 to 4', and the other load say, 'I want to do 10 to 6. You definitely get more of a lean towards earlier I find. People want to get up and come in and have more of an evening. It's the people with kids, I think, who are sometimes the other way around, because they're doing stuff in the morning with the kids."

[Stephen, 35, Accounting Manager]

Stephen differentiates himself from the organisation and his senior management colleagues when he said that '*they*' want employees in the office at 5pm, as part of the requirement to have cover during core office hours. This condition was asserting and sustaining the 9 to 5 routine and so industrialised working time had become embedded within the flexitime policy. Stephen felt that this stipulation caused the issues in his team and without it he would be able to better manage his staff's flexitime requests. Moreover, the flexitime policy only recognised time in measurable units of linear time, but Stephens' staff wanted to use flexitime to improve their work-life balance, something which could not be measured quantitatively. Stephen's team valued time differently according to their life stage and in his small team of five staff, all but one was child-free and preferred to start and finish work early. Stephen found that it was not negotiations with his staff that were problematic, the difficulty was in negotiating the quantitative, linear units of time used in the flexitime policy with the qualitative measure of time his staff were using to manage their work-life balance.

The next section will return to the Nordica Business Administration team to understand how the flexitime policy was used to manage the workload fluctuations caused by month-end. By combining theories of social time with theories on gendered organisations, this section will show how the working practices of these employees were profoundly shaped by Richard's own interpretation of the company's flexitime policy.

Flexitime practices over month-end

Month-end is an accounting procedure that closes an organisation's operations for the preceding month. It is a cost control process to ensure businesses regularly reconcile their profit and loss. Efficient month-end reporting is seen to demonstrate the company's reliability and ability to adapt to change, something which the market, and therefore shareholders, value. In financial services, month-end reporting is also integral to regulatory frameworks and in asset finance, members of the Finance & Leasing Authority (FLA) are required to report their balances promptly after month-end closes.

Although primarily an accounting procedure, month-end was synonymous with the monthly targets set for Nordica's Sales department. The pressure to secure business was significantly increased by target-linked bonuses, awarded to the sales team, which added a personal incentive to finalise deals by the month-end deadline. The function of the Business Administration department was to provide administrative support to the Sales team and therefore their work was dictated by the cyclical workflow that month-end targets produced. During the final week of the calendar month, Business Administration experienced dramatically increased workloads and all staff were expected to be flexible with their time and complete every finance deal before the month-end close. Unlike their colleagues in Sales, the Business Administrators did not receive target linked bonuses. Instead, the flexitime policy enabled them to reclaim any additional hours they worked during month-end. This section will consider how the cyclical process of month-end impacted the flexible working practices of the Business Administration team and how this financial procedure changed the way employees negotiated their use of time.

The intensification and extensification of work over month-end was normalised by interviewees across the organisation but this was particularly pronounced in Business Administration. As the next extract shows, the whole team were required to work overtime at month-end and because it was usually so busy, there were no exceptions to the rule:

> *"When we're busy, we're busy and everyone knows we have to stay, but if things are quite slow and not as fast then you can fit more of what you want in. You can fit your outside life much more around work rather than work being the dominant thing and having to try and fit other stuff in."*

> *[Dylan, 23, Business Administrator]*

This extract is typical of the ambivalent way Business Administration interviewees talked about month-end. There was a shared understanding that work took

precedence over life when it was busy at month-end and most interviewees said they accepted they had to stay late over month-end because the flexitime policy allowed them to reduce their working hours the following fortnight. Business Administration accrued lots of flexitime whilst working overtime at month-end but were forbidden from taking any time in lieu until the accounting period had closed. They would then reprioritise their life over work and take the flexitime they had accrued at month-end before the cycle started again. Nordica's flexitime policy was designed to optimise staff productivity when the workload demanded it, guided by the cyclical rhythm of the monthly workflow. Interviewees accepted that at month-end, work took priority but they could renegotiate the balance afterwards.

According to the interviewees who worked in Business Administration, the ideal worker was willing to accept work intensification and extensification over month-end because it was only temporary and they would take the time back later. This seemed to be a shared understanding amongst the Business Administration interviewees but as the next section shows, some employees resented working long hours at month-end because this time was valuable to them and could not be so easily exchanged.

An absence of negotiation

The Business Administration interviewees had all normalised the intensification and extensification of work over month-end, but one interviewee challenged the expectation that month-end must always take priority over their personal life. Not only was flexitime forbidden over month-end but annual leave was also restricted as Josh explained:

> *"Having time off is, I think, really hard here because we only have about forty people. Month-end is sort of just a slash, it's like you can't have any time. My partner's a teacher so I can only have time off during the half terms because obviously, there's no point if she's at work. It's really hard for me because quite a lot of the school*

holiday's land on a month end and you have to tell her I can't have

it off because it's month-end, which is hard."

[Josh, 23, Business Administrator]

Josh wanted to take annual leave at month-end so he could spend time with his girlfriend, but his experience suggests that the use of flexitime at month-end was non-negotiable. Josh said he found this restriction over his time-off 'really hard' to accept and was frustrated that he missed out on time with his girlfriend because of it. Although he worked overtime at month-end alongside his colleagues in the department, he challenged the characteristics of the ideal Business Administration worker because he resented having to prioritise work over his personal life during this time. Whilst his colleagues seemed content with taking time back in lieu once month-end was complete, this was not enough for Josh as it meant he had not been able to spend his free-time in the way he would have liked. Josh's experience reasserts the claim made by Stephen earlier in the chapter, that the flexitime policy only measured quantitative, linear units of time, but Josh measured his work-life balance by the quality of the time he spent away from work. At month-end, a constructed version of financial time was used to justify the availability of flexitime during this busy period. Flexitime negotiations were temporarily silenced and the Business Administration administrators were required to become traditional ideal workers, at least until the start of the next month when they could resume their preferred work-life balance.

No right to negotiation

As discussed in the Methodology chapter (Chapter Four), although Business Administration was a department with near gender parity, the research sample consisted of three (young) men and one woman. I was told that at least one woman in the team was a mother and I have been continually reflecting upon why she, and other women and mothers at Nordica, did not volunteer to be interviewed. This section is borne out of that reflection and offers one explanation for why women in Business Administration may have been reluctant to tell their story. This section

will introduce 'Anna', an ex-Nordica employee who, although not interviewed in person, became a topic of discussion for two Business Administration interviewees. The following section gives an insight into Richard's attitude toward gender roles, work-life balance and flexible working practices. This section will also revisit the younger manager, Stephen to see how he negotiated a similar situation within his department.

Richard remembers Anna

Unprompted, Richard told the story of Anna, a mother who had requested fixed working hours when she returned from her second maternity leave. He thought the story was significant because of my interest in gender. In this section, the focus will be on Richard's interpretation of events as Anna's manager, and the following chapter will revisit the case from the perspective of Max, one of Anna's Business Administration co-workers.

As the following quote from Richard's interview states, the outcome of Anna's right to request flexible working ended up in a legal dispute. Richard freely admitted this to me in the interview but because of my ethical obligations to the organisation and to Richard as a participant, I am conscious of representing this discussion as accurately as possible in order to avoid any potential ethical, or even legal, implications. Therefore, I have chosen to tell the story in Richard's own words with this extended extract:

> "We did have a case actually - this might be interesting or not - we had a lady come back from maternity leave and because she used to come in at 8 and go at 4, she came back and said, 'Right, these are my hours - I'm working eight 'til four', and I said 'Well that's not acceptable. We'll be as flexible as we can but through peak periods, which is normally at the end of the month, I need you here beyond 4 o'clock'. She said 'No, that doesn't work for me', so we came to an agreement and she left, that was the agreement [...] For me it was all about fairness. I didn't think it was fair that she could dictate her

114

hours, which meant that her partner could never leave early. So, for me that didn't work for the team. The team dynamics would've suffered [...] We do have these exceptionally busy periods where the team will be here until 7 o'clock at night and again, I don't think it was fair that she could leave at 4, meaning they'd have to work 'til 7 - 7.30 [...] And although we gave lots of options to say, you know, we'll give you plenty of notice you can organise your child minder, she didn't want to do that."

[Richard, 59, Business Administration Director]

Despite Richard's glib description of events, the incident was escalated when Anna appealed the decision to refuse her flexible working request, forcing the company to involve their lawyers. Although the right-to-request legislation does not include a statutory right to appeal, employees can complain to an employment tribunal if they do not think the request was handled in a reasonable manner. As Richard mentioned later in the interview, because Anna had returned from maternity leave she had 'additional protection', which he said, 'made it trickier' from a legal perspective. Richard was referring to the 'protection from detriment' which ensures employers do not unlawfully erode women's pay or conditions when they return from maternity leave. Under Section 47C of the Employment Rights Act 1996, women are entitled to return to their original job or an equivalent suitable job with equal pay and conditions (Employment Rights Act, 1996). Richard's justification for refusing Anna's request rested on the argument that all staff were obliged to work overtime at month-end. Richard was unable to understand why Anna would not be willing to do this, either to support the company or in solidarity with her co-workers

A breakdown of negotiation

Learning about this case felt like uncovering a dark side to an otherwise pleasant community. I used my own experience of HR procedures and staff management to consider possible explanations. Perhaps this employee was a difficult person who

was not valued by the team or maybe she had exploited the flexitime policy in the past. As a sociologist, I was critical of these explanations but also recognised they can be legitimised through the eyes of a department manager responsible for creating a productive workforce.

As shown earlier in the chapter, Richard preferred young, 'bright guys' who could 'cope' with the pressure of the Business Administration environment. We also know that work intensification and extensification at month-end was normalised by the team and that the flexitime policy was designed around this fluctuating workflow. As a working mother seeking to opt out of both the flexitime policy and the obligatory overtime at month-end, Anna did not fit Richard's description of the ideal Business Administration worker. Richard considered Anna's request to leave 'early' each day as unfair on the rest of the team, particularly as it would affect his strategy of letting partners negotiate flexitime between themselves, as detailed earlier in the chapter. Most significant though was Anna's refusal to work overtime at month-end. By refusing to co-operate, Anna was rejecting Richard's construction of the ideal worker and the requirement to put work first during month-end. Richard described how negotiations between himself and Anna broke down as she refused to accept his compromise to be 'as flexible as we can'. Richard and Anna had different perspectives on work-life balance and since having her baby, Anna valued her time at home more than her time at work.

Richard's response to this request for flexible work supported Stephen's assertion earlier in the chapter. Stephen said that the senior management team expected parents to be able to 'cope' with managing their work-life balance, and although they recognised the right to request flexible working they did not 'necessarily agree with the principle of it'. When a mother in Stephen's team approached him with a similar request he granted it, but the decision did have repercussions on the rest of the team as they had to negotiate their own flexitime around her fixed hours. As shown earlier in the chapter, Stephen also said that his Accounts team had less pressure and time constraints than Business Administration, meaning they could be a bit more flexible. Unlike Richard, Stephen was not wedded to the idea of the traditional ideal worker, partly because of his own childcare responsibilities but also because those characteristics were not required in the Accounting department.

The contrasting ways in which Richard and Stephen negotiated requests for flexible working show that a manager's subjective construction of the ideal worker impacted employees' access to flexible working practices at Nordica. This subjective construction depended on the manager's own experience of work-life balance, influenced by their age and life-stage, but also by what the manager considered to be important characteristics for the job. The next section will explore this idea further by analysing interview data from two male managers at DBK. It will expand on this argument by considering whether a universal financial culture could also influence a manager's subjective construction of the ideal worker, especially if they had worked in the sector their entire career.

Managers at DBK

At DBK, the two male managers in the sample claimed to support flexible working practices in their teams and across the organisation, both envisioning a future where remote working would become commonplace. Both managers regularly worked from home to manage their work-life balance and this section will introduce the idea that flexible working practices are used for self-care as well as care for others. It will also investigate how the attitudes of these managers may be influenced by having worked their entire careers in the financial services sector. The focus will then shift to four employees who had mixed experiences of accessing flexible working practices, despite feeling they had support from their managers.

Mark: happy employees work best

Mark was the Director of Credit, and one of only two Board Directors for DBK in the UK. At 56, Mark had worked at DBK for the last six years but had been in finance 'forever'. He was responsible for several departments including the Credit Underwriters, Collections and Recovery, and Asset Auditors. Mark's perspective on working from home was influenced by his own experience of struggling to maintain

a healthy work-life balance, which resulted in him working from home twice a week to manage an ongoing health condition.

Mark was an advocate for increasing flexible working at DBK and believed in the mutual benefits of working from home:

"I think we will see more and more people working remotely in the future. Systems, you know the telecoms and things nowadays is so good that you don't have to be in a fixed location, and company premises are expensive, so much better to have people set up at home. As long as they can be relied upon to do the work and are getting sufficient social interaction, then it's a good thing, for everybody"

[Mark, 56, Director of Credit]

The discourse at DBK was that working from home was no longer considered a luxury reserved for senior employees (Gregg, 2011), and Mark wanted to create a culture where more employees worked remotely. Every employee in the organisation had been issued with a key fob so they could logon to the company systems from their personal computers and laptops at home, and at the time I was conducting fieldwork the company was experimenting with replacing the key fobs with a smartphone app. As well as having adequate technology, Mark also felt it was important that staff could 'be relied upon to do the work'. The theme of negotiating trust as part of flexible working practices is something that will recur throughout the thesis, as well as how trust is integral to constructions of the ideal worker.

For Mark, an ideal worker was one that could be relied upon to be productive and utilise their time effectively; and Mark believed staff were most effective when they were happy:

"I don't care when people work. Whether you're a 9 to 5 standard pattern [or if] people want to disappear off for an hour during the day and work an hour later in the evening, fine. If it's not a time

critical task then I'd much sooner people work what suits them, as
then they'd be happier employees and we can pay them less and
still keep them! [...] Everybody knows happy employees work best."

[Mark, 56, Director of Credit]

Mark's facetious comment that staff with flexible working practices are happier, and can therefore be paid less, supports the narrative that flexible working practices have mutual benefits for both employer and employee. Mark understood there could be a tangible, 'bottom-line' saving if staff were able to exercise more control over when they worked, as well as where they worked. He also recognised the intangible savings that could be made as employees with a better work-life balance were likely to be more productive. Despite his progressive approach to flexible working practices, Mark's considered certain tasks to be 'time critical', meaning employees were required to relinquish their time autonomy and prioritise the work. There was no explanation of how a time critical task was measured, but this construction of time was similar to the way Richard at Nordica spoke about month-end; when work was urgent, employees must become traditional ideal workers and how they used their time became non-negotiable.

How Mark negotiated flexible working practices with his staff will be explored from the perspective of his employees later in the chapter. As this section has shown, Mark claimed to support flexible working practices which challenged traditional working time and place, and he aligned himself with the popular argument that flexible work has mutual benefits for employers and employees. The next section will focus on Eddie, a manager a little further down the organisational hierarchy. Like Mark, Eddie believed that flexible working practices required a negotiation of trust between employers and employees, but in contrast to Mark, he did not believe that all employees had equal access to flexible work.

Eddie: dependent flexibility

Eddie was the Manager of the Asset Sales team and the temporary Manager of Customer Services. Although a few years younger than Mark at 48, he had also worked in the finance sector his whole career and had worked at DBK for 15 years,

originally starting in a High Street bank straight from school. Eddie supported flexible working practices in principle but warned that the finance sector had a unique relationship with time which may restrict the availability of flexible working for some employees in the organisation. He referred to the strict daily deadlines imposed by the banks which restricted the temporal practices of departments such as Financial Accounting (which Eddie refers to here as Finance):

> *"I do think there's pressure on the financial transactions happening within a certain period of time. I mean in Finance for example, that tends to be over lunchtimes, so they tend to be having their lunch hours a lot later. So, I think [the culture is] quite time critical, especially about the banking industry, especially as there's time limits and they have to have things done at a certain time."*
>
> *[Eddie, 48, Asset Sales Manager]*

Eddie explained that the rigid deadlines imposed by the banks were temporally specific and impacted the organisational processes at DBK. He said that these deadlines and limits created time-pressures in some departments which could restrict their access to flexible working practices. These banking deadlines were socially constructed and normalised parameters which were enmeshed within legislative requirements and authorisation procedures, both in DBK and across the asset finance sector. Eddie felt that this created a culture where 'banking time' dictated the processes and practices within organisations such as DBK, as they relied on the banking sector to administer their daily transactions (see also Chapter Four). As a sub-sector of the finance industry, these asset finance organisations were integrated into what Hope (2006) describes as the 'accelerated global monetary exchange' (2006: 278), creating a culture which celebrates immediacy and instantaneity.

Eddie said departments outside Financial Accounting also had restricted access to flexible working practices, and despite the organisational discourse of remote working for all, autonomy over when and where you worked depended on your position within the organisation:

"There is quite a bit of flexibility on the lead team upwards [and] Sales, they can do what they want, but there are core people in the office who need to be here. So, I think it's more functional rather than personality of a team leader […] In Customer Service you've got to have a core there to answer the phone and deal with correspondence."

[Eddie, 48, Asset Sales Manager]

Eddie felt that certain types of flexible working practices were more accessible for employees higher up the organisational hierarchy and in departments such as sales, where the ability to work remotely was a core element of the job. Eddie felt that customer facing roles were less suitable for flexible working practices because the ideal administrative worker was always available when the customer needed. These workers were required to be available during the institutionalised, but socially constructed, working hours of 9 to 5. As far as Eddie was concerned, this availability was a requirement of the role and the timeframe was non-negotiable.

The Customer Service department at DBK included the Business Administration team and (similarly to Nordica) this was the department responsible for processing the finance deals at month-end. Also akin to practices at Nordica, Eddie expected his Business Administration staff to stay late to process the contracts and time-off was often 'banned' over the month-end period. He felt that because the company was 'pretty straight' with them about month-end at the interview stage, employees should accept these conditions as 'part and parcel' of the job. At month-end, the ideal administrative worker was also expected to show commitment to the organisation by prioritising work and renegotiating their personal time because of month-end; this was non-negotiable.

For Eddie, negotiating flexible work practices was about more than agreeing on when and where employees would work. Eddie expanded on Mark's discussion around trust and reliability by explaining that this was central to how he negotiated flexible work with his staff, especially when they worked remotely:

"I'm all for giving people enough rope to hang themselves really, pardon me! You know, we can see who's signed on when with the Windows structure so you can see when they're working or not […] [It's about] trusting people […] You do have, you know, people who will take it to the maximum and working from home means an extra days holiday a week."

[Eddie, 48, Asset Sales Manager]

Paradoxically, this negotiation of trust between Eddie and his staff was based on a foundation of mistrust. Eddie believed that there would always be staff willing to abuse their employers' trust when able to work from home, so he used the same technology which enabled remote working practices as tools of surveillance over his staff. By monitoring how much time his staff spent online, Eddie was substituting old-fashioned presenteeism in the office for presenteeism behind a screen at home. Furthermore, measuring units of linear time spent online is not a reflection of employee productivity and can actually cause staff to be less productive. Gregg (2011) found that employees who worked from home would engage in less urgent tasks such as immediately replying to emails, because these were more visible online, in what Gregg referred to as performing 'competence and diligence' (Gregg, 2011: 42). Eddie did not provide any evidence to support his statement that some staff would treat working from home as 'an extra day's holiday'; neither did anyone interviewed at DBK say that they felt under surveillance when working from home. However, issues of trust and productivity around remote working were discussed by several interviewees, including Ankit and Ruth, who both feature in the following section which looks at DBK's flexible working practices from the perspective of their employees.

DBK employees: working from home in practice

The section opens by introducing two carers. The first is Elaine, a working mother who worked part-time at 0.8 FTE and also worked from home every Friday. The second employee is Alan who worked from home twice a week to support his

disabled wife who was suffering from degenerative blindness. This section will show how these two employees felt confident in negotiating access to their flexible working practices because as carers of dependent family members, Elaine and Alan were benefitting from the legacy of the original right to request flexible working legislation.

Mixed methods: Elaine, working remotely and part-time

Elaine was 43 years old and had worked at DBK for 16 years. She had three children and had two periods of maternity leave whilst at DBK. Elaine had been in her role as Credit Auditor for two years and was promoted whilst working part-time. The role was office based but involved domestic travel two to three times a month to conduct asset audits. As well as working part-time, Elaine had successfully negotiated with her manager, Mark, that she would work from home on a Friday, working from 9am to 1pm whilst the children were at school. Elaine also made regular requests to work additional hours at home, for work or personal reasons:

> *"My manager is very easy going about working from home, anyone in the department can for whatever reason. If your child's sick, you have an appointment - you know you're going to spend half the day going to the Doctors or trekking in – he's quite happy for working at home. And if I said to him, 'Look, it's a bit noisy at work, I've got this report to write can I do it from home?' it'd be fine."*
>
> *[Elaine, 43, Credit Auditor]*

Elaine felt that negotiating to work from home occasionally was simple with Mark, because he supported staff who wanted to work remotely. She also felt that successful negotiating involved giving a rationale for wanting to work from home and explaining how this would increase her productivity, therefore benefitting the organisation as well as herself. Elaine was enacting the principles of the right-to-request legislation every time she entered a negotiation with her manager to work from home on a temporary basis. By doing so, Elaine was showing Mark she would

provide something in exchange and it would be in the company's best interests to approve her request. Elaine and her family would also benefit from a successful negotiation, as she could get herself or her children to a doctor's appointment without having to make up the extra time later on.

As well as working at home, Elaine often worked remotely to combine her personal and professional responsibilities:

> *"If there's [children's sports] training going on I think, oh I need to finish something off, I'll take my laptop with me and do a bit of work. It can get a bit boring watching the training, so yeah, sometimes I take work with me to do."*

> *[Elaine, 43, Credit Auditor]*

By taking her laptop to her children's training, Elaine was actively using flexible working practices to negotiate the boundaries between work and life, blurring her responsibilities as a worker and mother. Elaine did not explain whether this remote working constituted overtime but Gregg (2011) found that part-time mothers would often utilise remote working to extend their working week. By using time that would otherwise be 'boring', Elaine felt she was being economical with the limited time she had available rather than feeling burdened by work extensification. For Elaine, working at the side of the swimming pool or tennis court was exchanging low-quality personal time for more valuable time that could be spent working. This example shows how Elaine used flexible working practices to negotiate her time as a mother and worker, actively choosing how, where and when to integrate her multiple responsibilities. For Elaine, the ideal working mother could successfully negotiate various flexible working practices to make the most of the time and space she had available. Chapter Seven will return to Elaine's story to show that making the most of time was important to Elaine because her free-time was significantly limited.

Alan was 57 and had worked in finance and leasing his entire career. Alan had worked for DBK for six years, originally starting on a temporary contract and commuting 150 miles from Yorkshire every day. When his manager, Mark, asked him to stay permanently, Alan successfully negotiated a flexible working practice that enabled him to work from home two days a week. He originally only requested one day but the company offered him a second day in exchange for conducting regular credit visits to customers in the north of England. As well as reducing the time and money he spent on travel, this time at home allowed Alan to care for his wife who was registered as blind.

As well as looking after his wife, Alan also cared for his father-in-law who at 89, needed regular help with housework. Being able to work from home meant Alan could combine paid work with caring responsibilities, such as visiting his father-in-law whilst walking the dog. For Alan, and several other DBK interviewees, working from home was not just about spatial flexibility, but also enabled greater temporal flexibility:

> *"When I work from home I get up at 7 o'clock. I start work and then I'll have a break at 8, I'll take my dog for a walk for half an hour and then I'll work, and very often I'll probably work through lunch. I have a break sometimes, I don't have to, it's up to me. And often I'll carry on afterwards, not that anybody [at DBK] would say you have to do that or anything, but it's just the fact that when you're at home and you know, you actually get quite a lot done, and it works, it works really well."*

> *[Alan, 57, Senior Credit Underwriter]*

When Alan worked from home, he had autonomy over his working routine which enabled him to negotiate his work and caring responsibilities. For Alan, the ability to choose when he worked was important and believed this often meant he was more productive. Rather than negatively experiencing this as work extensification, Alan considered the ability to 'get more done' as a benefit of working at home. The

sentiment that you are more productive at home was one shared by many of the interviewees at DBK. This could be because a significant number of interviewees were in mid-senior positions where they were responsible for managing their own workload, including Alan, Elaine and Ankit. Alan felt that working from home had benefits for himself and his employer; it gave him the time autonomy to combine his work and caring responsibility, and the company got a productive and happy worker in return – just as manager Mark envisaged.

Dani: occasional flexibility

Dani was 38 and had worked at DBK over 15 years. She started as an administrator and progressed through Mark's Credit team to become a 'middle-ticket' underwriter, approving finance transactions of over £200,000. During that time, she had taken maternity leave twice and reduced to 0.8 FTE after her first maternity leave. When she reduced her hours, Dani also asked if she could work from home on a Friday but decided she preferred working in the office for several reasons:

> *"I can concentrate better in the office and yeah, I just find I prefer to be working with people rather than sitting at home […] Maybe if I had a completely empty house I might think a bit differently, but if I'm going to be working from home and I know one of the kids is around it's like I'm hiding from them all day. You're just waiting for them to go, 'Mummy!' and just appear […] There's, too many distractions at home for me to want to do it regularly. I'd rather just, like I say, come in to the office and just switch off from home, you can separate home and work life depending on where you are can't you?"*
>
> *[Dani, 38, Credit Underwriter]*

Like many others in the DBK sample, Dani appreciated the company of her co-workers, but this was not the main reason she preferred the office. Dani found the only way she could concentrate on her work and 'switch off from home' was by

working in the office and was the only mother in the DBK sample who commented on this. The only other participant who discussed the distraction of children at home was Eddie, who said that when his children were younger he 'didn't have a hope in hell' of working once they got home from school at 3 o'clock (see also Chapter Seven). Unlike her colleague, Elaine, Dani did not want to combine her caring responsibilities with her paid-work and preferred to maintain a spatial separation between work and home. Dani's experience highlights the gendered assumptions that underpin this type of flexible working practice. The ability to work from home does not excuse employees from being traditional ideal workers and they are still required to prioritise work and be free from outside responsibilities whilst doing so. Whilst some interviewees, such as Elaine and Eddie, felt comfortable in challenging this norm, Dani did not. She did not feel able to successfully negotiate her roles as a mother and worker when working from home. Dani said that combining childcare with work meant, 'you're not really doing either then - you're not looking after them properly and you're not working properly'.

Dani's story is a reminder that negotiating access to work from home is easier for some employees than others and this can depend on the domestic setting as much as the organisational context. The ability to conduct paid-work from home is based on gendered assumptions about work and care, where traditional ideal workers are free from responsibilities outside of work. It does not acknowledge the gendered dynamics of parenting, where mothers spend more time on care related activities even if childcare is shared between couples and family members (Burnett *et al.*, 2010; Lyonette and Crompton, 2015). By providing the policies and IT infrastructure to enable all employees to work from home companies, like DBK, give the appearance of equal opportunity and fair access to flexible working practices. However, not all types of flexible work are feasible for all employees because of wider social norms around work and care, and time and place.

The next section will look at two employees who felt that working from home would be good for their work-life balance and productivity at work but because they could not justify why they wanted to work remotely, they felt powerless to negotiate the flexible working practices they wanted.

This section will introduce Ankit and Ruth who both wanted to work from home regularly but felt unable to negotiate this with their manager. They felt that improving their work-life balance was not a good enough reason for requesting a change to their working practices and they did not want to be seen to take advantage of the company. This section will argue that Ankit and Ruth felt unable to access flexible working practices because neither of them felt the practices were designed for them.

Ankit: Asking for a favour

Ankit was a 46 year old Senior Credit Underwriter and had been in finance most of his career, having worked for a competitor before joining DBK. Ankit had successfully negotiated a flexible working practice to fit around his caring commitments and, starting two months before the interview, he had agreed with Mark that he would leave early on a Tuesday and Thursday to take his son to football training after school. Ankit and his wife both worked full-time and had a carefully balanced schedule co-ordinated around their children's various hobbies and activities – a topic that will be revisited in Chapter Seven. As well as working flexibly to provide childcare, Ankit had also temporarily worked from home a year earlier when his Mum had cancer, enabling him to take her for chemotherapy treatment several times a week. Ankit represented a handful of other interviewees who could be considered part of the 'sandwich generation' – caring for elderly relatives and young children simultaneously. DBK encouraged an informal approach to requesting flexible working practices and there were no limits on the number of requests an employee could make. This is a significant deviation from the right to request legislation as employees are only legally entitled to one statuary request for flexible working every 12 months.

Despite being assured he had his managers' support, Ankit said that negotiating these flexible working practices had felt like asking for favours all the time:

"I mean, I do feel embarrassed to ask all the time, you know, but, generally Mark's flexible enough to let me do things, as long as it's not impacting on the work or [the] presence of other team members [...] I just feel that I keep asking for favours and I don't know how well or badly it's being received, so yeah, it's a bit difficult.[...] I kind of almost ask it more of a favour then, you know, and I do position it that way, 'Can you do me a favour?'. Maybe that's the wrong words I don't know."

[Ankit, 46, Senior Credit Underwriter]

Ankit felt 'embarrassed' every time he renegotiated his flexible working practices, suggesting he was aware that by doing so he was contradicting norms of hegemonic masculinity and the traditional ideal worker. Lewis (1997) argues that requesting flexible work can feel like asking for a favour because the socio-political context in the UK considers the family to be an individual rather than social (or corporate) responsibility (1997; 16). This cultural influence is exacerbated by the legacy of the gendered, family-friendly discourse that surrounded work-life balance policies throughout the mid-to-late 20th century (Lewis 1997; 2010; see also Chapter Three). This may explain why Elaine, as a working mother, felt able to assertively renegotiate her flexible working practices with her manager. As a white, middle-class mother in a one-and-a-half earner household, Elaine was the ideal type worker for whom flexible working practices were designed.

Like Elaine, Ankit wanted to work from home on a Friday but did not feel he could justify his reasons if he were to negotiate with his manager:

"I'm a bit apprehensive to ask [...] I mean, Mark is quite flexible but I think if I went to him and said, 'I want to work from home on Fridays', he's going to say, 'Why?', and I really don't know how to answer that. I don't think what I would say to him would be rock solid enough for me to able to work from home on a Friday [...] From a quality of life perspective it would be ideal [...] but I can't just say, 'Oh, well I do the cooking on Friday' [...] Maybe I'm being

a bit selfish by saying I'd like to work from home once a week [because] it just makes life easier for me."

[Ankit, 46, Senior Credit Underwriter]

Ankit did not feel he had a 'rock solid enough' reason for wanting to work from home on a Friday. Working from home would help him to negotiate his work-life balance and provide better care for his family, but he still considered the request to be 'selfish' and therefore unjustifiable. I explained to Ankit that under the current legal framework he was not required to give a reason for his request, but he said he still felt unsure about how to 'tackle' the request with his manager. Research has shown that despite the increased visibility of flexible working practices, fathers still feel that taking time away from work to care for others is a privilege rather than an entitlement and that they feel marginalised from being able to access this kind of flexibility (Gatrell *et al.*, 2014; Borgkvist *et al.*, 2018). Like Stephen at Nordica earlier in the chapter, Ankit was negotiating competing masculinities of the ideal father and the ideal worker (Wada, Backman and Forwell, 2015). The next section will explore the reasons why Ruth, a single, child-free woman, felt unable to renegotiate her own flexible working practices and how her experience shares some similarities with Ankit's.

Ruth: don't take advantage

Ruth had worked for DBK for four years, having previously been employed at an American owned finance firm which she said were very rigid and structured compared to DBK. Ruth was 43 and worked in Asset Sales where her role involved a combination of marketing and administration. As well as working full-time for DBK, Ruth also ran her own business as a fitness instructor which meant she worked most evenings following a full day in the office. Ruth confessed that this busy lifestyle caused her to 'burn-out' a few years ago, resulting in serious consequences for her physical and mental health. As a result, Ruth realised she had to renegotiate the balance and decided to reduce her commitments outside of work. Ruth's

department manager also suggested she change her working pattern from 9am to 5pm, to 8am to 4pm, which she said had made a 'massive difference'.

Like many other employees in the DBK sample, Ruth successfully negotiated to work from home occasionally for mundane domestic reasons such as waiting for a delivery, or on the day she discovered her car had two flat tyres. Like Ankit, Ruth wanted to work from home more regularly but was reluctant to ask:

> *"I just always say, God, I really wish we could do more work from home, because then if you have a bad night's sleep you can have a couple of hours extra sleep in the morning. Then I can be more productive when I'm working right into the evenings"*

> *[Ruth, 43, Asset Sales Administrator]*

Ruth suffered from insomnia which worsened when she was stressed. She felt that if she could work from home when she experienced an attack she could make a faster recovery and be more productive at work. Ruth also felt that working from home would help her with her household chores. As someone who described herself as very 'house proud', managing the home was important to Ruth and a significant factor to her wellbeing. She felt that working from home would not only make her more productive at work, but also more productive in the home:

> *"I know that in those two days working at home I could be even more productive [at work] and also if there were things I needed to sort out whilst I was at home. Rather than taking an hour lunch I'd probably spend an hour getting some washing done, doing some bits and pieces at home, whereas I would usually be rushing around at night-time to try and do those things."*

> *[Ruth, 43, Asset Sales Administrator]*

Ruth represented several DBK employees who were single and living alone. As well as working two demanding jobs, Ruth had sole responsibility for the housework and household admin (see Chapter Seven for more in-depth analysis). Working from

home would allow Ruth to combine her paid and unpaid labour and create more time in the evenings for rest and recuperation. For Ruth, having more time for the mundane and everyday tasks in life was an important element of her work-life balance. Ruth's experience is an example of how flexible working practices can improve the work-life balance of those who are child-free. Under the right-to-request flexible working legislation she was entitled to ask to work from home yet, Ruth was reluctant to instigate the negotiation with her manager, Eddie.

Ruth felt that her role suited remote working and she was aware that her colleagues in the Dutch Head Office often worked from home. She talked about a co-worker who had accessed flexible working practices to work from home twice a week and that she would work from home occasionally herself if she had appointments to attend or tradespeople working on the house. Ruth was justifying to me why she should work from home but felt unable to do the same with her manager. Perhaps Ruth was using the interview as an opportunity to rehearse her request for flexible working, but there are other possible explanations. Firstly, Ruth was unaware she had a legal right to request flexible working and therefore did not realise she was entitled to ask. Secondly, she felt that working from home was only an option in emergency situations and that anything more would be taking advantage. Ruth repeated this concern multiple times throughout the interview, with comments such as, '*I would only really ask if it was something that I think would be urgent, I just wouldn't want to take advantage*' or '*Sometimes you do find there are people that will take advantage of a good thing'.* Ruth was afraid she would be taking advantage by renegotiating her flexible working practice and asking to work from home, but she was unable to articulate what she would be taking advantage of.

Ruth's anxieties were similar to Ankit's because she felt she would be asking for more than she was entitled to, akin to asking for a favour from the company. Ruth was the only interviewee in the sample to be managed by Eddie, who earlier in the chapter, raised issues of negotiating trust and employees taking advantage when they worked from home. This suggests that Ruth's access to flexible work could have been influenced by Eddie's own reservations about trusting employees to work from home. As shown in the introduction to this chapter, line-managers often control access to flexible working practices and their attitude toward work-life

balance shapes the way they negotiate with their staff. Ruth and Ankit were anticipating unsuccessful negotiations with their managers before they even started the process. The interview analysis with managers Mark and Eddie suggests they supported working from home, but when compared to the interview data from Ankit and Ruth, a more complex picture emerges, shaped by doubt and internalised norms around standardised working practices, gender roles and the characteristics of an ideal worker at DBK.

Conclusion

This chapter has explored how line-managers and staff at Nordica and DBK negotiated flexible working practices and how these negotiations were shaped by gendered norms and temporal contexts. It showed how the manager's subjective constructions of an ideal worker affected employees' access to flexible working practices but also how this conceptualisation could shift over time. In Chapter Two, I explained how I draw upon Acker's (2006) later definition of gender regimes to show that the characteristics of ideal workers are contextually constructed and differ depending on the organisational setting. In this chapter I showed how each manager had a different subjective construction of an ideal worker which affected their staff's ability to access flexible working practices.

At Nordica, senior manager Richard had constructed the ideal Business Administration worker as a young, bright guy who could cope in a busy and demanding environment. Richard's staff were all entitled to use flexitime but administrator Josh said that this was restricted when it was busy at month-end because for Richard, the business needs of the department took priority and an ideal worker in his department would accept this and use flexible working practices accordingly. This was further demonstrated when Richard refused Anna's request for flexible working on the grounds that, by not working overtime at month-end, her flexible working practice would have a negative effect on the rest of the team. In contrast, Nordica manager Stephen approved a similar request from a member of his team because he felt there would be no detrimental impact on the team's performance but argued that this was because his department was not customer

focused. Previous research has shown that managers' decisions about employees' flexible working practices were driven by the perceived impact that they would have on the performance of the department (den Dulk and de Ruijter, 2008; McCarthy, Darcy and Grady, 2010) and I have explained these finding by framing managers' attitudes in terms of their subjective construction of the ideal worker.

A similar focus on performance and productivity was evident at DBK, where manager Mark constructed an ideal worker as productive and reliable, reflecting his initiative to promote greater access to remote working across the organisation. A similar sentiment was shared by his colleague, Eddie, who also felt that an ideal worker could be trusted to work effectively from home without supervision. However, Eddie was finding it difficult to trust his staff who worked from home and his confession of monitoring their online activity suggests he was unsure how to manage their productivity from afar. This supports previous research which found that some managers struggled to adapt their management styles to accommodate employees' flexible working practices and would react by micro-managing their staff or refusing access to flexible working altogether (Been, den Dulk and van der Lippe, 2015; Lyonette *et al.*, 2017). This shows that the construction of the ideal worker not only depended on the manager but also on the type of flexible working practice that was being negotiated.

This chapter also argued that managers' constructions of an ideal worker depended on their age and life-stage because this influenced their attitudes toward gender roles and work-life balance. At Nordica, the younger and least senior manager, Stephen, felt the company was not supportive enough of flexible working practices, which he attributed to generational differences between himself and the senior-management team. Richard's refusal of Anna's request for flexible working could be considered evidence of this. This supports the work of Sweet et al. (2015; 2017) who argue that managers' attitudes to flexible working practices depend on the age of the manager, their level of managerial experience and the extent to which the organisation supported flexible work.

At DBK, there was also evidence that managers' attitudes to flexible working practices were subject to change across their life course (Ford and Collinson, 2011;

Sweet, Pitt-Catsouphes and Boone James, 2016). Mark had begun to work from home in order to manage a health condition and as a result, was promoting remote working across the organisation. Several employees in his department, including Elaine and Alan regularly worked from home and felt comfortable in doing so. Elaine and Alan recognised that Mark's construction of an ideal worker was one who was reliable and productive and knew that as long as they could demonstrate those behaviours, they could work at home and manage their caring responsibilities.

However, Ankit felt that working from home would mean asking for another favour. Although Ankit said that Mark would support him, Ankit's subjective construction of an ideal worker was one who worked full-time in the office, a construction which was in direct competition with his responsibilities as a father. This finding supports research which explains Ankit's experience as negotiating the competing masculinities of the ideal father and ideal worker (Wada, Backman and Forwell, 2015; Borgkvist *et al.*, 2018). My conceptual framework expands this theory by asserting that these masculinities are not fixed, but rather they are contextually constructed and subjectively experienced. The requirements of the ideal worker and ideal father change over time, as Ankit was experiencing when he had to keep renegotiating his flexible working practices.

Gender differences and inequalities were subtly woven throughout the experiences of these interviewees and embedded in the way these managers executed flexible working practices in their departments. Their attitudes to flexible working practices were shaped by their individual subjective constructions of the ideal worker, which depended on their age and life-stage, and were renegotiated across their life-course as well as throughout the calendar month. These constructions were also shaped by their gender and it was significant that all four managers in the sample were male and had only experienced the conflict between work and life from a man's perspective. Furthermore, all four managers had worked in financial services their entire careers, so their relationship to time and work was influenced by a culture that normalised daily and monthly deadlines and the (often negative) impact these had on working practices across the organisation. As well as the less subtle gender differences, such as visible vertical segregation of all managers being

male, these managers also had a tendency to use gendered language and rarely recognised they were doing so. At Nordica, Richard talked about his young, bright guys and Stephen, despite his own caring commitments, still talked about flexible working requests as something for mothers. This gendered language was not exclusive to Nordica, managers or men, as will be highlighted throughout the thesis.

The next chapter will continue to draw-out these themes of negotiation, time and the contextual constructions of the ideal worker, but focusing in more depth on how employees in the sample experienced flexible working practices and how they negotiated these with their colleagues across the organisation.

Chapter Six: negotiating time and work with colleagues

Introduction

The relationship between co-workers is a theme often overlooked within the work-life balance literature (Teasdale, 2013) and so the focus of this chapter will be how colleagues negotiated flexible working practices, drawing upon interview evidence from both organisations. Where co-worker relationships do feature in the work-life balance literature they are often within the field of organisational behaviour rather than sociology. Furthermore, the focus is usually on how colleagues perceive and oppose each other's working arrangements (Teasdale, 2013) rather than analysing how they negotiated flexible working and what these negotiations involved. This sociological study will support Teasdale's (2013) finding that although colleagues wanted to support each other's flexible working practices, they had to 'grapple' with the conflicting notions of the traditional ideal worker and socially constructed gender roles (Teasdale, 2013). In her study of women who worked flexibly, Teasdale found that negotiating practices of flexible work was complex and participants simultaneously displayed support and resentment towards colleagues with flexible working arrangements (Teasdale, 2013). In this chapter I draw on Teasdale's (2013) theory and use my conceptual framework to deconstruct what is meant by co-worker negotiations. I consider how gendered power relations form part of the negotiation context and how these are shaped by employees' gendered constructions of work and care. I also relate this to how ideal workers are subjectively constructed by employees within a given time and space and argue that negotiating flexible working practices requires co-workers to confront ideal worker behaviours which can support or conflict with their own.

Reflecting the format of the previous chapter, this chapter will open by analysing the interview data from employees at Nordica. It will start by understanding how Business Administration employees constructed the ideal worker and how they used this mutual understanding to negotiate their flexible working practices

between themselves. This will be followed by evidence which suggests that working-mothers did not fit this construction and that mothers may have been restricted from accessing flexible working practices. However, some of their colleagues without children also felt unable to access flexible working practices which impacted their ability to manage their work-life balance.

The second half of the chapter will offer a contrast to this experience, as the focus will turn to those at DBK who used flexible working practices to manage their caring responsibilities. It will show how employees built bonds with their co-workers which helped them negotiate their flexible working practices, but the data also shows how this was a gendered process which was shaped by time and work inequalities. After offering a practical example of how time and work could be simply and successfully negotiated at DBK, this section will then focus on the experiences of employees who felt their co-workers resented their flexible working practices because they had conflicting constructions of what made an ideal worker.

Nordica: colleague relationships in Business Administration

This section will revisit the Business Administration team at Nordica who were introduced in the previous chapter. Over half of the Nordica sample were from Business Administration and as described in the Methodology, these Business Administration interviewees were mostly young men. They were employed by the Business Administration Director, Richard, as part of a deliberate recruitment strategy targeting young, 'bright guys'. This made the department an interesting case-study because administration, in this context, is a stereotypically feminised profession. However, when covering the flexitime there was a shared understanding that work be prioritised over life, privileging the masculine ideal worker.

Negotiating Flexitime in Business Administration

This section explores how members of Business Administration negotiated flexitime and how these negotiations were embedded in a discourse of team work and co-operation. Whilst some interviewees in the department found it easy to negotiate flexitime with their team partner and co-workers, others found the expectation to complete urgent tasks by working longer hours meant they sacrificed their flexitime and consequently failed in their efforts to balance work and life.

Teamwork

An overwhelming majority of interviewees from Nordica said they liked the people they worked with and had made some good friends through work. Many also said that the people in the organisation were one of the best things about working for the company. Interviewees from Business Administration were among this group and they all agreed that their team had a good working relationship. Although the partnering strategy split them into pairs or partners, they all said they felt part of a bigger team. The importance of teamwork was briefly discussed in the previous chapter in the context of working together to get through month-end. Team dynamics was also considered to be a fundamental part of negotiating flexitime, as Max explained:

> "I think flexitime is good, it needs to have a good team behind it
> otherwise if you have a bunch of individuals it doesn't work because
> it just breaks down, everyone just does their own thing. It needs to
> have a team that respect it first of all, because if you don't respect
> it you're just going to abuse it […] The team has to respect each
> other as well as the manager to have trust in it all […] We have a
> good group of people in our team now […] we're quite tight and it's
> probably the best it's been."

> [Max, 23, Business Administrator]

Max was 23 and had worked at Nordica for two years at the time of the interview. He was the only non-white participant in the Nordica sample and the only young administrator in the sample who was not a university graduate. This was his first permanent job after finishing sixth-form college and he was the first, 'young bright guy' Richard recruited having been at Nordica a year longer than any of the other new recruits. He had a tendency to infantilise the other new recruits, referring to them as 'the kids' even though they were all the same age, constructing a hierarchy in the group based on length of service alone.

Max felt that for flexitime to work a team had to co-operate but more importantly, team members had to be respectful. In their theoretical paper, Hill et al. (2008) identified mutual trust and respect between employer and employee as a prerequisite for flexibility in the workplace, and Max extends this theory to include trust and respect between colleagues as well. As discussed in the previous chapter, negotiating trust was a significant part of accessing remote flexible working practices but this extract shows that it was also an important part of negotiating time. For Max, the ideal Business Administration worker was team-oriented, respectful, trustworthy and flexible. Colleagues with these characteristics could be trusted not to 'abuse' the flexitime system and Max felt that the current team was a 'good group' that could be relied upon.

Despite the gender bias in the sample, that 'good group' of Business Administration Administrators were a heterogeneous, gender balanced team. There were 6 women in the team and 4 men, 3 of whom were interviewed for this study. All the men in the team were the same age – 23 at the point of fieldwork – reflecting Richard's 'young, bright guys' recruitment strategy, which was beginning to homogenise this diverse group of workers. This may explain why Max felt the team was 'the best it's ever been', as flexitime negotiations were conducted between workers with similar life experiences. Max's partner was one of the few women in the team with children, but he felt this made it easier to negotiate flexitime because they both wanted to use their time differently:

> "She'll take her son to school in the morning, so she generally does
> 9 to 5. We've agreed that I can do pretty much whatever time I want
> to do. But then at the same time I've said, if you ever want to leave

early just let me know. And we have a good working relationship,

so like I'm leaving early today, she'll be leaving early tomorrow."

[Max, 23, Business Administrator]

Max felt that flexitime negotiations with his partner were successful because of their differences. Max was a young, child-free man whereas his partner was a woman with caring responsibilities and this diversity meant they had different yet complementary relationships to time. Max appreciated the temporal flexibility of flexitime, but his partner valued a stable routine which enabled her to take her son to school. From Max's perspective, he and his partner respected each other's differences and were able to successfully negotiate flexitime as they were both satisfied with the outcome. However, as will be shown later in the chapter, Max was not always able to negotiate so easily with co-workers who were different from him, particularly if they did not share his construction of what made an ideal Business Administration worker.

This section opened by stating that all the interviewees from Business Administration said they had good relationships with their co-workers and felt the team negotiated flexitime well. However, there was evidence to suggest that negotiating flexitime with colleagues beyond the boundaries of the Business Administration team may not be so straightforward, as the next section shows.

Difficult negotiations

In the previous chapter, Eddie from DBK explained how the temporal deadlines imposed by the banks were a source of pressure for those working in asset finance, especially in Financial Accounting departments. The last chapter also explored how the month-end processes created a rhythmic workflow across the course of the calendar month, restricting the flexible working practices of Business Administration. These processes and procedures had repercussions across the organisation and several interviewees talked about the importance of prioritising

'urgent' work. This urgent work was not confined to month-end and sometimes impacted flexitime practices at other times of the month too, as Josh explained:

"I have two quite needy sales guys in Ireland - they'll hate me saying that - and they'll obviously require me to do things quite urgently for them. So obviously if I'm not there then that looks bad because I'm not there to do the urgent stuff they ask. You know, you could say 'I'm going home at four', [using the] flexi, and they could ring me at four o'clock and say this needs to be done. Well that's my flexi gone. I can't go because they need something doing, so that's pretty annoying."

[Josh, 23, Business Administrator]

When tasks were labelled as urgent, Josh felt he had to prioritise work and sacrifice his own time. In this example, he was notified of the urgent work at the last minute and felt unable to take the flexitime he had planned. For Josh, this situation was non-negotiable because it came from *his* 'sales guys' and was therefore *his* responsibility. Josh could have refused to do the work, saying he was leaving at 4pm, but felt that the work 'needs to be done', so that was the priority. The ideal Business Administration worker prioritised work when it was urgent, like they did at month-end, and this behaviour had become normalised across the department – it was part of being a team. Because the work was labelled as urgent he felt unable to negotiate with his 'sales guys', something which they may have known and used to their advantage. The Sales team were more senior in the organisation than the Business Administrators and many had worked at Nordica for many years, so this negotiation context (Strauss, 1978) began with a power imbalance which placed Josh lower in the social order from the outset.

Yet the bigger question is why Josh did not negotiate this piece of urgent work with his partner in the Business Administration team. According to Max, and the other interviewees from Business Administration, the team worked well together and if a co-worker wanted to leave early their partner was there to cover for them. One explanation could be the way 'cover' was constructed within the team. Although many interviewees talked about covering for each other, they described it as an

abstract concept rather than explaining what it meant in practice. Having worked at the company less than a year, Josh may have been unsure about negotiating his workload with his colleagues, instead feeling it was his responsibility, as an ideal Business Administration worker.

This example showed that despite the discourse of teamwork found across the interviews from the Business Administration sample, some team members may have felt unable to negotiate flexitime in particular contexts. Accessing flexitime required a successful negotiation of both time and workload, but Josh felt unable to begin negotiations because of an unequal power relationship, the ill-defined meaning of cover, and a reluctance to challenge the notion of the ideal Business Administration worker. The following section will expand on these themes in the context of motherhood and co-worker relationships within Business Administration and across the organisation.

Negotiating motherhood at Nordica

This section develops the themes of gender and contextual constructions of the ideal worker introduced in the previous chapter. It was shown that for Business Administration Director, Richard, the ideal Business Administration workers were young, bright guys who could cope with the demanding environment. The last chapter also introduced Anna, a former Business Administration employee who acrimoniously left the organisation after her flexible working request was refused by Richard. This section will consider these themes from the perspective of two Business Administrators.

The first part will analyse Max's relationship with Anna, based on extracts from his interview. The second half will introduce Sharon and her perspective on working-mothers in the company. Sharon was the only female member of Business Administration in the sample and although she was not a mother herself, as will be explored more in the Chapter Seven, she still had significant caring responsibilities outside of work. By focusing on how Business Administration employees talked about their colleagues who were working mothers, this section helps to build a

more nuanced picture of how gender differences were negotiated in Nordica. It also develops an understanding about how access to flexible working practices may have been gendered, as well as how these negotiations reinforced those same gender inequalities.

Max remembers Anna

Like Richard, Max offered his version of Anna's story without being prompted and the following extracts are taken from the discussion that followed from the interview question, 'Do you know anyone who has a flexible working practice, other than flexitime?'

> *"We did have one member of staff who left because, she felt it was her motherly right that she could choose what time she wanted to work. But as we have partners you can't say 'I'm always going to do 8 'til 4' [...] that's not being a team, that's not what we stand for [...] She ended up leaving because she wouldn't change and work as a team basically."*

> *[Max, 23, Business Administrator]*

Max echoed Richard's belief that granting Anna's request would have been unfair on the rest of the team. As was seen earlier in the chapter, teamwork was very important to Max and he considered it to be a fundamental element of flexitime negotiations. The problem seemed to be that Anna's request for fixed hours rendered her inflexible and for Max, flexibility was a key characteristic of the ideal Business Administration worker. Perhaps more significantly, Max conflated the right to request flexible working policy with a right for mothers to choose their working practices. Whether this was his interpretation of the policy or what he thought Anna believed is unclear, but his use of the term 'motherly right' is a distinct form of gendering associated with women wanting to access flexible work practices to balance their work with their caring responsibilities.

As this next extract shows, Max found it difficult to understand how having another child impacted Anna's attitude to work:

She had one child, went off, had another one. And she was like 'Well I need to get back for my kids' and I was like, ok but you weren't obviously pregnant when you were employed, you knew the working [requirements]"

[Max, 23, Business Administrator]

Max felt that Anna had a duty to adhere to her contractual obligations to the company, despite having a legal right to request a change to the terms of her contract. His assertion that she knew, and presumably accepted, the department's working practices before getting pregnant echoes the extract from Stephen's interview in the previous chapter. Stephen argued that the senior management team, which included Business Administration Director Richard, felt that employees, '*commit to doing that work when [they] join so if [they] can't then fulfil them then that's [their] problem.*' Max's reaction to Anna's request for flexible working resembled that of the older management team, challenging Stephen's assertion that attitudes to flexible work reflect 'generational differences'.

One explanation for this is that, like Richard, Max could not relate to Anna's problems because of his gender and life-stage. He did not have children and would never experience how it felt to be a mother trying to balance a full-time job and two young children. Another explanation is that ambitious Max was actively emulating Richard's behaviours, and Richard was actively encouraging him. In his study of masculinities in British organisations, Roper (1994) argues that older male managers choose successors who they mould in their image, thus reproducing gender hierarchies in corporate organisations. These two, intersecting explanations show how Anna's experience is an example of how gender is embedded within organisations and how gender regimes (Acker, 2006) are recreated across generational divides. Neither Richard or Max felt that Anna represented the ideal Business Administration worker as her priorities conflicted with their own and the somewhat masculine shared values of the team.

However, Anna did not represent all mothers in Nordica and as was shown earlier, Max was able to work well alongside his partner who worked 9 to 5 so she could take her son to school. As the next extract shows, working-mothers were welcomed at Nordica, but only if they agreed to uphold the behaviours of the traditional ideal worker.

Mums can be traditional ideal workers too

Sharon was the final interviewee from Business Administration and the only female Administrator in the sample. She was 51 and child-free and had worked at Nordica for over a decade. She knew most people in the company but also felt she had a reputation as 'the office dragon'. Sharon was one of a handful of interviewees who informed me that everyone in the company worked full-time:

> *"We don't have any part-time people, everyone works full-time. Even the new Mums all come back to work full-time, although they might have come back working a slightly different hour pattern to what they were before but they've all come back full-time."*
>
> *[Sharon, 52, Business Administrator]*

The organisation had near gender parity, including in the board of Directors, yet no one was working part-time. I was made aware of an Administration Assistant who used to work part-time but was told she went full-time because she wanted more hours. This finding was surprising because, as was stated in Chapter Three, 42 per cent of women in the UK are employed on a part-time basis. Sharon's comment suggested there was scope for mothers to adjust their working hours, but this could have been referring to the ability to adjust start and finish times within the flexitime policy. Sharon also said that the company enabled mothers to 'take time off when they need for their children', without making anyone feel like 'they're letting the side down'. However, Sharon also felt that working-mothers received privileges that were denied to her, re-evoking the discourse of fairness shared by her colleague, Max and manager, Richard:

"I have this massive issue about people still being able to accrue holiday whilst they're on maternity leave. I've never had children and nobody's ever given me 9 months off work and let me accrue holiday at the same time. So, I've got a real, real beef about some of these things, but it's a personal thing."

[Sharon, 52, Business Administrator]

Sharon's strong feelings toward this legislation are reminiscent of the way Max spoke about 'motherly right[s]' in the previous section. There is bitterness in this statement about an injustice felt by someone who was not entitled to certain workplace rights. Whilst Sharon's comment may seem severe, resentment toward working mothers was a finding of Teasdale's (2013) research and work-life balance policies aimed at working parents have long been considered by some employees as 'perks' they were not entitled to (Lewis, 1997, 2010). Sharon's comment was not directed at working mothers but adds to mounting evidence that the work-life balance challenges of working-mothers were not fully understood by employees at Nordica, particularly within the Business Administration department. Mothers, such as Max's flexitime partner, were accepted if they characterised the ideal Business Administration worker – worked full-time, were flexible during busy periods, and worked well as part of a team. Having not been able to interview any of these mothers, these claims and assertions are hard to verify, but if Nordica did not create a welcoming or supportive environment for working-mothers, this may explain why they were absent from the sample.

This section has gathered evidence to show how gendered norms around paid-work and care can affect access to flexible working practices. Anna's request for flexible work was refused and the only flexible working practice available at Nordica was the flexitime offered to all employees. This section also suggests that Nordica's approach to accessing flexible working practices was reflective of those across the finance industry. In 2009, a report by the Equality and Human Rights Commission found that the finance sector employed 28 per cent women in part-time work which was over 10 per cent lower than the rest of the economy at that time (Metcalf and Rolfe, 2009). The same report also found that instances of flexitime

were slightly higher in finance than elsewhere in the economy (Metcalf & Rolfe, 2009).

The next half of this chapter will return to the interviewees at DBK to see how they negotiated flexible working practices with their colleagues. It will explore how these negotiations drew-upon gendered practices, norms and language to perpetuate gender differences embedded in the organisation, and how his impacted employees' ability to access flexible working practices.

DBK: relationships between caregivers and their colleagues

At the point of conducting fieldwork, two thirds of the DBK sample regularly provided care for others. For those with children, care could mean spending time supervising young children, providing taxi services for teenagers, or ensuring adult children were eating proper meals. Three interviewees provided care for more than one generation of their family, with elderly relatives needing transport to hospital appointments or assistance with housework. The previous chapter introduced Mark, the Director of Credit and Company Director, who was an advocate for flexible working across the organisation. Mark supported the virtues of working from home, believing it benefitted the employer and employee, but his philosophy foregrounded self-care rather than care for others. This section will analyse the data generated during interviews with four of Mark's staff who had caring responsibilities, all of whom worked from home regularly or temporarily.

The first section will focus on two interviewees who reported having no issues negotiating flexible working practices with their colleagues. Both of these employees had developed strong relationships with their co-workers and this analysis will compare how they developed and negotiated these relationships through the lens of gender. The second half of this section will contrast these experiences with data from two interviewees who did experience difficult negotiations. It will explore how resentment can create difficult negotiations, but the outcome can also be influenced by the employees' subjective constructions of gender roles and the ideal worker. These findings explore how gender differences

were embedded in the way flexible working practices were negotiated between colleagues, and how this could affect the way employees accessed and experienced flexible work.

Making friends with colleagues – masculine and feminine relationships

This section will expand on the story of Alan from the previous chapter and introduce part-time working mother Mena. Both Mena and Alan had two generations of family dependent on them for care. Mena, with help from her mother-in-law, looked after her two young children as well as her father-in-law who was suffering from a long-term illness. Alan looked after his disabled wife who was losing her sight, as well as providing ad hoc care for his father-in-law. Both employees had requested flexible working practices to accommodate their caring responsibilities and both were happy with the arrangements they had negotiated. Both employees said they had good relationships with their co-workers, as everyone shared the ups and downs of their personal lives which helped them bond and understand each another. Alan and Mena felt that, as a consequence, their co-workers understood their work-life balance challenges and they had no issues negotiating their flexible working practices. This section will critique the way Mena and Alan developed these co-worker relationships to examine how gender was embedded in their flexible working negotiations. This section develops the arguments that gender was present in the way work and time were negotiated, as well as the language used by employees during those negotiations.

Shared experiences – feminine closeness

Mena was 36 and had worked at DBK for 5 years at the time of the interview and worked as an Administrative Assistant where Mark was her senior manager. This was a 0.8 FTE role and included 20 hours in the office and 8 hours from home, per week. Mena joined the company from a competitor and began her career at DBK as a Sales Representative in the Healthcare division, a full-time role where half the

week was spent in the office and the other half visiting suppliers. Whilst in that role, Mena became pregnant with her second child. She had always planned to return full-time to sales because her mother-in-law had agreed to look after both children. Whilst on maternity leave, Mena's father-in-law became seriously ill and required regular dialysis for an indefinite period. This impacted on all three generations of the family - who all lived under the same roof – so they took the collective decision that Mena would return to work part-time at the end of her maternity leave.

Mena negotiated her part-time work with her HR Manager and it was mutually agreed that she would not be able to return to her sales role on reduced hours. As Mena said in her interview, she would have loved to come back to sales part-time but felt that, 'you can't have a part-time sales person, it just doesn't work. It's not fair with the customers, it's not fair to the vendors, it's just not adequate'. Both Mena and the organisation maintained that a sales role requires a traditional ideal worker who was full-time, mobile, and available when the customers needed them. She felt that she could not fulfil that role whilst working part-time and caring for her extended family. Her priority was to renegotiate her hours and so she accepted the reduced professional responsibilities saying, 'it's something stress free, given my circumstances at the moment, so I'm not going to knock it, it's great for me at the moment'. For Mena, this was the ideal work for her at this point in time, but she hoped to return to sales again in the future because sales was her 'passion'.

Mena had a bright and bubbly persona and her friendly personality seemed to have eased her integration into the team. She described the team as 'quite close' and said they supported one another's work-life balance because they each had personal issues. I asked Mena whether she felt the team accepted her part-time hours and she said:

> *"Yeah, oh yeah. I mean they take the mick, 'Urh, she's a part-timer. Oh, thanks for coming in Mena!' [mocking voice]. But they totally understand where I am in my life and we're quite close. The bench that we work is four girls and we're very close in the sense that we've all had, not problems, we've all had obstacles in our lives."*
>
> *[Mena, 36, Credit Administration Assistant]*

Humour was used by Mena's co-workers to negotiate her flexible working practice and although she felt they were mocking her she did not experience this interaction as hostile. Humour can be indicative of a team's shared values (Holmes, Schnurr and Marra, 2007), suggesting Mena's co-workers may share her subjective construction of an ideal worker, one who chooses to put the priorities of her family above her work and career. Humour is also a way to diffuse tension in the workplace (Plester, 2009) and may have be used by Mena's co-workers as a tool to manage their conflicting feelings toward Mena leaving early whilst they stay behind in the office. Teasdale (2013) found that co-workers would simultaneously experience feelings of support and resentment toward their colleagues with flexible working practices. She explained how co-workers had to 'grapple with the gendered notions of the [traditional] ideal worker and with women's continued responsibility for caring work' (Teasdale, 2013: 409).

Mena felt that the closeness she shared with her co-workers had developed through a sense of shared experiences. In the interview, Mena listed the illnesses and bereavements that her team had recently experienced and how these had led to sustained periods of leave across the department. She said that they negotiated cover between them but had all experienced work intensification as a result. Mena never felt this impacted on her ability to access her own flexible working practices, but as was common across the sample at both organisations, she did feel the team had a responsibility to work together to ensure all the work got done. Although some of her co-workers were men, she referred exclusively to the 'girls' on her 'bench', actively gendering the co-workers she felt closest to. Her use of the word 'girls' also suggests that Mena had normalised the use of gendered language which infantilised women in the workplace, another example of the subtle but embedded ways that all employees recreated gender inequalities in organisations. Mena and the girls had become close by bringing private issues into the work sphere and this sense of shared understanding, along with a dose of humour, meant that Mena was able to successfully negotiate her flexible working practices with her co-workers, despite the intensification of the department's workload.

As depicted in the previous chapter, Alan was a Senior Credit Underwriter and worked from his home in the North of England two days a week. He said he 'wouldn't want to work from home 5 days a week' because he missed the 'camaraderie and banter' in the office:

> *"Everybody talks about what they've been up to, their family, everyone. I mean, the lads that I work with, they bake and bring food in and there's some fantastic, what I call banter, between the team as well, you know, which I think is really important, really important, because it makes it enjoyable to come to work [...] We go out and we'll have a drink together, a lot of us go and play pool together every couple of weeks. We go running together, we go to the cafe together. So, there's a real camaraderie there."*
>
> *[Alan, 57, Senior Credit Underwriter]*

Alan's department also talked about their family lives at work, but he did not offer any details on what those lives involved. Neither did he elaborate on what he defined as 'banter'. Instead, he focused on the light-hearted gesture of baking cakes for one another. Alan implied the stereotypically feminine act of baking was done by 'the lads', inverting and perhaps caricaturing gender roles as a source of humour, and I wondered if this formed part of the banter Alan referred to. Alan's use of overtly masculine terms such as 'banter', 'camaraderie' and most significantly 'the lads' was another example of how gender differences were part of everyday culture in the organisations. Although subtle, normalised, and perhaps unintentional, this language acts to marginalise women, not only from Alan's description but also from the interactions he is describing.

Another subtle gender difference, especially when compared to Mena's experience, was that Alan's co-worker relationships transcended the boundaries of work and took place outside the temporal and spatial context of the office. Alan worked in the office three days a week and during that time he stayed with his daughter in London and thus was absent from the home where he cared for his

wife and father-in-law. It was during this time away from home that Alan got to know his colleagues, either at the pub in the evenings or running during lunchbreaks or after work. This respite from his caring responsibilities gave Alan time to cultivate friendships with his colleagues, but as the findings in the next chapter will show, Mena and other working-mothers at DBK were unable to take time-out from their caring responsibilities to socialise in the same way.

Alan felt that his co-workers were 'fine' with his flexible working practices and did not report any tensions when negotiating his working routine. However, he did wonder if this would have been different if he were the only one with access to flexible work. Alan thought that because others in the team also worked from home regularly, the practice had become more acceptable:

> *"I think one or two others probably work from home occasionally now as well, but I think it's good that everybody has that call, so to speak, for a bit of flexibility. Because if you're the only one doing it you might have some whispering from the back mightn't you, in certain places."*
>
> *[Alan, 57, Senior Credit Underwriter]*

This statement suggests that negotiating flexible working practices is easier because departmental culture had made it acceptable for him to do so. Alan felt that the normalisation of flexible working in the department could be attributed to the attitude of his manager Mark, from the previous chapter, who was 'very flexible', according to Alan. As a male carer, Alan was transgressing gender norms and challenging the traditional ideal worker, but he did not consider this to be problematic. He did not he feel that his co-workers resented his flexible working practices but as the next section will show, Ankit, also introduced in the previous chapter, did not have such a positive experience of co-worker negotiation despite being in the same department as Alan.

Mena and Alan both reported positive experiences of negotiating flexible working practices with their colleagues, shaped in part by the bonds they had developed as co-workers. Gender differences were evident in the way they developed these co-

worker relationships, and their socialisation was shaped by gender norms around care and work, time-use, and language. Although they both reported working in mixed gender teams, Alan talked about 'the lads' and Mena, 'the girls', suggesting their closest working relationships were with co-workers of the same gender. Whilst this is not unusual, or obviously problematic, it shows how these two employees conformed to gender norms when developing relationships with co-workers and how these gender based relationships made it easier to negotiate their flexible working practices.

Difficult Negotiations

The data presented in the following section contrasts with the positive stories of negotiation in the previous analysis. The first interviewee who experienced difficult negotiations was Ankit. In the previous chapter, Ankit explained how he found it difficult to negotiate access to flexible working practices because he felt he was asking his manager for too many favours. In this section, Ankit explains how the attitude of an ex-colleague may have had an impact on this reluctance, showing how co-workers relationships influence flexible work negotiations across temporalities. The second section will revisit the interview with Elaine, also introduced in the previous chapter. Elaine described feeling silent resentment from her co-workers, so would sneak out of the office when she was due to leave early, an experience which exemplifies how negotiations of flexible working practices are not always verbal. The final part of this section will show how part-time working mother, Dani, from the previous chapter, avoided difficult negotiations about her flexible working practices by communicating her movements to her colleagues in advance. Dani's account offers an alternative experience to Ankit and Elaine's, but all three will be analysed to consider how gendered norms around care and work, and the ideal worker, shaped access to and experience of flexible working practices as well as the negotiations which sustained these inequalities.

Ankit's children were older than most of his co-workers' children and he felt that they did not always understand the type of care he had to provide. Rather than supervising them at home, his children now needed driving from one appointment to the next and had sports or social arrangements every day of the week – except on a Friday. Ankit agreed with Alan that the team were close and supportive of each other's working from home however, the legacy of one ex-colleague seemed to have had a lasting effect on Ankit and had caused him to worry about how others were perceiving him:

> "There doesn't seem to be any problems. I mean we do work pretty well as a team so it's fine. There was a previous employee here who took umbrage, because he didn't have children, didn't have a family life, so he couldn't understand why we would need to take this time, or have this flexible approach. So, he wasn't impressed, and I think that sort of led the behaviour now, as in you're a bit apprehensive because of what other people might think, but I think everyone now is on the same wavelength"

> *[Ankit, 46, Senior Credit Underwriter]*

Although Ankit felt his current team worked well together and were 'on the same wavelength', this experience with an ex-colleague reminded him that negative attitudes toward flexible working persisted. The colleague he described was male, child-free, and vocal in his disregard for flexible working practices. Ankit's ex-colleague embodied the traditional ideal worker and was unable to understand those with work-life priorities different to his own. In contrast, Ankit challenged the traditional ideal worker norm by seeking to provide and care for his family simultaneously. Like Stephen at Nordica, Ankit was negotiating evolving masculinities in a culture which still privileged the traditional ideal worker but also recognised the emergence of an ideal father (Wada, Backman and Forwell, 2015). This supports the argument made earlier in the chapter, that rather than gender determining attitudes to flexible work, life-stage and subjective constructions of the ideal worker were more influential.

Ankit's colleague had left the company, but his overtly negative attitude made a lasting impression on Ankit, making it difficult for him to access the flexible working practices he wanted to improve his work-life balance. This shows how co-workers can impact flexible working practices across time, and that negotiations in the past have the power to influence the outcome of negotiations in the future or supress them altogether. For most interviewees, it was their immediate team members who supported or resented their flexible working practices, but Ankit's experience shows how past experience can shape behaviours in the present.

In the last chapter, Ankit felt that requesting flexible work was asking for a favour and that he did not have a good enough reason to work from home. The evidence presented here also suggests he was wary of how his colleagues perceived him because of issues with an ex-colleague with a negative attitude toward flexible working practices. Ankit was conscious that by asking to work from home he would be reconstructing traditional conceptions of the ideal worker and he was concerned this could cause conflict within his team. He would be the only father who had requested flexible working and the only parent of older children to do so. Although he felt his manager and colleagues would support him, Ankit went to great lengths during the interview to assure me that he could be trusted to work from home and that it would be valuable to his work-life balance. Ankit's story suggests that when employees request flexible work, not only do they try to anticipate the response of their manager but also how the request may be received by their co-workers.

Avoiding negotiations

In the previous chapter, it was shown how Elaine felt more able than Ankit to access flexible work, because as a working mother, she was expected to prioritise caring commitments over work. Elaine felt that having the support of her manager, Mark, made it easier to negotiate working from home on an ad hoc basis. As well as working from home, Elaine also worked part-time, meaning she left the office at 2.30pm twice a week. Elaine described how she would sneak out of the office to avoid having to face her co-workers and have an awkward negotiation around her right to leave work early:

"I don't like making a big fuss. If I'm leaving at half 2 I rarely say, 'Oh bye, see you tomorrow'. Just because you always get the odd look like, 'Oh, she's going is she?'. And I do notice that. But then I think to myself, well, I am going but I don't get paid as much as you because I am leaving earlier and I'm not going home to watch TV or sit on the sofa, I'm going home to do something else. But yeah, I think sometimes people don't really like it when you leave early. Not managers, I think it's just colleagues, they would get a bit sort of, bitter."

[Elaine, 43, Credit Auditor]

In contrast to Mena's experience, Elaine was actively avoiding saying goodbye to her colleagues when she left early to try and evade uncomfortable negotiations around her flexible working practice. However, although verbal interactions were avoided, a negotiation still took place whereby Elaine interpreted non-verbal communication as a sign of bitterness or resentment. Teasdale (2013) found that resentment could build when co-workers had to facilitate the part-time working practices of colleagues, such as covering their work or having to stay late. Elaine said she worked autonomously so her flexible working practice should not have impacted her colleagues' workloads, but still felt she was being judged for leaving early. Elaine's co-workers may have resented her leaving early or she may have just felt insecure because she knew her flexible working practice challenged traditional ideal worker norms. The traditional ideal worker works full-time and prioritises work over family, and like the other mothers in the DBK sample, Elaine was actively disregarding these norms to construct her own version of an ideal worker.

In this same interview extract, Elaine continued to justify her decision to work part-time by explaining she was not going home to relax, but rather to start her second-shift (Hochschild, 2012) as a mother and wife. Feeling she had to justify this suggests her colleagues may not have understood that her caring responsibilities meant she continued to work, unpaid, when she got home, which may be why she found the negotiation so uncomfortable. For Elaine, working from home had a dual meaning; although she worked from home as an Audit Reporter on a Friday, she worked at home the rest of the time being a Mum and the primary carer for her

children. The next chapter will look in more detail at how Elaine managed her work-life balance and why she felt her work did not end when she walked out of the office.

Active negotiating

Ankit and Elaine both actively avoided negotiating their flexible working practices because of perceived hostility from their co-workers. Dani, introduced in the previous chapter, took a different approach to avoid potentially uncomfortable negotiations with co-workers by actively communicating her flexible working practices with them in advance. Dani, like Elaine, worked 0.8 FTE and also combined several flexible working practices to manage her work-life balance. As well as working part-time, Dani was also flexible with her start and finish times and used to work from home but found she preferred working in the office as it was free from distracting children. Dani said that she found the best way to negotiate her flexible working practices with co-workers was to ensure they knew her working hours in advance:

> *"I think, or I hope, when they know you've got kids to get home to, and to get out in the morning, that they'd understand if I was chopping and changing [my hours] on different days and the reason for it [...] So, out of courtesy I did email the rest of the team so they could know if people came over and said, 'Oh, where's Dani today?'"*
>
> *[Dani, 38, Credit Underwriter]*

Dani was the only interviewee at DBK to give an example of how she actively negotiated her flexible working practices with her colleagues. Although she felt her co-workers understood her need for flexibility, she decided to ease negotiations by emailing the team in advance with her anticipated hours for the week. Dani explained how this not only updated her co-workers but also filtered the information across to staff from other departments, who Dani would liaise with as

part of her role. The fact Dani felt she had to notify her colleagues about her working pattern suggests that the temporal flexibility that Mark envisioned in the previous chapter, was not yet considered the norm, not even in his own department. Working full-time, 9 to 5 (at least) is an institutionalised norm and still a key characteristic of the traditional ideal worker.

The importance of communicating time in this negotiation may also reflect the reliance on culturally constructed deadlines in asset finance. In the previous chapter, Eddie explained how the bank's deadlines impacted the working routines of employees in some departments which had a ripple effect across the organisation. As a long-term employee in the finance sector and at DBK, Dani would have been aware of this cultural reliance on time and recognised that she could smooth negotiations with her colleagues if she enacted this characteristic of the ideal financial worker. As a working-mother who was resisting many other behaviours of the traditional ideal worker, Dani realised that this small gesture could ease negotiations so all parties would be satisfied with the outcome.

Conclusion

The evidence presented in this chapter adds to the small body of work-life balance research on how co-workers negotiate flexible working practices between themselves, with particular focus on how this process is gendered. At Nordica, Business Administrators said that flexible working practices were negotiated amongst team members, although the emphasis was on negotiations with their departmental partner who was allocated by manager Richard. Nordica employees felt they had a good relationship with their co-workers, an opinion shared by their contemporaries at DBK. There were examples of employees at DBK who made an effort to bond with their co-workers, a process which was found to revolve around gendered language and time-use. Nevertheless, these friendships, which blurred the lines between work and life, helped employees to negotiate flexible working practices with their co-workers. Interviewees from Business Administration agreed that teamwork and good co-worker relationships were important for successfully negotiating flexitime, but the team had constructed their own ideal worker which was more accessible to some employees than others.

Data from Business Administration interviewees suggested that the working environment in the department, and across the organisation, was not overly supportive of working mothers. Interviewees felt that the workplace rights of working mothers were not always fair and posed a challenge to the collective notion of an ideal Business Administration worker who was a committed and flexible team member. Whilst this attitude was not so visible at DBK, there was still some evidence that working-mothers were not ideal or desirable workers in some contexts. Mena was unable to work part-time in her sales role, and Elaine described uncomfortable negotiations with some co-workers when she left the office early as part of her agreed flexible working practices. It was found that the attitude of co-workers from the past can also impact access to flexible working practices as employees were aware that they could be seen as challenging traditional ideal worker norms that may still exist across the organisation.

There was evidence that employees at Nordica could also put pressure on colleagues who sought to challenge the traditional ideal worker model, even temporarily. Josh felt unable to negotiate his workload with his colleagues in Sales or Business Administration if the work was labelled as urgent, which meant he was not always able to access flexitime when he wanted to. Employees at both organisations were constantly negotiating both their own subjective construction of an ideal worker and those of their colleagues across the organisation. Similarly to the managers in the previous chapter, all employees in the sample had worked in the finance sector for most, if not all, of their careers; many of them within the sub-sector of asset finance. They had all normalised a culture which supported the traditional ideal worker and although they all had access to flexible working practices, they were still in the process of negotiating these with colleagues across the organisation, each with their own subjective construction of what an ideal worker was, both in the past and in the present.

For Strauss (1978), negotiations interact with existing social orders and between co-workers there was a hierarchy of power which was shaped by gender norms around work and care. Analysed through a framework of gendered power relations, employees found it easier to make friends and negotiate flexible working practice with co-workers of the same gender because they were equal in the social hierarchy

of work. This hierarchy was flatter at DBK where gender inequalities were less pronounced than at Nordica, and this is evident in the way working-mothers were perceived by their colleagues. When employees negotiated flexible working practices they were doing so within an existing social order, one which historically privileged masculine norms around work and care. As the previous chapter showed, traditional constructions of the ideal worker, based on this masculine norm, were slowly beginning to change as flexible working practices became more acceptable to managers. This shows how flexible working practices can reshape the existing social order, especially in more egalitarian organisations like DBK, which could mean that in the future, co-workers will negotiate gendered power relations differently than they do today.

The next chapter will extend the exploration of how these employees negotiated their flexible working practices by analysing how time and work was negotiated in the home, and how this was shaped by gendered norms and expectations around work and care.

Chapter Seven: negotiating time and work at home and across the rest of life

Introduction

Previous chapters explored how employees negotiated flexible working practices with managers and colleagues, analysing these experiences through the conceptual framework of social time, negotiations and the contextual ideal worker to show how flexible working practices are gendered. This chapter extends that discussion out of the workplace and into the homes of the interviewees to understand how flexible working practices influenced their everyday routines and how time and work were negotiated between family members. Following the convention of the previous two findings chapters, this chapter is in two halves with the Nordica findings being analysed first. It will begin by revisiting the two managers introduced in Chapter Five and explore how their everyday practices and experiences of time have shaped their attitudes toward work-life balance and flexible working practices in the organisation. The next section continues the stories of the interviewees from Business Administration, to show how they negotiated their time outside of work in order to become ideal Business Administration workers who were flexible, hard-working and committed to the team.

The DBK analysis will also start by learning more about the personal lives of the two managers introduced in Chapter Five. It will show that they both displayed traditional ideal worker behaviours through prioritising work but differed in their levels of responsibilities both in the home and across the wider community. Both recently had cause to use flexible working practices to renegotiate their work-life balance which builds on the argument formed across the previous two chapters, that the subjective construction of an ideal worker is renegotiated across the life-course. The second half of this section will continue the story of the five carers introduced in previous chapters. It will highlight the similarities and differences between them, including the intersection between gender roles and life-stage. The final part of this section will revisit the story of Ruth from Chapter Five who, like

several others in the DBK sample, lived alone, meaning she often had no-one to negotiate her time or work with, giving her a different experience of time to many of her co-workers.

Everyday work-life balance practices at Nordica

Nordica Managers

This section will revisit the two Nordica managers, Richard and Stephen, from Chapter Five. This section will understand how these managers negotiated time and work outside of the office, including how they used their time and how they co-ordinated caring responsibilities and household tasks with family members. The aim is to understand the gendered power dynamics behind these negotiations as well as how their experiences influenced their attitudes toward flexible working practices in the organisation. The analysis will focus on the two themes of the contextual ideal worker and the transience of time over a life-course and explore the work-life balance practices of these two managers in the past and present, as well as their plans for the future.

Richard: the simple life

Richard went to the office every day, arriving by 8.30am and leaving after 5pm, except on Fridays when he left at 4pm to miss the traffic. His commute was over an hour each way, meaning Richard was out of the house for around 12 hours a day. During his nine hours at work, he would stop for approximately half an hour to buy a sandwich at lunchtime - the standard lunchbreak reported by almost all interviewees at Nordica. This steady, uneventful routine was typical of the way Richard talked about time and his leisure time was conducted in much the same way. He did very little in the evenings and his weekends were spent with his wife, and they enjoyed walking in the Cotswolds if the weather was fine. When the

weather was bad, they would stay at home and cook batches of food together in preparation for week ahead. Because Richard's wife worked part-time as a midwife, preparing meals in advance meant neither of them had to cook after a day at work. Richard's wife did most of the housework, unless her working day fell on a weekend then Richard would take over. He said he also did his own ironing, shared the washing and maintained the garden in the summer.

As a manager, Richard was only entitled to a limited version of the flexitime policy (see Chapter Four) but said he would often use it to take a spontaneous half day off work if the weather was nice. Richard had also used flexitime to take his mother-in-law to chemotherapy appointments and for over a month the previous summer he had negotiated flexitime one day a week to drive her to and from the hospital. He said that his mother-in-law was 'the only one we have to care for' as his son, and baby grandson, lived in New Zealand so they only saw them about once a year, although he and his wife had plans to emigrate once they had retired. The first time Richard mentioned his son, grandson or mother-in-law, was once we had finished the formal interview and I was completing the interviewee demographic details form (Appendix vii). This was the only time I directly asked respondents about their caring responsibilities, but Richard was the only interviewee who had not discussed his family earlier in the interview. Perhaps he did not consider them to be relevant in a study about flexible working in financial services, or maybe he was unfamiliar or uncomfortable talking about his personal life in the context of work. This could be because Richard was the traditional ideal worker who did not let caring or domestic responsibilities interfere with his paid work. At work, Richard was behaving as the traditional ideal worker and at home he also tried to be the ideal husband, sharing some of the housework and cooking with his wife. As the next extract will show, Richard actively constructed a separation between his work and home life, meaning he could sustain his traditional ideal worker behaviour in the office space but become the ideal husband once at home.

Richard said he had a philosophy about work-life balance, one he had held for a long time:

"Very early on in my career I made a decision I would never take work home. They don't pay me for working at home, it's not seen, it's not appreciated and I should be able to do my job in the hours. If I can't do my job in the hours it's either because I'm not good enough or I've got too much, or I haven't been trained. That's just my theory on life."

[Richard, 59, Business Administration Director]

Richard said this 'theory on life' resulted in a good work-life balance. Yet, he confessed that when he worked for his previous company he would often go into the office at weekends:

"When I was with MoneyCo, I used to work down the road and I had a habit of going in at the weekend. Just because I had so many things on, just to have that peace and quiet, it's trouble free and you can just concentrate. All of a sudden, you think, oh, I didn't actually have that much work it was just that I was in a bit of a frenzy".

[Richard, 59, Business Administration Director]

In this extract, Richard gave the impression that weekend working had become a routine, yet later in the interview he said it was only 'the occasional weekend if my wife was working' and only when he was 'under a lot of pressure.' Whether it was habitual or occasional, Richard had drawn a distinction between taking work home and working in the office. Taking work home crossed his spatial and temporal boundaries between the spheres of work and life, yet working in the office at weekends was positioned differently. Richard felt he was maintaining his boundaries because the work was being done in the office *and* whilst his wife was also at work.

Richard's philosophy toward work-life balance seemed to be inconsistent with his working practices. As well as working weekends in the past, as a manager at Nordica he was regularly working 45-hour weeks and spending over 10 hours commuting. However, Richard also shared domestic tasks with his wife and enjoyed spending

time with her at weekends; he also helped care for his mother-in-law when she was unwell. Richard's subjective construction of an ideal worker spent long hours in the office, but his actions at home combined with his work-life balance philosophy, suggesting that paid work was not his main priority in life. Richard was committed to his work, and as explained in Chapter Five, he expected the same from his staff. However, he also demonstrated commitment to his family and actively negotiated these two competing responsibilities by delineating time and space for work and home.

Stephen: paternal priorities

Younger manager Stephen also worked over 8 hours a day but unlike Richard he only had a 15-minute commute which meant he spent more time at home. This was not unusual at Nordica where the majority of interviewees lived within half an hour's drive from the office or their place of work. Stephen managed the Financial Accounting team and could stay as late as 10pm over month-end, accruing up to ten hours flexitime. Although managers had a distinct flexitime policy (see Chapter Four) Stephen would use those flexitime hours if his wife was unable to collect the children from school or nursery, or if one of the children was unwell. At month-end, Stephen ensured he co-operated as the traditional ideal worker, demonstrating his commitment to work by staying late and prioritising work, but this was only temporary. Throughout the rest of the month, he took back the time he accrued as the traditional ideal worker to enact his role as the ideal father and husband, caring for his children and supporting his wife.

Stephen said that using flexitime when the children were sick had not caused any issues at work but 'there might be a point where it does become a bit more of a problem'. Stephen and his wife had agreed that as the primary wage-earner, his career should take priority, and he and his wife were starting to renegotiate who took responsibility for the children when they were unwell. Stephen felt that being the primary carer when his children were sick was not a desirable characteristic for a senior manager at Nordica. Although he was able to challenge the traditional ideal

worker at this point in his career he was not convinced that he would be able to if he wanted to rise up the managerial hierarchy in the future.

This process of renegotiating work-life balance as a couple was identified by Duckworth and Buzzanell (2009) in their qualitative study with working fathers. By renegotiating his role as primary carer when the children were sick, Stephen was reasserting his professional autonomy (Duckworth & Buzzanell, 2009) over his role as a father. Although this meant Stephen would relinquish part of his parenting responsibilities to his wife, he was adamant that his family remained the priority:

> *"I've definitely taken the decision that whilst my children are young, supporting them and being there to support my wife with looking after them, and all that sort of stuff, that is my key now, even if I do have frustrations around my career. But also taking the long-term view, the management team are all old so at some point they are all going to leave […] You just have to prioritise at different stages of your life and where I am now, the kids need me more so that's what I prioritise."*
>
> *[Stephen, 35, Accounting Manager]*

Whilst his children were young, and his promotion prospects were low, it suited Stephen to prioritise his family over work. With the senior management team 'all old' and nearing retirement he was biding his time and hoping the opportunity for promotion would coincide with his children growing older and being less dependent on him. Stephen felt he was managing his work-life balance and successfully negotiating his dual role as an ideal worker at Nordica and an ideal father at home (Dermott, 2005). Stephen knew that with his current childcare responsibilities he was not the traditional ideal worker, but with his long-service and long working hours, he felt his construction of an ideal worker was sufficient for his stage in life. Similarly, he felt that by taking his daughter to school, covering the children's sick-days, and staying in a local job with flexitime benefits, he was also an ideal father. Contemporary constructions of masculinity require fathers like Stephen to negotiate the inherent contradictions and competing demands of the traditional ideal worker and the ideal father (Duckworth and Buzzanell, 2009;

Cooper, 2000; Wada, Backman and Forwell, 2015). At this stage of his life, Stephen had achieved a reasonable balance but if he were to progress his career, for the benefit of himself and his family, he did not think this could last forever.

Business Administration at Nordica

The previous chapters showed how these young Business Administration employees negotiated flexitime around month-end with their manager and their co-workers. Whilst interviewees like Max were keen to embody the ideal Business Administration worker who was bright, committed and flexible, others, like Josh, felt the demands of the role interfered too much with his personal life, particularly at month-end. This section will examine the everyday practices of these Business Administrators at home to help understand their behaviours at work. The focus will be on how they negotiated time and support outside of work, and how their life-stage enabled them to behave as the ideal Business Administration workers that their manager Richard, and the organisation, wanted. This section will also revisit Sharon, the only female Business Administrator in the sample. She was also much older than her male Business Administration co-workers and although she was child-free, had significant caring responsibilities within her family. Sharon felt that she had always been the ideal Business Administration worker but when her family called upon her for support, she had to renegotiate her priorities and change the way she used her time.

Josh: young, but not free or single

Josh was one of two men in the sample who joined Nordica's Business Administration team less than a year before the fieldwork was conducted. As a 22-year old graduate, he was employed as part of Richard's recruitment strategy to attract young, 'bright guys' as discussed in Chapter Five. Josh lived with his parents less than 30 minutes' drive from the office and started work around 9am and

finished around 5pm. In the evenings, he would often go for a run to unwind after a busy day and enjoyed relaxing with friends in the pub at weekends, a pastime shared by several of his young, male co-workers. He said these activities were a stress-relief from the pressures of work:

> *"I like the pub, it's my sanctuary. It's the only time I relax, it's the best way to relax [...] And I'm into my running, that's my stress relief. Every night after work, if I'm feeling really stressed I'll make sure I go on a long run because it clears it all in your head."*
>
> *[Josh, 23, Business Administrator]*

Josh liked to spend his free time relaxing and trying to relieve the stress that built up at work. In Chapter Six, Josh was frustrated about the restrictions placed on flexitime over month-end, but in the following extract he said he experienced work intensification and extensification throughout the month, not just at month-end:

> *"Work obviously builds up as well, you think, urgh, tomorrow I've got that, that, that, that, that, that, that, that, that...and that's in your head until you go to sleep. Then you wake up the next day because you've got to do that, that, that, that, that... [...] That's stress, because you end up thinking about it, you can't switch off. When I go for a run it comes out of my head."*
>
> *[Josh, 23, Business Administrator]*

Josh was unable to 'switch off' from work in the evenings and would be constantly thinking about the amount of work he had to do the next day. Several other interviewees at Nordica had also commented on how busy work had been over the past few months and as business volumes had increased, so had the workload on staff. Josh was unable to stop thoughts about work seeping into his personal time and space, and this affected how he used his free-time.

Josh also explained how, as well as extensification of work, seeping out of the workplace into his everyday cognitions, he also felt that the specific demands of working in finance were a source of work intensification:

"The stress of finance, it's quite hard, you know, to get right because it's a lot of figures and a lot of money passing from everywhere all the time, and if it's not done right then it comes down on you like a ton of bricks. So, it's quite stressful […] You have to be on the ball and that's quite hard. It's not a job where you can just relax and there's no pressure, there's always pressure to get it right."

[Josh, 23, Business Administrator]

The pressure to maintain concentration and accuracy in his work was another source of stress for Josh. This stress was exacerbated by a feeling that he would be blamed and reprimanded if he made an error. Josh was unique amongst his peers as he was the only interviewee to express this worry. Josh's comments also contradict those of his manager as, in his interview, Richard said he tried to encourage a 'no-blame culture'. However, this was not Josh's experience and he said this source of pressure was relentless and not just confined to exceptional periods such as month-end. Josh made sure that his free-time was spent relaxing and relieving himself of the worry and stress caused by work, and one element of his life was used as a counter-balance for the other. Josh was only able to be the ideal Business Administration worker because he could spend his free time on activities which relieved the stress caused by work; and he only had so much free-time because he lived at home and his mother did all the cooking and cleaning.

However, things were about to change for Josh as he embarked on the next stage of his life. In the few months following the fieldwork, Josh was moving in with his girlfriend and like several of his colleagues in the Nordica sample, he was starting a Master's degree in Finance, sponsored by the company. As Richard said in Chapter Five, the company would offer young, bright guys the opportunity to study for further qualifications in exchange for their commitment to be the ideal Business Administration worker, even if that were only for a few years. Josh knew that taking on this qualification would mean he would also experience an extensification of his unpaid work as well as his paid work. He also recognised that his studying commitments would mean having to renegotiate the way he spent his time and managed his mental health, but he resigned himself to this fact by saying that that

170

when working full-time, 'you have to realise that you don't get a lot of time to yourself', anyway.

Sharon: child-free caring

Sharon was infamous in the department for starting late, finishing late and taking several cigarette-breaks during the day. Sharon started work between 9.30am and 10.00am and never left the office before 6pm. She said the flexitime policy enabled her to work a schedule that suited her because she was a 'zombie' in the morning who needed two cups of tea to wake up. Her cigarette breaks were always taken in accordance with the flexitime policy which stated that 'Smoking breaks must also be taken from accrued flexi hours (sign out required).' Smoking breaks were one of the ways Sharon used flexitime to take time for herself. She would also make hair appointments in her lunchbreak and use flexitime if it ran over an hour, which it frequently did. The rest of her flexitime was spent as an 'emergency babysitter' for her nieces and nephews. In the following extract, Sharon explained that she was providing a lot of assistance to her two sisters whilst also caring for her long-term partner and their cats:

> *"I spend an awful lot of time looking after my sisters. I have two sisters and a brother, my other half as well and he just sort of takes third or fourth place behind them […] He does need looking after because he doesn't manage his diabetes very well […] We've been together for a long time; we don't have children, we have cats and I have seven nieces and nephews."*
>
> *[Sharon, 51, Business Administrator]*

Although Sharon was child-free, much of her time was spent caring for others. Sharon explained that one sister was a single-parent to three young children, and the other suffered a stroke which had left her partially paralysed. Because of her sister's disability, Sharon was helping her out by walking the dog every night after work and explained how she also spent time with both sisters over the weekends, 'sorting them out'. Although there were men in these women's lives, Sharon

commented on their absence saying her own Dad was 'not really much help' and her sister's new boyfriend was busy with his own children; and there was no mention again of her brother. In Sharon's family, caring was distinctly gendered and as the eldest sibling, the role of family carer fell to her. For Sharon, her caring role was non-negotiable, and she considered it her responsibility, a responsibility she inherited from her mother who died a few years prior to the interview. This new responsibility meant Sharon had to renegotiate her priorities, including who she spent time with and what she was able to do with that time.

Since her evenings and weekends were now spent caring for her family, Sharon's work-life balance had suffered, and she had less time available for her hobbies. Her hobbies ranged from the feminine stereotype of collecting shoes and painting her nails, to the hyper masculine world of classic car shows and mechanics. Sharon made no comment on these juxtaposing interests, other than she always wore gloves to protect her nails when working on the cars. Like several other older interviewees at Nordica, Sharon also said she enjoyed gardening and because the interview was conducted on a warm, sunny day in April, Sharon was musing on what to do with the garden that year. She enjoyed making her garden 'beautiful' but felt less inclined to do it that year because she was so busy:

> *"Since I've been spending more of my weekend time looking after other people, [my garden has] sort of slipped a bit and now it's a chore. In fact, I'm even thinking about not putting any baskets or tubs out this year, because I don't know when I'm going to get time to look after them. So, there's no point […] Some evenings I'm not getting in until half past seven, eight o'clock, and the last thing I want to be doing then is cooking dinner and then going out and watering the garden. So, yeah, I think I might skip it this year."*
>
> *[Sharon, 51, Business Administrator]*

Sharon's comment articulated how the distinction between a hobby and a chore can be affected by the amount of time available to dedicate to it. Sharon was proud of her garden and worked hard to make it both beautiful and manageable but was unable to put the same effort in that year because she was walking her sister's dog

every evening. Sharon usually enjoyed gardening but felt that watering the garden was 'the last thing' she wanted to do at the end of a busy day. Domestic tasks can have different meanings depending on the context and Warren (2011) argues that sociological work-life balance research should move away from trying to define what unpaid work is, and instead focus on how individuals feel about the tasks they are doing. For Sharon, attending to her garden had become an obligation rather than an 'act of love' (Warren, 2011; 141) because she no longer had the time to dedicate to it. The availability of time impacted Sharon's ability to reconcile her work-life balance because she no longer had the time to maintain her garden it had become a source of stress (Warren, 2011).

Sharon's story shows how work-life balance practices are transient and not always within our control. It is also an example of how child-free employees are still affected by socially constructed gender norms around care and work. Apart from using flexitime to babysit for her nieces and nephews, Sharon did not negotiate with the organisation for any additional support in reconciling her work-life balance. She felt that she continued to be the ideal Business Administration worker as well as being the ideal sister and partner too. She still worked late, often staying after everyone else had gone home because she said, 'I like the quiet'. This could be why Sharon did not comment on the impact of month-end because it did not cause any disruption to her usual routine. She used cigarette breaks as a way to break up the working day and take time for herself, and the inclusion of cigarette breaks in the flexitime policy ensured that employees used their working time to be productive for the company. Cigarette breaks, working late and having two cups of tea in the morning was how Sharon protected pockets of time for herself around her work and family responsibilities. Sharon felt that she worked hard and by doing so, was the ideal Business Administration worker. She was proud that she was able to continue working long hours whilst also looking after her family, saying 'I probably work too hard. I know I do, I've always been a workaholic.'

The Managers

Chapter Five introduced Mark and Eddie, two managers at DBK who promoted flexible working practices within their departments. They both supported working from home as the dominant form of flexible work as it was a practice they both utilised and benefitted from. Although they both advocated greater spatial and temporal flexibility for their staff, access was not equally distributed. This was because a particular role was not considered suitable for certain types of flexible work, or because staff found it was difficult to negotiate access to flexible working practices as they could not justify wanting to improve their work-life balance. This section will explore the everyday temporal practices of Mark and Eddie to show how they spent their time and negotiated their work-life balance. It will show that they both displayed traditional ideal worker behaviours and prioritised work, but whilst Mark had successfully negotiated a high level of support at home, Eddie had multiple responsibilities which had resulted in him having to reconsider and renegotiate his work-life balance.

Mark: controlling time

In Chapter Five, Mark, the Director of Credit, explained how he worked part of the week at home for 'health reasons'. When working in the office, Mark said, he arrived by 7am and would leave just after 4pm, and with an hour's commute each way this meant he avoided the worst of the traffic. Mark scheduled his work to ensure he did not spend too long in the office, saying, 'my days in the office tend to be completely full of meetings [and] I try and manage them so they're not too long.' On the days he worked from home, his schedule would vary but in total Mark estimated he worked around fifty hours per week which was less than he used to do and 'not unmanageable'. He used to work a lot longer, doing twelve hours a day in the office then working when he got home. He also confessed that he used to

work whilst on holiday but had stopped doing that now, partly because of a new company policy stating employees must not work whilst on annual leave. Although he had reduced the volume of overtime he did, Mark still routinely worked at home during the evenings or at weekends:

> *"I do often work from home though in the evenings. And sometimes*
> *at the weekend, especially if the wife's got Made in Chelsea or some*
> *other rubbish on - because [work] is more interesting!"*

> *[Mark, 56, Director of Credit]*

Several other interviewees at DBK said they would work at home in the evening but this tended to take the form of temporary but habitual email checking. In contrast, Mark framed his extensification of work as an active choice which was preferable to wasting time on something he was uninterested in. As a traditional ideal worker, Mark was invested in his job and found it interesting and therefore something he wanted to do, certainly more than he wanted to watch reality television. This brief extract is an insight into how Mark negotiated his work and leisure time, and also how he negotiated time with his wife. He implied this scenario was fairly normal and unproblematic, suggesting he and his wife had reached a mutual agreement on this blurring of work-life boundaries.

Mark had reduced the number of hours he worked per week but was still an archetype of Acker's ideal worker 'whose life centers [sic] on his full-time, life-long job, while his wife or another woman takes care of his personal needs and his children' (Acker, 1990: 149). However there is no precise definition of what traditional ideal worker behaviours constitute in practice (Britton, 2000). By reducing the number of hours he worked, by leaving the office earlier and not taking work on holiday, Mark had renegotiated his priorities and had a better work-life balance because of it. Yet, according to the universally accepted definition, his working practices still represented the traditional ideal worker. Mark's subjective construction of the ideal worker seemed to be on a spectrum; in many areas he had reduced his 'commitment' to paid work but compared to the other managers in the research sample, his traditional ideal worker practices were still extreme.

At 56 years old, Mark could afford to relax in his free-time and said this was his priority when he was not at work. His children had grown up and moved out, so Mark had very few demands on his time at home. He said he played 'a lot of squash' or went jogging, and at the weekends he liked to spend time with his wife and go for walks. His wife was at home full-time and had been for most of his career, taking full responsibility for running the household. This traditional, breadwinner family model allowed Mark to work hard and maintain his leisure time. I asked him how he felt about his work-life balance:

> *"Yeah, yeah, it's a good balance […] I very much control my own time. That's the beauty of being a senior member of the team. I do control my own hours. I am able to do what I want to do, both in terms of business and personally, socially. But, I do very much encourage the team to take the same approach. Because it's fair and, you know, it works well."*
>
> *[Mark, 56, Director of Credit]*

Mark was satisfied with his work-life balance because he had full autonomy over his time. He had time and task autonomy at work and very little to distract him at home. However, he had overlooked the support mechanisms at work and at home that enabled him to control his own time. Firstly, as Mark identified, time autonomy was a privilege of his seniority in the company, but his staff had to seek permission if they wanted to adjust their working schedule (see Chapter Five). Therefore, not all employees enjoyed the same level of support to autonomously manage their working schedule. Secondly, but perhaps most crucially, Mark had normalised the amount of support he received from his wife. Because he had a wife at home full-time who was managing the household, Mark was absolved of any domestic responsibilities. Mark's wife ensured his time out of work was free from housework so he could prioritise relaxation and leisure.

Mark had reached the level of Director because he was able to successfully negotiate the time and energy required to be a traditional ideal worker. As well as having the authority as a senior manager to manage his own time, his wife enabled him to spend his time away from work relaxing and recharging ready for work. The

next section will focus on Eddie, a less senior manager who was at a different life-stage to Mark, with more domestic responsibilities and a different subjective construction of an ideal worker, at least for now.

Eddie: renegotiating work-life balance

Eddie was 48, eight years younger than Mark, and was the Manager of Asset Sales and Customer Service. Eddie worked from the office most days, arriving about 9am after dropping his two teenage children at school. He visited suppliers and partners twice a week, on average, and this could be anywhere in the country. He also worked from home occasionally if it best suited his schedule, as long as he notified his (female) manager first. As well as offering a better understanding of Eddie's seniority in the organisational hierarchy, this is also a reminder that many managers are required to negotiate their time like any other employee (Ford and Collinson, 2011). Eddie did not think it was significant that his manager was a woman, but it does raise the question of why there were no female managers in the DBK research sample.

Like Mark, Eddie also worked from home during the evenings and said this was to catch up on the most urgent emails and tasks that had accumulated whilst he was visiting clients. He was trying to reduce the overtime he worked at home, or eliminate it completely, but he said, 'At the moment it's just needs-must, unfortunately'. By continually working overtime, Eddie was reasserting the traditional ideal worker norm that he, and other managers such as Mark, were subscribing to. However, as the previous section found, managers in Mark's situation can afford to prioritise work because they have so few demands on their time, especially at home. As the following section will show, with his wife working and two teenage children at home, Eddie had several responsibilities to negotiate outside of work and was struggling with his work-life balance. He was approaching a transitionary phase which would see the balance start to shift, but negotiating the change was taking time.

When I asked Eddie about his work-life balance he was the only interviewee to give an unambiguously negative response:

> *"I think my work balance has been shocking the last year, to tell you the truth. But I'm trying to cut that back, especially by leaving work. Especially now I'm doing this diploma I've got to be a lot more disciplined. And I think the more [overtime] you do the more, I wouldn't say it's expected, but I think you can paper up the cracks. I make a conscious effort now to try not to do it during the week, well not to try and do it all, unless it's urgent."*
>
> *[Eddie, 48, Asset Sales Manager]*

In this extract, Eddie gave two reasons for reducing the amount of overtime he worked, but also one big excuse for why this practice would continue. Firstly, Eddie had just started a diploma in finance which meant he had to renegotiate his work-life balance to find time to study. Having started working for a High Street bank straight from school, Eddie had spent his whole career in finance but did not have any qualifications, something which is now a prerequisite for many senior positions. Rather than discussing his career ambitions, Eddie was more concerned with how he would renegotiate his time over the next few years to complete the diploma and maintain an element of work-life balance. Rather than sacrifice his personal time, Eddie had elected to reduce the amount of overtime he worked during the evenings. The diploma was the motivation and the catalyst for Eddie to reduce the hours he spent working, much like Mark's health condition was for him.

Secondly, Eddie recognised that by working overtime he was both reaffirming the culture of the traditional ideal worker and masking a structural problem within the organisation. That structural problem was that staff were suffering from work intensification that was causing extensification, and rather than exposing the issue, Eddie and his colleagues were just 'paper[ing] up the cracks'. Yet, despite his good intentions Eddie still felt he had to do work that was 'urgent'. Eddie viewed the workload as an autonomous agent that had to be managed rather than recognising that the urgency of this work was culturally constructed. He identified that part of that construction was the willingness of him and his colleagues to continue working

overtime and reaffirm the traditional ideal worker norm. He was unable to challenge the meaning of 'urgent' work and instead used it as a rationale for continuing his working practices, albeit at a reduced level.

Studying was not the only demand on Eddie's time outside of work. Eddie's wife worked part-time (0.65 FTE) and although she took responsibility for cleaning the house, Eddie contributed by tidying most evenings, washing up or loading the dishwasher and cooking the occasional meal - but he confessed, 'probably not as much as I should or could'. It was unclear whether Eddie felt he had successfully negotiated his way out of doing any more housework, but he was aware that this was another use of his time he should probably renegotiate. Although he only had a few responsibilities at home, his teenage children still required considerable care and attention. As well as taking them to school each morning, he was often on call to take his daughter shopping and ferry his son to and from football practice and matches. Eddie also spent time with his extended family which was a balance of socialising and care. He said that once the 'family stuff' was done in the morning he could prioritise his own leisure time, an example of how Eddie negotiated his caring responsibilities with his leisure activities.

Eddie's leisure time revolved around sport and, like other men in the sample, he enjoyed supporting the local football team and watching sport with friends in the pub. Eddie was also one of several interviewees who volunteered for local organisations and as well as being a school governor in the past, he was also a trustee for a local charity. Eddie got satisfaction and enjoyment from volunteering but this was something he was also re-evaluating since starting the diploma. Eddie was one of only a few parents who engaged in community work, and Duckworth & Buzzanell (2009) argue that community engagement is part an emerging fatherhood ideology which includes a 'web of responsibilities' (2009; 567) that reach beyond the family unit and community work is considered part of providing a good role model to children. However, these additional commitments meant more time away from the family, and Eddie had already reported having a 'shocking' work-life balance.

Outside of work, Eddie's time was fully utilised and not only was he managing his work-life balance, he seemed to be juggling a family-life balance outside of work as well. As seen in Chapter Five, Eddie's work meant he would work remotely in the field, as well as at home and in the office. When working at home, Eddie admitted to managing his own schedule but did not discuss whether he used flexible working practices to manage any of his competing responsibilities. When his children were young, he admitted that when he worked from home he would schedule his hours around the children because 'you can't sit there and concentrate when you've got a 3-year old or a 5-year old badgering you'. In Chapter Five, Eddie said that some employees would take advantage of the ability to work from home, so perhaps he did not want to admit that he combined his work and personal life in case it was perceived that could not be trusted.

Eddie's story shows how working practices and work-life balance priorities shift over a life-course, meaning that work and time are having to be frequently renegotiated. Outside of work Eddie had multiple responsibilities requiring negotiations with several interlocutors, including his wife, his children, his extended family, friends and his children's school. He was about to add studying to this list of responsibilities, meaning his work-life practices would have to be reviewed once more. Eddie was one of several interviewees with multiple, competing responsibilities but as the following section will explore in more depth, there seemed to be a significant gender difference in the way these responsibilities were negotiated and experienced.

The Carers

The majority of the DBK sample had flexible working practices because of caring responsibilities. The sample included three mothers who combined part-time hours with working from home, and this first section will focus on how they spent their time outside of work. It will compare the everyday lives of Mena and Elaine, to Dani, to show that for these women, work-life balance meant renegotiating traditional constructions of the ideal worker in order to manage their caring responsibilities, but this often left little or no time for their own interests or wellbeing. The second

section will offer a gendered critique to this argument by showing how the two male carers in the sample, Alan and Ankit, negotiated work and time in order to prioritise their own hobbies and leisure interests.

Mena: balancing everyone

When I asked Mena what she did in her leisure time, not including caring for others or working, she said:

> "I don't do anything. Apart from late at night when the kids have gone to sleep and I've sorted everything out in the house and that, I'll probably get on my phone and watch something on iPlayer, catch up on EastEnders or watch some soaps or something. I think the Asian daughter-in-law role is one where she doesn't relax, she doesn't, you know, she doesn't take any time out for herself. It's always on the go, I'm always on the go."
>
> [Mena, 36, Credit Administration Assistant]

As shown in the previous chapter, Mena worked 0.8 FTE so she could do the school run and take her father-in-law to hospital appointments. Her heart was in Sales, but Mena was 'grateful' for her flexible hours as an Administration Assistant because it was the only way she could support her family. Amongst those who had adjusted their working patterns, research has found that part-time women, the majority of whom were mothers, were the group who felt most gratitude toward their employers (Gregg, 2011; Kelliher and Anderson, 2010).

The three generations of Mena's family operated as one unit and all lived together in the same house. Mena said she would be 'lost without my in-laws' as they helped look after the children and kept the house running whilst Mena and her husband worked. Mena had been living with her in-laws for ten years and said she and her mother-in-law were 'like a little team' when it came to housework and together they did everything around the house and cared for the children. Despite this

support, Mena still said she barely had any time for herself. Mena said her life changed when she got married and described her husband's family as very 'orthodox' Hindus compared to her own family. As the daughter-in-law to this traditional family, Mena felt her role was to look after others before herself, even though she was working and earning as much as her husband at the time. Since being married, Mena had to negotiate intersecting gendered, cultural and religious norms which differed from her own upbringing.

I asked Mena whether she felt she had a good work-life balance:

> *"I try to balance as much as I can but knowing that I'm also human and I can't do everything. I'm not supermum or superwoman. But I personally think I've got a good balance in my life in the sense that I'm a working mum as well as a daughter-in-law and a wife and, you know, I try and balance all avenues, I'm not just one person."*
>
> *[Mena, 36, Credit Administration Assistant]*

Mena felt her work-life balance was multi-faceted and critiqued the dualism implied by the ability to balance work and life. Mena evoked the notion of the superwoman as a metaphor for the multiple and competing demands on her time and Kaur Rana et al. (1998) argue that the 'superwoman syndrome' is heightened for British Asian women. They argue that British Asian women also feel 'accountable' to their extended family and community, as well having to work harder than their contemporaries to prove their value and commitment in the workplace (1998: 226). In order to balance her time and responsibilities, both in work and at home, Mena was negotiating a fragmented self and with no leisure time of her own, her flexible working practices were supporting her family more than herself.

Elaine also worked 0.8 FTE at DBK and had responsibility for running the household and caring for the family, describing her household as 'quite traditional'. Her husband worked as a Finance Director in the City and was 'much busier' than she was, arriving home around 7.30pm most nights. Elaine did not expect her husband to do the washing-up or put the washing on, although he occasionally collected the children from school. Instead, Elaine negotiated support from her mother who cared for the two children twice a week, as well as employing a cleaner. Elaine introduced her cleaner like a confession, as she said, 'I do have a cleaner, I must admit'. Elaine said the household was her 'domain' which may explain why she considered the cleaner as belonging to her rather than the household. Lyonette & Crompton (2015) found that in high earning households like Elaine's, paid domestic help was the norm. They argue that although paying for domestic labour resolved issues around time-poverty and potential conflict between couples, it failed to challenge social expectations around the gendering of unpaid labour by excusing men from sharing domestic chores (Lyonette and Crompton, 2015). The same research also found that it was women who organised and administered any paid domestic help, reasserting the notion that domesticity was the woman's responsibility (Lyonette and Crompton, 2015). By drawing on the support of her mother and her cleaner, Elaine had negotiated a few hours of extra free time a week. However, as the next section shows, this time was rarely spent on herself.

When I asked Elaine how she spent her leisure time, she was one of several parents in the DBK sample who responded by saying, 'Erm, what's leisure time?' Elaine described herself as 'family orientated' and her leisure time was spent with her husband and children who were all very active, so she would watch them participating in their various activities. Her social life involved mixing with other parents at sporting events, although very occasionally Elaine and her husband would go out for a meal. Elaine enjoyed going to the gym or spending the day shopping with her mother, but this was a rarity as it meant using annual leave which was usually reserved for time with the children. Like Mena, Elaine's free-time revolved around caring for the family and her main source of support was her mother. Mena attributed her lack of personal leisure time to her role as an Asian

mother, wife and daughter-in law, but there are several similarities between the way she and Elaine spent their time despite this cultural difference.

In Chapter Six, Elaine felt she had to justify that she was leaving the office early to care for her children and not just going home to relax. In the following extract Elaine provided a detailed review of some of the jobs that made up her second-shift:

> *"But you know, when you finish it is work. Picking the children up, getting them to the next job, making sure they've got their homework ready and everything. It's not relaxing, it's constant - making sure the house is tidy, are they fed, are they clean, are there clean clothes for tomorrow? […] I wouldn't say it's work, work, but it's something else that you have to do. It's still doing something else isn't it. My life it not my own, I still have to do things for other people. So, it's sort of work isn't it."*

> *[Elaine, 43, Credit Auditor]*

Elaine's life was not her own until she sat down to relax at 9.30pm. Like Mena, Elaine's time revolved around the needs of others. Her children and her husband were dependent on her at home so for Elaine, work-life balance meant balancing her work and her family's wellbeing. When I asked Elaine how she felt about her balance she said she was quite happy, but also that she day-dreamed about giving up work or working three days rather than four. This suggests Elaine was seeking more time, either for herself or to get all her unpaid work done. She felt 'quite lucky' to work four days. Similarly to Mena, Elaine was grateful to the organisation for enabling her to work part-time but like the mothers in Gregg's (2011) study, Elaine felt she was unable to negotiate a further reduction in her working hours.

The next section will contrast Elaine's and Mena's experience by exploring how Dani spent her time out of work. Although Dani was also a busy working mother and wife, she had a different experience of negotiating her work-life balance and had multiple sources of support around the home, including from her husband.

As seen in previous chapters, Dani also worked 0.8 FTE but preferred working in the office. Like her colleagues Mena and Elaine, Dani had also negotiated support from her mother who came to her house and looked after the youngest child whilst her eldest was in pre-school. Yet unlike the other working mothers, Dani had also negotiated support from her husband as they shared the housework and childcare equally. Dani's husband was a self-employed London taxi driver so had complete time autonomy and flexibility as his income was generated according to the hours he worked. Dani's husband worked what she referred to as 'a night shift', leaving the house around 4pm and finishing anywhere between midnight and 2am. He had always preferred this shift pattern because it was the most profitable, but it also worked well for co-ordinating childcare between them. Dani and her husband each took one day a week away from the paid work to care for the children, and Dani's mother covered the other days which meant they avoided the need to pay for childcare.

Dani and her husband were able to maintain this balance because of their occupations. As shown in the previous two chapters, Dani could work from home or alter her hours to manage childcare emergencies and because her husband was self-employed, he was able to do the same. As well as negotiating their available time to co-ordinate childcare, Dani and her husband shared the housework. Because he was home in the afternoon, Dani's husband cooked dinner every evening and Dani was responsible for the cleaning. Dani considered this a fair and pragmatic division of household labour, but some scholars suggest that men are more inclined to participate in visible tasks such as cooking, which is also considered to be more enjoyable than other routine jobs like cleaning (Coltrane, 2000; Lyonette and Crompton, 2015). Similarly to Elaine, Mena, and several other families across the wider research sample, Dani and her husband also had considerable support from Dani's mother, who looked after the children twice a week and helped with the housework:

> *"My mum, obviously being there two days a week, she helps out a*
> *lot. So, I'll put the washing machine on and she'll hang the clothes*

out to dry and put them away. It's things like that you don't get done when you're working and looking after kids, you know, actually putting the clothes away, sometimes they just pile up. […] I do the cleaning at the weekends, but it has got to the point where I'm thinking, my time is too valuable to be cleaning at the weekends as well now. Keep talking about getting a cleaner and not doing anything about it but I think I might do soon."

[Dani, 38, Credit Underwriter]

In this extract, Dani exposed the multi-faceted nature of housework in a way no other interviewee had. Doing the washing was not one job but four separate tasks, often conducted over more than one day. As a working mother, Dani said she rarely had time to complete every stage of the washing but her mother helped by combining elements of housework with childcare. In this respect, Dani's mother was the ideal (grand)mother, in an era where grandparents (often grandmothers) are increasingly called upon to provide care for their grandchildren whilst the parents (usually mothers) are in paid employment (Craig and Jenkins, 2015). In Dani's home, domestic responsibilities were negotiated between three family members – Dani, her husband and her mother. Dani was also considering getting a cleaner because, like Elaine, she felt that cleaning was not a 'good use' of her time. She would rather spend that time playing with her children, especially over the weekend. Dani was the only mother who talked about having play-time with her children, as women usually reported spending more time caring for their children's needs than engaging in play (Bittman and Wajcman, 2000).

Play-time with the children was important to Dani, but she did not consider it leisure time. When I asked her about her leisure time, like Mena and Elaine she replied, 'Leisure time, do I have any of that?' Dani did not feel like she got much time to herself, despite spending most evenings in front of the TV once the children were in bed. This suggests that relaxing in front of the TV was considered time for recovery and rest, rather than leisure. Instead, Dani negotiated small chunks of time for leisure, and had recently started running in her lunchbreaks. She enjoyed running and, as Josh said earlier in the chapter, Dani found it helped her 'de-stress'. Running was Dani's only hobby, but this still made her unique amongst the other

working mothers in the sample who reported having no interests of their own. Dani was also different because she had successfully negotiated the sharing of childcare and housework with her husband, with additional support from her mother. This small network of support meant that Dani had time, and energy, to play with her children and carve out a few hours a week for rest and leisure. By doing so, she was subtly challenging gender roles and expectations around care because, as the next section will show, male carers in the sample were more able to prioritise time for leisure because they were even more successful at negotiating free-time for themselves.

Ankit and Alan: gendered time

In the previous two chapters, Ankit and Alan were introduced as two Senior Credit Underwriters, both with significant caring responsibilities outside of work. Ankit shared the care of his two school-age children with his wife and Alan looked after his wife who was losing her sight. Although they both utilised flexible working, Alan felt fully supported with his arrangement, whilst Ankit was doubting how others were perceiving him. Alan and Ankit were negotiating competing constructions of masculinity where their roles as carers contrasted with their professional responsibilities. This meant their experience of negotiating flexible working practices and everyday temporalities were quite different from those of the working mothers portrayed above.

Alan: enjoying the mix

The first difference was that both Ankit and Alan worked full-time. Although this was only 7 hours more per week than Mena, Elaine and Dani, it was significant because part-time working is the most gendered flexible working arrangement (see Chapter Three). Secondly, Alan was ten years older than the other carers in this group, so he and his family were at a different life-stage. This meant that his negotiations took on a different power dynamic because his children were old enough to provide him and his wife with support, but still young enough to need

support in return. When he was at home, Alan cleaned and helped his wife out with tasks that had become difficult since her loss of vision. When Alan was away for work, he said his 17 year old son helped out instead, although he doubted how useful he actually was. Alan also said that his father-in-law, whom he often helped around the house, would return the favour by driving him to the train station to save parking charges. As shown in Chapters Five and Six, Alan stayed with his daughter in London when he was working in the office and had negotiated with her that he would do the food shopping in exchange for a bed and a cooked meal. Alan's family had negotiated a form of interdependent support, but when I asked him about his work-life balance he was unsure how to answer:

> *"I think that's a personal thing that I'm never going to be able to balance it. With having [my wife] at home and working away and, you know, my daughter down in London and my son doing college and everything, and [my wife's] Dad who we have to support, it's very difficult. What is balance? I don't know. […] I'm happy with the mix, put it that way, it's a nice lifestyle to be honest. Hard work but yeah, very rewarding."*
>
> *[Alan, 57, Senior Credit Underwriter]*

Although his children and father-in-law were additional sources of support, Alan still spent time and energy (and money) supporting them in return. In this extract, Alan did not explain how his children's circumstances impacted his work-life balance, but he felt that older children still required ongoing support that took both time and energy. Alan also considered his father-in-law as someone who required more support than he was able to offer in return. Although Alan appeared to have a family network of mutual support, he was in the middle of everyone's negotiations and was the one committing most time to ensuring everybody else's needs were catered for. Yet he was happy with 'the mix' and enjoyed his lifestyle, even if it was 'hard work', a sentiment shared by the majority of interviewees across the wider research sample.

As well as working full-time, and spending part of the week away from his main caring responsibilities, Alan also differed from the working mothers as he had a

variety of hobbies. He supported his local football team and regularly went to watch them play; he enjoyed walking the dog and made time for shopping with his wife; he played guitar, went to quizzes and brewed beer. His interests also expanded to include DIY as well as what he called 'extra education'. Alan was intellectually curious and would spend his spare-time researching anything that captured his interest, from stocks and shares to classical composers. Like many others in the sample, Alan said 'I never have a spare minute and I'm never bored'.

Alan framed his lack of time differently to his colleagues in the sample. Rather than the working parents who would quip, 'What's leisure time?' Alan actively filled his available time with leisure pursuits. As stated at the beginning of this section, Alan was older than the other carers in the study and his children were a lot older and needed a lot less time and attention. He said his wife also 'copes great' and still manages many household tasks, although they were becoming increasingly difficult and took her a long time to complete. Despite being the primary carer for his wife, in all other respects Alan and his wife were still acting out their gender roles, with him working full-time and her taking responsibility for the household. Alan was challenging traditional ideal worker norms by negotiating a flexible working practice which meant he could be at home more to help out, yet with his wife's deteriorating condition he knew that in the future he may find himself renegotiating not only the way he spent his time, but also these traditional gender roles they had carved for themselves and his own subjective construction of an ideal worker.

Ankit: seasonal leisure

Ankit was another interviewee who felt he lacked time for himself. When I asked him how he spent his leisure time he responded, 'Well, there's not much of it at the moment'. His response mirrored those of Mena, Elaine and Dani; but unlike his female colleagues, Ankit had a regular hobby outside of the home that provided a break from family life. During the summer, Ankit played golf most weekends and was an active member of the golf club. He was captain of the golf society and was

responsible for arranging the society's annual social events and competitions. Golf was Ankit's chosen leisure pursuit but being the captain of the society had affected his work-life balance. As well as the time it took to co-ordinate society events, this extra-curricular role was impacting the quality of Ankit's everyday life as he said, 'my mind's thinking a million things all the time'.

Like Alan, Ankit led a busy life with multiple, conflicting responsibilities. What set them apart from the working mothers in the sample was that they both had hobbies and interests away from family life. Research suggests that this is not uncommon and fathers spend more time on 'pure' leisure pursuits than mothers; that is, leisure time without children present (Bittman and Wajcman, 2000; Craig and Brown, 2017). Typically, male leisure interests which are conducted outside the home, such as sporting activities like golf, squash, football and hockey – all of which were enjoyed by male interviewees in this sample – are less likely to be interrupted by domestic duties and childcare. Many fathers in this study said that their main hobbies were oriented around sport, meaning that for most of them their leisure time was seasonal. Alan would only be watching local football matches for two thirds of the year, and Ankit would only be playing golf during the fine summer months. This meant that although these men considered these hobbies as an important part of their life, their seasonality meant they would be renegotiating time with their families at different points during the year.

The next section will contrast the experiences of these carers at DBK with Ruth who was introduced in Chapter Five. Ruth's interview extracts represent the experience of several DBK interviewees who lived alone and whose experience of negotiating work-life balance was very different to their colleagues, namely because they had very few people to negotiate with.

Ruth: living alone

Most employees in the DBK sample had dependent or adult children but several were child-free and lived alone. Those who lived alone were all over 35 years old and worked at DBK full-time. If flexible working practices are for the benefit of all

employees then the stories of these interviewees are important, and the data showed that they spent their time quite differently to their colleagues with children. As single people living alone, this group had sole responsibility for domestic chores and although they did not have children to care for, that did not mean they were devoid of responsibilities of a different kind.

As shown in Chapter Five, Ruth worked part-time as a fitness instructor alongside her full-time job at DBK. Ruth worked at the gym three evenings a week and for two hours at a time. Having originally trained as a dancer, Ruth qualified as a fitness instructor in her early twenties before moving into corporate work full-time. Ruth explained how and why she combined her two careers:

> *"I like it purely because I can use my brain and do my financial job in the day, but then I have that release of teaching the fitness and training, not only myself but helping other people. It's something I love to do and I love helping others as well."*
>
> *[Ruth, 43, Asset Sales Administrator]*

Her job as a fitness instructor enabled Ruth to continue her passion for health and fitness, but she also felt she was helping others at the same time. Ruth did not speak of any caring responsibilities in her extended family, or even in the form of pets, but instead she considered her fitness job as a way to care for others. This was a trait shared by the other women at DBK who lived alone and they all dedicated several hours a week to supporting others, usually as volunteers, all saying they enjoyed the satisfaction they got from doing this. As well as feeling she was helping others, Ruth found that her teaching was a form of 'release'. As explained in Chapter Five, Ruth had struggled with her mental health in the past and was using her regular fitness routine as a way to manage her health in the present and for the future.

Ruth had already negotiated a flexible working practice to better manage her time around her two jobs (see Chapter Five) but also wanted to work from home so she could combine her paid work with her unpaid domestic work. Ruth, and the other single interviewees in the sample, were united in their disdain toward housework

and were more vocal about this than any other group in the sample. Ruth articulated why housework was such a burden when you lived alone:

> *"I think it's quite tough actually living on your own. People underestimate how hard it is living on your own. All those little bits and pieces, again they all take up so much of your time"*
>
> [Ruth, 43, Asset Sales Administrator]

Unlike many of her colleagues in the sample, Ruth had no one to negotiate domestic tasks with and so every job was her responsibility. As she said in this extract, all the small jobs around the house add up and take a considerable amount of time, and they all have to be completed outside of paid working hours. Ruth's experience was subtly different to those of the working mothers from earlier, as they all had some form of support around the home. Mena had her mother-in-law, Dani her mother and Elaine had her cleaner. In their research with managers and professionals who lived alone, Wilkinson et al. (2017) found that those living alone had work-life balance challenges that were unique to their situation, and interviewees in their study also felt burdened by the 'inability to share or divide tasks and responsibilities with another adult' (2017: 648). Participants in the study said that having sole responsibility for all domestic chores created a 'distinct time pressure when coupled with a demanding work environment' (2017: 648). Those who lived alone faced different work-life balance challenges to their colleagues who lived with families, and the interviewees in this sample sometimes felt that this was overlooked by others. Gender roles in the home were rendered invisible because men and women who lived alone did all the domestic work themselves as they had no one else to negotiate them with.

Conclusion

This chapter has examined how these interviewees negotiated their time and work in the home to better understand the impact of flexible working practices on their work-life balance, and how this experience was shaped by gender.

Gender, age and life-stage affected the way managers at both organisations negotiated their time and work within the home. All managers displayed characteristics of the traditional ideal worker, but older managers with least responsibility for domestic or caring tasks demonstrated more extreme behaviours, such as working on holiday or visiting the office at weekends. It was shown how these managers would adapt their subjective construction of an ideal worker over the life-course, renegotiating their work-life balance as their children grew up, their health deteriorated, they moved to a new house, or looked to progress their careers.

There was evidence that renegotiating time and work in the home was often out of the employees' control, as family members became ill and required additional care, or in some cases it was they themselves who were unwell and needed to change their working practices to support their own wellbeing. Although men and women in the sample provided care for others, women would sacrifice their paid work or personal time to do so. Whilst male carers still enjoyed some leisure time, female carers found their personal time squeezed or non-existent. Mothers who were working part-time were only working one day a week less than their male counterparts, who were also carers, yet they spent more time caring for others and significantly less time caring for themselves.

There was less discussion of month-end and urgent deadlines at home, but the discourse still reflected these employees' experiences of time pressure. This time pressure was also felt by employees without children as sustaining traditional ideal worker behaviours impacted the quality of the time they spent outside of work (see also Chapters Five and Six). Several interviewees were in partnerships where both of them had flexible working practices and had negotiated a weekly routine which they felt made best use of their temporal resources. Yet, rather than discussing how they negotiated their flexible working practices with family members, the discourse shifted to how they negotiated time and work around the home; that is, the outcome of negotiating tasks around the home affected how much time employees had available for other activities. Using flexible working practices to support caring responsibilities was evident in both organisations, but what was less apparent was

how flexible working practices were used to support work-life balance more generally.

These findings, along with those from the previous two findings chapters, will be analysed in more depth in the following chapter. The Discussion chapter will re-centre the analysis toward answering the research questions stated in Chapter One, using the conceptual framework to understand how negotiations, time and the contextual ideal worker all shaped and sustained gendered flexible working practices in these organisations.

Chapter Eight: Discussion

Introduction

This study has explored how gender is embedded in the flexible working practices of employees from two asset finance organisations. The preceding three chapters analysed the findings from 26 semi-structured interviews and this chapter will discuss those findings using a conceptual framework which draws upon social theories of negotiation, feminist theories on time and the notion of a contextual ideal worker. Rather than treating each concept as a separate sphere of analysis, this framework integrates these theories to offer a unique contribution to the wider field of work-life balance studies.

The framework will be used to answer the three research questions stated in Chapter One and reiterated throughout the thesis. This chapter will be structured to show how this study has answered those questions. The first section answers the question: 'how is gender constructed in employees' negotiations of flexible working practices across the boundaries of work and home?' This discussion will focus on the relationships between workers in the organisations and how masculine constructions of time and work were normalised as part of flexible work negotiations. It will also show how the social construction of the ideal worker was part of everyday organisational narratives and that flexible working practices required employees to negotiate and renegotiate multiple, subjective constructions of the ideal worker. The next section addresses the second research question: 'how does gender affect access to flexible working practices in the workplace?' This focuses on the managers in the study and how their own subjective construction of the ideal worker affected the way they negotiated access to flexible working with their staff. Finally, I will show how the findings answer the third research question: 'how does the masculine culture of finance impact employees' experiences of flexible working practices?' I will argue that the position of asset finance, as a sub-section of the wider financial services industry, has created a unique relationship to time that impacts employees' access to and experience of flexible working practices in these organisations.

The main body of the chapter is structured as laid out above but the chapter starts with a reminder of the conceptual framework and provides an overview of the literature reviewed in Chapter Two. The chapter will conclude by summarising how this analysis addresses the main research aim: to understand how gender is embedded within flexible working practices in these two organisations.

Overview of Conceptual Framework

The Sociology of Negotiation

This study adopts Strauss's (1978) social theory of negotiations to analyse the temporal and structural contexts which impact flexible working negotiations in the two case-study organisations. The sociological study of negotiations recognises the power relations inherent in social interactions and the interdependency between these interactions and the social order (Strauss, 1978). For the purposes of this research, a negotiation has been defined as an active and reciprocal process where the aim is to reach a mutual agreement in order to get something accomplished (Strauss, 1978; Gerson and Peiss, 1985). In work-life balance research, the study of negotiation tends to focus on work-life conflict but does not deconstruct the process of negotiating to understand what this means in practice. Analysing the research findings using Strauss's (1978) 'subprocesses' of negotiation, which include the negotiation context and the structural context of negotiations, makes it possible to critique how gender is embedded in flexible work negotiations at both the macro and the micro level. This focus on the context of negotiations also complements the analysis of social time, which is the second theoretical concept in this framework.

Social Theories of Time

As a study about flexible working practices, this research contributes to the wider field of work-life balance research by offering a sociological critique of the way time is constructed in these two organisations. Time is integral to work-life balance research but is usually only considered as a quantitative, linear measure rather than as something which can be experienced on multiple levels. A sociological approach to time recognises the rhythms and routines of everyday life, whilst feminist critiques of time assert that time has become a source of social power embedded in a capitalist commodification of time, based on a masculine logic of work (Adam, 1994; Fagan, 2001b; Sharma, 2014). Social theories of time have provided a framework for analysing how time has been constructed and normalised within the finance sector and how this unique temporal experience has shaped the negotiation of flexible working practices. Using these theories, I have highlighted the interplay between power and social construction of time and critiqued how time is embedded within a masculine organisational logic, alongside other gender regimes (Acker, 1990, 2006) such as the ideal worker.

The construction of the ideal worker

The ideal worker lives to work; they work full-time and are free from obligations outside the workplace (Acker, 1990). Typically, the ideal worker is a white man who is free to dedicate himself to work as the women in his life will take care of any personal obligations, including all domestic and childcare responsibilities (Acker, 1990). I refer to this model throughout the thesis as the traditional ideal worker, and it is this ideal-type that is dominant throughout the work-life balance literature. In this framework I adopt Acker's (2006) later description of the ideal worker, as one who is ideal within a particular organisational context or setting. This contextual approach complements the social theories of negotiation and time and has enabled me to analyse how the ideal worker is constructed in different temporal and negotiation contexts. I will use this analysis to consider how subjective constructions of the ideal worker shape employees' access to and experience of flexible working practices and consider how these multiple

constructions of the ideal worker hold different levels of power within these two case-study organisations.

Having reviewed the conceptual framework, the following section will show how these theories have been used to analyse and understand the research findings in the preceding three chapters. The discussion will be structured around the three main research questions to show the subtle and nuanced ways in which gender is embedded into flexible working practices in these organisations.

How is gender constructed in the way employees negotiate their flexible working practices inside and outside the organisation?

To answer this question, interviewees were encouraged to talk about their relationships and responsibilities at work and at home. Discussions focused around the way time and work were negotiated and renegotiated, but it was also found that interviewees were negotiating multiple constructions of the ideal worker, both their own subjective constructions and those of their co-workers. By focusing on the structural and negotiation contexts (Strauss, 1978) this section will show how gender differences and assumptions were integral to these negotiations but mostly normalised by interviewees both at work and in the home.

Negotiating time

As discussed in Chapter Two and throughout the thesis, flexible working practices pose a challenge to the institutionalised standard working time which is based on male norms around work and care (Bryson, 2007; Holmes, 2002; Hughes, 2010; Sharma, 2014). To explore how these employees negotiated this conflict around time, the interview questions were designed to draw out discussions around routines and everyday temporal rhythms. By using a conceptual framework which integrates social theories of time and negotiation, the findings can be analysed to explore gender differences in how interviews negotiated their time and how the

outcome affected their experience of time as an integral element of their flexible working practices.

Negotiating time at work

Chapter Six focused on how interviewees negotiated flexible working practices with their colleagues. Rather than negotiating how work was distributed when a colleague was leaving early or working from home, the narrative tended to focus on the temporal effect of their absence. Interviewees discussed the successes and challenges of negotiating time with their co-workers, such as when part-time working mothers left the office early or when another team member wanted to use their accrued flexitime. By arranging to leave the office before their colleagues, interviewees with these types of flexible working challenged the way (paid) working time had had been socially constructed and normalised across these organisations. The experiences of these employees resonate with those in Teasdale's (2013) study who found that the co-workers of working-mothers with flexible working practices had to manage conflicting feelings of support and resentment which emerged from gendered norms around work and care. However, because all employees in this sample had access to flexible working, not just working mothers, Teasdale's (2013) theory did not quite reflect what was going on in these organisations.

Despite universal access to flexible working practices in these organisations, employees still had to engage in multiple negotiations in order to enact them. A condition of the negotiation context (Strauss, 1978) was the relationship between colleagues, and negotiations were found to be more successful and caused less resentment when interviewees had good relationships with their co-workers. A similar finding was shared by Korabik & Warner (2013) who argued that an employee's experiences of work-family enrichment was affected by the level of work-life balance support or resentment they felt from their colleagues. However, this study was based on quantitative measures and did not deconstruct the relationships between colleagues or consider whether colleagues could also be friends (Pettinger, 2005; Pedersen and Lewis, 2012).

Amongst the employees in this study, social bonds and friendships were found to be important for both the experience of work and negotiating flexible working practices, but in Chapter Six it was shown how co-workers' relationships were based on gendered experiences of time and space. It was argued that women with caring responsibilities had little time to develop friendships outside of the office environment and as a consequence, they developed bonds by sharing their personal experiences with those around them. This gendered experience of time affects the way co-workers develop relationships with one another, which in turn can impact the outcome of flexible working negotiations. If strong co-worker relationships affect employees abilities to balance work and life (Korabik and Warner, 2013) then it is important to acknowledge that there is a gendered time inequality in the way these friendships are developed.

As stated in Chapter Four and across the preceding chapters, access to flexible working practices was granted upon the condition that the office must be covered during the core working hours of 9am to 5pm. This was stipulated by managers from both organisations and even written into flexible working policy (see Chapter Four). The structural context (Strauss, 1978) of flexible working negotiations included the dominance of these institutionalised working hours across the economy, both in the UK and globally. However, as was explained in Chapter Two, working hours are not a universal truth but rather a social construction which emerged out of industrialisation and the separation of work and home. This standard 9-to-5 working time is a masculinisation of time which suits the ideal worker (Acker, 1990; Williams, Muller and Kilanski, 2012). Working-mothers in the sample, and many fathers too, found the 9 to 5 was incompatible with the natural rhythms of care work (Bryson, 2007), as well as other constructions of institutionalised time, such as school opening hours or the availability of healthcare appointments. Interviewees who wanted or needed to challenge the 9-to-5 routine, to care for others or simply to manage their work-life balance, had to ensure they had successfully negotiated cover in the office. However, exactly what 'cover' meant in practice was not articulated by the managers, the staff or the policy literature. Whilst the institutionalised rhythm of the 9 to 5 remains embedded in the organisational discourse around 'cover', flexible working practices will be

unable to provide a significant challenge to masculine norms around (paid) working time.

Negotiating time at home

Interviewees also provided accounts of how they negotiated time at home but in contrast to discussions about the workplace, at home the narrative focused around how time was used to manage housework, childcare and leisure interests. These negotiations were ongoing and changed over time; the outcome of the negotiation could vary according to the day of the week, the time of the month or even the time of year. Negotiations of time-use also changed over a life-course and would be renegotiated as employees reached different stages in life or their careers. As explained in Chapter Two, time can be understood in multiple ways and can be measured chronologically *and* according to meaningful circumstances or events (Adam, 1994; Sharma, 2014). Sharma (2014) describes temporalities as shifting across a life-course, where periods of time can be measured according to life-stages, such as before the children were born or when working for a previous company. Employees would use both these measures of time unconsciously and interchangeably when describing how they managed and negotiated their work-life balance.

Many interviewees relied on routines where time and work were delicately balanced and felt their flexible working practices enabled them to sustain this balance. However, when analysed through the lens of gender, the subjective experience of balance was different for many of the women and men in the sample. Several interviewees were in partnerships where both of them had flexible working practices and had negotiated a weekly routine which they felt made best use of their temporal resources. However, consistent with the literature, women in the sample tended to claim more responsibility for domestic chores and childcare (Hochschild, 2012; Lyonette and Crompton, 2015) and whilst some men felt they could do more around the home, others were content with the outcome of their domestic negotiations. Furthermore, women's leisure time also seemed to be

absent from these negotiations, and in Chapter Seven, it was argued that male employees with caring responsibilities had more leisure time than their female colleagues who also cared for others. This is synonymous with previous research on gendered leisure (Bittman and Wajcman, 2000; McCormack *et al.*, 2008) and shows that gendered norms around how time is used and experienced outside of work are perpetual and embedded in wider structural inequalities about work and care.

Negotiations around time were ongoing and many employees had to renegotiate their division of time and labour because of unplanned disruptions to their work-life balance which were beyond their control. Several carers in the sample were forced to change their flexible working practices when family members became ill or if they suffered from their own health issues. Others were at the mercy of institutionalised school timetables and after-school clubs, which changed each year as children moved through the system. Each disruption required interviewees to renegotiate their flexible working practices, firstly with their managers but then subsequently with their colleagues and with others in the home. Employees expressed gratitude toward their employer when they allowed them to access a revised flexible working practice suggesting they knew the request may be perceived as disruptive and therefore less likely to be approved (den Dulk and de Ruijter, 2008). Furthermore, the right to request flexible working legislation only allows employees to make one request every 12 months, but some employees in the sample were making multiple informal requests to manage these ongoing disruptions to their routines.

For many interviewees, balancing their work and life meant engaging in multiple, ongoing negotiations and this was a shared experience in both organisations and across all forms of flexible working practices. As well as negotiating how they would use their finite resource of time, interviewees also negotiated how unpaid work would be distributed and how they would use their time to ensure all their work was done, paid or unpaid. There was an interdependency between negotiations in the home and negotiations at work, where employees engaged in ongoing negotiations with managers, colleagues and family members as to how they would allocate their time as a resource and how paid and unpaid work would be distributed. The negotiations of these outcomes were dependent on several

contextual factors, including the social construction of gender roles and individual subjective constructions of the ideal worker.

Negotiating with other ideal workers

As well as negotiating the resource of time and the responsibility of work, interviewees were also negotiating social expectations around work and care. Interviewees had their own expectations, based on their gender, age, life-stage and social background, and so did their colleagues. As part of negotiating their flexible working practices, interviewees were required to negotiate these multiple, and sometimes contradictory, constructions of the ideal worker which could change depending on time and place. Colleagues often shared a similar subjective construction of the ideal worker when they were at a similar life-stage or could relate to each other's work-life balance challenges, and so flexible work negotiations reached mutually satisfying conclusions where there was no animosity or resentment between co-workers. Satisfactory negotiations could also be achieved where interviewees had developed good relationships with their co-workers or actively communicated their flexible working practices in advance, pre-empting and managing any potential conflict. Anticipating conflict led some employees to avoid negotiating their flexible working practices altogether, especially when it meant visibly leaving the office early, either as part of their routine part-time hours or an ad hoc use of flexitime.

Analysing the negotiation context between co-workers highlights the power relations between individuals within teams and across the wider organisation. Some team members were vocal about what made an ideal team member which may have left their co-workers feeling wary about negotiating flexible working practices which challenged that subjective construction. This affected both men and women interviewees so whilst the impact was not gendered, the characteristics of the ideal team member were based on the traditional, masculine ideal worker norm. Those who were able to fulfil this ideal type often wielded more power in the negotiation than those who sought to challenge it with their flexible working

practice, because all employees believed the traditional ideal worker was more valuable to the organisation.

These interviewees were aware of the characteristics which were desirable in the traditional ideal worker, and as well as negotiating their co-workers' expectations, some were experiencing internal conflicts of their own which also needed negotiating. This was especially pronounced in the interviewees who were fathers and, concurrent with much of the existing literature, these men were negotiating conflicting constructions of the traditional ideal worker and the ideal father, for whom providing for their family was as important as making time to spend with them (Wada, Backman and Forwell, 2015; Borgkvist *et al.*, 2018). This may explain why some interviewees were finding it hard to begin negotiating flexible working requests with their managers, as well as why some avoided negotiations with their colleagues.

Subjective constructions of the ideal worker were shown to change over time as interviewees compared their working practices in the past to how they worked in the present, as well as considering how they may also work in the future. These contextual experiences were based on changes which occur across a life-course but were also based on wider structural factors such as the social discourse around work-life balance, social policies such as the right to request flexible work, and technological advances which have transformed workplace connectivity. Changing social constructions around gender roles have also shaped interviewees' subjective constructions around work-life balance and there was evidence in the data that this shift had taken place over a generation. However, this finding was not generalisable across the sample as some younger employees seemed to still emulate the behaviours of their older, senior managers (Roper, 1994) with more traditional views on gender roles and expectations of the ideal worker. The following section will turn the spotlight on the managers in the sample and continue this theme of the subjectively constructed ideal worker, to understand how gender affected employees' access to flexible working practices within these two organisations.

How does gender affect employees' access to workplace flexible working practices?

In Chapter Five it was argued that managers controlled access to flexible working practices at both case-study organisations, a finding which was anticipated as it is consistent with the literature (Been, den Dulk and van der Lippe, 2015; den Dulk and de Ruijter, 2008; Lyonette *et al.*, 2017; Sweet, James and Pitt-Catsouphes, 2015; Sweet, Pitt-Catsouphes and James, 2017). As well as exploring how some employees successfully negotiated access to flexible working practices with their managers, the research found evidence of unsuccessful negotiations which can be understood by applying Strauss's (1978) theory to analyse the structural and negotiation context to deconstruct the gendered power relations between these male managers and their staff.

Power relationships in negotiations

In the negotiation context, managers held a considerable amount of power over their employees' access to flexible working practices. This power was granted by their seniority in the organisation but also because they had the authority to define whether the flexible working practice would detrimentally impact on business performance. As explained in Chapter Three, a central requirement of the right to request flexible working legislation is that employees must consider the impact their flexible working practice would have on the business and, as part of their negotiation, they must offer solutions on how to overcome potential issues. This discourse of business impact was present across both case-study organisations and was evident in two distinct ways.

Firstly, flexible working practices were accessible on the condition that the work was still done, although there was no mention of how this could be measured and, as will be shown later in the chapter, the volume of work would change over time. Secondly, as discussed earlier in the chapter, many employees could only access flexible working practices if there was adequate cover in the office, another condition which was subjectively defined by each manager. This finding supports

the existing literature which argues that managers assess the potential impact on productivity and performance before granting access to flexible working practices (Been, den Dulk and van der Lippe, 2015; den Dulk and de Ruijter, 2008; Lyonette *et al.*, 2017; McCarthy, Darcy and Grady, 2010). Within the framework of negotiations, flexible working requests require managers to negotiate the conflicting pressures of maintaining productivity and maintaining staff morale and retention. If the mutual benefits argument is to be believed (see Chapter Three) then this requirement should not cause conflict because flexible working practices are thought to improve productivity, but as will be demonstrated in the following analysis, managers felt that this depended on the type of flexible working practice, as well as the function of the department.

Rather than utilising the right to request flexible working framework, the majority of interviewees said their flexible working practices were accessed informally. Although none of the interviewees had invoked the right to request legislation to negotiate their flexible working practice, several working mothers said they felt that having a legal right to request had empowered them to approach their manager and start the negotiation. The same cannot be said for the fathers in the sample, supporting Gatrell & Cooper's (2008) findings that fathers feel less entitled to access flexible working practices. However, as argued earlier, this was connected to the challenges fathers faced negotiating evolving social norms around the ideal worker and the ideal father. Managers, who were all fathers themselves, each described instances where they had to renegotiate their own subjective construction of the ideal worker in order to manage their work-life balance, and the following section will show how these managers conceptualised the ideal worker both at work and at home.

Managers' subjective construction of the ideal worker

As evidence across these chapters has shown, access to flexible working practices depended on the manager but also on their subjective construction of the ideal worker. The two most senior managers in the sample typified Acker's (1990, 2006) traditional ideal worker, although I would question whether anyone can be totally

devoid of responsibilities outside work. The younger managers also displayed characteristics of the traditional ideal worker but, partly because of their age and life-stage, they still had significant responsibilities at home including childcare and other domestic duties. It was not surprising that these managers engaged in traditional ideal worker behaviours as this model of work is still rewarded in most organisations. However, there was also evidence that these behaviours changed over time. This could be short-term change, for example during the course of a month, or long-term change across the life-course. Each of these managers had re-evaluated their work-life balance due to 'changes in family circumstances' (Ford and Collinson, 2011: 268), such as when their children changed schools or if they themselves or a family member had become unwell. This supports the findings of Ford & Collinson (2011) and Sweet et al. (2016, 2017) who found that managers' perspectives on work-life balance and flexible working practices were susceptible to 'shift' across the life-course and in line with wider social and cultural change. Sweet et al. (2017) recognised that the level of change was affected by the gender and age of the manager, and I extend this evaluation to argue that these shifts reflect a change to their subjective construction of the ideal worker, which in turn impacted how they negotiated access to flexible working practices with their staff.

These managers felt they worked hard, and some were actively trying to renegotiate the amount of work they were doing, especially when this worked spilled out into their personal lives. Many accepted the extensification of work as an inevitable consequence of their senior positions and therefore did not expect the same level of commitment from staff lower down the hierarchy. However, they were quite clear about the characteristics that they valued in their staff and what it meant to be an ideal worker and engage in flexible working practices. As discussed earlier, managers granted access to flexible working practices on the condition that there was no detrimental impact on the business. Therefore, a key characteristic of the ideal worker for these managers was one who could ensure that their flexible working practices did not affect their productivity. Several employees in the sample were aware of this condition and would cite increased productivity as a rationale for requesting their flexible working practice, particularly amongst those who wanted to work from home. Employees were also expected to be reliable and be trusted to work efficiently when away from the office or managing their own

working time. Hill et al. (2008) said that mutual trust and respect between employer and employee is a prerequisite for flexible working practices but as stated in Chapter Six, reliability and trust was also found to be important between co-workers as well as between employer and employee. This suggests that trust and reliability are more universal characteristics of the ideal worker, in the context of organisations which offer flexible working practices to all staff.

These characteristics of productivity and reliability were shared amongst the managers, and interviewees across the sample recognised these as shared organisational values. However, even when employees could stipulate that their flexible working practice would not negatively impact the business or their productivity, and that they could be relied upon to work effectively, access to flexible working practices also depended on the job they were doing. These managers felt that negotiating flexible working practices was easier in some departments than others and teams that were customer facing, such as Business Administration or Customer Services, were required to be present in the office during core office hours. This meant that these teams faced restrictions in when and where they worked and in both organisations, Business Administration staff accepted regular intensification and extensification of work over month-end because it was a normalised as a consequence of working in asset finance.

There was some evidence that flexitime worked well to motivate staff in these administration teams and allow them some restricted temporal and spatial flexibility when the workload was quieter. Flexitime was shown to have mutual benefits for the employer and employees, but the organisation still maintained the power over how employees used this flexible working practice. Although all employees had access to flexitime, they could not access any other type of flexible working practice which meant that no one worked from home or reduced their hours. Employees who worked from home were more likely to be senior staff who managed their own workloads, such as those in Credit and Risk departments. This findings reflect comments by Gregg (2011) who said that the option to work from home depended on the intersection of age and seniority in the hierarchy, with the majority of remote workers in her sample also considered as being mid-career.

At these organisations, negotiating access to flexible working not only depended on the managers' subjective construction of the ideal worker, but it also depended on several other intersecting factors which shaped the negotiating context: the perceived effect that the flexible working practice would have on the business and on the employees' productivity; the perceived reliability of that employee; the employees' job and the function of their department; and the type of flexible working practice they were requesting. These multiple conditions were acting as interdependent axes of power which intersected with wider social inequalities around gender, work and care to shape employees' access to flexible working patterns across both organisations.

How does the masculine culture of finance impact employees' experiences of flexible working practices?

This research was partly motivated by my own experience in the asset finance sector, so I was keen to understand whether interviewees felt the culture of finance affected their experience of flexible working practices. As discussed in Chapter Three, the finance industry has been found to have a pervasive masculine culture with high levels of gender segregation, where presenteeism and long hours continue to be rewarded, making it a challenging environment for accessing flexible working practices (McDowell, 1997; Metcalf and Rolfe, 2009; Maltby and Rutterford, 2013). Most interviewees felt that the organisational culture was more influential than a sectoral culture, however there was evidence of processes and practices which were characteristic of the wider finance culture and some which appeared to be unique to asset finance. By analysing the findings through the conceptual framework, referred to at the start of the chapter, the first half of this section will discuss the idea that these asset finance organisations had a particular temporal culture because of their position in the wider finance industry. This will be followed by the idea that asset finance requires an ideal type of worker which these interviewees had all normalised because they and their colleagues had all worked in the sector for the majority of their careers.

In Chapter Three, Hope (2006) argued that the finance sector had experienced an acceleration of time, creating a culture where immediacy and instantaneity are widely celebrated. In this section I expand on Hope's theory to argue that asset finance, as a sub-sector of financial services, has a unique relationship to time based on this 'accelerated global monetary exchange' (Hope, 2006: 278) and that this directly affected employees' access to, and experience of, flexible working practices.

In Chapter Five, one interviewee explained how, for some employees, the working day was structured around the deadlines imposed by the banking sector. As well as these daily deadlines, many interviewees talked about the impact of the month-end process, where the workload increased and intensification and extensification was normalised as part of working in finance. Work became more urgent at month-end, but the urgency of work could be experienced at any time during the month. These companies were experiencing the acceleration of time (Hope, 2006) but this acceleration was not experienced constantly by all employees, all of the time. Rather it was cyclical, following daily, monthly and even yearly rhythms. However, this temporal acceleration could also be constructed, as interviewees talked about urgent or time-dependent work but did not deconstruct how or why the work was so important. Urgency was a subjective construction of time which had the power to disrupt flexible working practices as it was the employees' responsibility to ensure the work was done. Interviewees across the organisational hierarchy gave evidence of not taking flexitime if work was urgent or working from home in the evening to reply to urgent emails. The construction of urgency is not unique to asset finance, but it is representative of a wider temporal rhythm within these organisations where financial time dictated the working practices of employees' work routines and flexible working practices.

The construction of urgency was most commonly associated with month-end which impacted the majority of interviewees in the sample, especially those who worked flexitime. There were several reports of access to flexible working practices, and other forms of leave entitlement, being suspended over the month-end period and during this time employees were required to behave as traditional ideal workers

and prioritise work over the rest of life. Interviewees on flexitime tended to accept this requirement as they claimed back any overtime they worked once month end was over. However, the exchange of time enabled by the flexitime policy assumed all units of time were of equal value, but as was discussed in Chapters Two and Five, time can be measured qualitatively as well as quantitatively. Some employees felt that this restriction of time autonomy over month-end meant they missed out on important elements of their work-life balance. The flexitime policy was designed to be mutually beneficial to the employer and their employees, but over month-end the power tipped in favour of the employer and by only recognising the linear, quantitative measure of time, the practice of flexitime overlooked the qualitative measure of work-life balance.

A career in finance: ideal asset finance workers

All four managers in the study had worked in the finance sector their entire careers and three had worked for their current organisation for over a decade. These managers had climbed traditional career ladders, rather than utilised 'career maps' as Williams et al. (2012) referred to in their research on knowledge workers. Their knowledge of the sector and dedication to work had been rewarded with senior positions, and the two eldest managers were both Executive Directors of their organisations. As discussed earlier in the chapter, these managers displayed characteristics of the traditional ideal worker. However, because they had spent their entire careers in finance it would be more accurate to describe them as ideal asset finance workers, because their knowledge, skills and behaviours may be of lower value outside this industry sector.

The majority of interviewees, across all levels of the organisation, had also worked in finance their entire careers. Many had worked for competitors within the sub-sector of asset finance, but for the youngest employees in the sample, this was their first permanent contract after school or university. Like their managers, employees in the sample had also normalised asset finance time. They accepted the rhythmic intensification and extensification of work were all conscious of what it took to be the ideal asset finance worker in these organisations.

Conclusion

This Discussion chapter has applied a conceptual framework to the findings for the preceding three chapters to analyse how gender is embedded in the flexible working of employees at two asset finance organisations in the UK. I have deconstructed the way flexible working practices were negotiated between interviewees and their managers and co-workers; how time and temporal context impacted flexible working practices; and how contextual, subjective constructions of the ideal worker affected access to and experience of flexible work. These concepts, and the research as a whole, have been analysed within a feminist epistemology which values poststructuralist theories and techniques.

In this chapter, I have used this methodology to answer three central research questions, starting with how gender was constructed within employees' negotiations of their flexible working practices, across the boundaries of work and home. I argued that interviewees' flexible work negotiations were framed around the way time was used and experienced, but that women and men experienced time differently because of perpetual social norms around care and domestic work. This experience of time was further shaped by an organisational discourse which normalised the social construction of the 9 to 5 working day, which is an institutionalised routine based on masculine norms around work and care. As well as negotiating time, I argued that interviewees also had to negotiate multiple constructions of the ideal worker which were subject to change across temporal contexts. Interviewees were having to negotiate their own subjective constructions of the ideal worker, which often conflicted with other social roles such as the ideal mother, father, partner or sister. In addition, they were also negotiating the attitudes of co-workers who had their own perspectives on what constituted an ideal worker in the team or organisation, as well as that of their manager who was controlling access to their flexible working practices.

Secondly, I considered how gender affected access to flexible working practices in the workplace, by analysing managers' negotiation processes and their subjective constructions of the ideal worker. I argued that accessing flexible working practices involved negotiating the power relationship between the employee and their manager. Managers had the power to grant access to flexible working practices,

but they would often prioritise the needs of the business within that negotiation. Employees who felt empowered by the right to request legislation were able to redress this power imbalance, but those who felt marginalised by the gendered legacy of flexible working practices were reluctant to enter negotiations altogether. Secondly, I argued that accessing flexible working practices also depended upon what managers felt the characteristics of the ideal worker were within a particular negotiating context. Managers' subjective constructions of the ideal worker varied according to their own experience of balancing work and life, but also depended on the job, the type of flexible working practice, but also the temporal context.

Social theories of time have helped to answer questions around the relationship between the financial culture and experiences of flexible working practices at these two asset finance organisations. I argued that access to and experience of flexible working practices were shaped by a construction of time which was unique to asset finance, originating from the sector's reliance on institutionalised banking time and a wider acceleration of globalised financial transactions. This affected how time was negotiated as part of everyday working routines but also helped explain the monthly rhythm of work and time caused by the month-end process. I further argued that these interviewees had normalised asset finance time because they had all worked in the sector for the majority of their careers, including the most powerful managers in the organisations. This normalisation of asset finance time formed part of many interviewees' constructions of the ideal asset finance worker, and shaped when, where and who was able to access universally available flexible working practices.

As well as reasserting some of the more visible ways in which gender is embedded in flexible working practices, such as entrenched social norms around care and domestic work, this framework of analysis also highlights subtle, taken for granted instances of gendering. A sociological analysis of flexible work negotiations shows how power relations are gendered and multi-layered, from the family-friendly legacy of flexible working policies down to the grandmothers who were helping out with childcare and domestic duties. Feminist social theories of time critique the gendered origins of institutionalised time and how it is incompatible with care work, but they still dominated organisational discourses around flexible working

practices both in policy and in practice. Finally, critiquing how constructions of the ideal worker change across different contexts helps explain the uneven distribution of flexible work across organisations and between genders, as the characteristics of the ideal worker are always contextually dependent. The originality of this framework is that the three concepts of negotiation, time and the ideal worker have been interwoven to produce a rich and nuanced analysis of the research findings. In Chapter Nine, the final chapter of the thesis, I will draw some conclusions from these findings and consider how they address the wider research aims, as well as potential implications for researchers and practitioners within the field of work-life balance and beyond.

Chapter Nine: Conclusion

Introduction

The broad aim of this research has been to explore how gender was embedded in the flexible working practices of employees from two asset finance organisations. I focused on three distinct research areas, guided by the following questions. Firstly, I asked, 'how is gender constructed in the way employees negotiate their flexible working practices inside and outside the organisation?'. This question was designed to deconstruct the process of negotiating flexible working practices and the boundaries between the spheres of work and home. The second research question addressed issues of power and inequality within the organisation and focused mainly on the attitudes and perceptions of the managers in the sample, by asking: 'how does gender affect employees' access to workplace flexible working practices?'. Finally, inspired by my own experience of working in asset finance, the study asked: 'how does the masculine culture of finance impact employees' experiences of flexible working practices?'. The two case-study organisations occupied a particular sub-sector within the financial services industry and it is important to recognise the nuances of this sectoral location, rather than assume that the culture of finance was universally experienced.

The research design was informed by a feminist research ethic and drew upon poststructuralist epistemologies to understand what flexible working practices meant to respondents and explore the multifaceted ways in which their experiences were gendered. I used a conceptual framework which incorporated social theories of negotiation, time and the ideal worker, to interpret data generated during interviews with 26 employees from two UK based finance companies. This analysis found that gender was embedded in the way employees negotiated their flexible working practices, where negotiations were informed by masculine constructions of time and work, which were normalised within the culture of asset finance. The follow section explores these findings in more detail

and explains how this study contributes to the wider field of work-life balance research, before considering some of the limitations of these conclusions.

How gender was embedded in the flexible working practices at Nordica and DBK.

The first research question created a foundation for the remaining questions by asking how gender was constructed in employees' negotiations of flexible working practices, across the boundaries of work and home. This question sought to understand whether negotiations were reasserting gender norms and how this affected the employees' experience of flexible working. I argued that gendered norms around work and care were a fundamental part of the negotiation context and informed how these employees negotiated flexible working practices with their managers, colleagues, family, and wider social networks. Using Strauss's (1978) theory of negotiations, I further argued that negotiations were conducted within an organisational and social context where masculine constructions of time and work were normalised.

Secondly, I wanted to find out how gender affected employees' access to flexible working practices in these two organisations. This was a question about gender and power relations as the male managers in the sample controlled the use of flexible working practices in their departments. Using a poststructuralist interpretation of Acker's (2006) ideal worker, I considered how subjective constructions of the ideal worker influenced the way employees and their managers negotiated access to flexible working practices. I argued that managers constructed ideal worker types which were informed by their own work-life balance, their perception of business needs and their internalisation of gender norms. This subjective construction of the ideal worker was not fixed but contextually determined and depended on the age and life-stage of the manager, the department they managed and whether it was a busy or quiet time of the month.

Answering the final research question involved deconstructing this fluctuating workload and the narrative of month-end, which was present across interviews in

both organisations. It asked how the culture of the finance sector impacted employees' experiences of flexible working practices in these organisations. Using feminist social theories of time, I argued that these organisations had constructed a temporal culture which combined institutionalised working time and accelerated financial time, both of which were founded on masculine experiences of work. In asset finance, the ideal worker accepted this construction of time as the norm, despite the restrictions it placed on their access to flexible working practices and the incompatibility with the rhythms of caring for others and themselves.

A comparison of flexible working practices in two organisational contexts

Recognising contextual specificities has been a central theme of this research design. In Chapter Four I explained how comparing two organisations within the same sub-sector of finance would enable me to isolate flexible working practices as the key variable of explanation and explore the similarities and differences between employees' experiences within each company. This section will compare the research findings and conclusions to understand how and why different types of flexible working practices are experienced as gendered.

Despite considerable differences in organisational policy, there were several similarities between the flexible working practices at Nordica and DBK. Firstly, the practices offered to employees were designed to put the needs of the business first but were framed by managers as mutually beneficial to the employer and employee. At Nordica, flexitime was designed to manage the ebb and flow of work which coincided around month-end. At DBK, flexible working practices were often implemented to encourage greater productivity, with the additional benefit of creating happy, grateful employees. There were echoes of this philosophy at Nordica too as employees felt that flexitime gave them a sense of autonomy over their working time. However, time autonomy was more of an illusion than a reality because every instance of flexitime use required a negotiation with colleagues and often a manager as well.

Secondly, access to flexible working practices at both organisations was controlled by managers across the hierarchy, from those in senior executive positions to department managers and team leaders. Their status in the organisational social order meant that managers entered flexible working negotiations with more power than their subordinates, meaning the needs of the business, the department or the manager, were generally prioritised above those of the individual employee. Yet, as already mentioned, managers are employees too and they are tasked with the challenging job of satisfying both the company objectives and the wellbeing of their staff – in itself a form of negotiation. Furthermore, managers brought their own work-life balance experiences into flexible working negotiations which shaped their attitudes toward flexible working practices, paid work and care. However, there was evidence at both organisations that these attitudes could change over time depending on age, life-stage and the cycle of workflow in the department.

Finally, flexible working policies and practices at both organisations were framed as gender neutral by employees from across the hierarchy. However, the evidence presented throughout this thesis has shown that gender norms around work and care were in fact deeply embedded into flexible working practices, as the next section will explain.

Comparing gendered flexible working practices

In Chapter Four I explained how the flexible working policies and practices at Nordica and DBK were very different, even though the two organisations occupied the same location within the sub-sector of financial services. At Nordica, flexitime was considered by management to be a panacea for achieving work-life balance and, perhaps as a consequence, there was no evidence of any other flexible working patterns in the research sample or across the organisation. Flexitime was considered to be mutually beneficial as it covered the increased workload generated over month-end whilst also enabling *some* employees a degree of flexibility to manage their work—life balance across the rest of the month. Whilst the majority of interviewees agreed that flexitime suited their work-life balance requirements, others felt their flexibility was constrained by the numerous

conditions that were embedded in the flexitime policy. The policy suited employees who were willing and able to enact the characteristics of the traditional ideal worker but marginalised those who did not, something which perhaps explains the dearth of women and mothers in the Nordica sample. The prevailing discourse around Nordica's flexitime, and amongst employees who supported it, was a presumption that workers were willing and able to be flexible with their time. However, the ability to be flexible with time is a characteristic more aligned with the traditional ideal worker and not easily available to those with caring responsibilities who often rely upon fixed routines.

In contrast, at DBK, many of those with caring responsibilities were able to combine the flexible working options available to effectively manage their work-life balance and caring commitments. However, there were still significant gender differences in the way these employees experienced flexible working. Firstly, there was a clear gender division within the types of flexible working practices utilised by those in the sample as the only part-time workers were mothers. As argued in the literature review (Chapter Three), part-time working for mothers reinforces rather than challenges the breadwinner model and binds women to the second-shift rather than liberating them from domestic duties. Secondly, the emphasis on increased remote working at DBK assumes that the home is a suitable environment to conduct paid-work and free of domestic responsibilities. Whilst women are responsible for the bulk of childcare and domestic duties, the home is not always a site which encourages greater productivity, despite managers' assumptions that it is. Finally, women who identified as carers had the greatest access to flexible working as they were the only group to combine several practices in order to manage their work-life balance. These mothers were combining part-time hours, working from home, working remotely and altered start and finish times whilst some of their colleagues were finding it difficult to negotiate one or more of these practices. This suggests that not only was there a gendered inequality in accessing flexible working practices but also an inequality between carers and non-carers as well.

There are several possible explanations for why these organisations varied so much in their approach to flexible working. Firstly, when paying attention to context it is important to note that the size and structure of the two organisations were very

different, as DBK employed over 200 staff compared to Nordica's 40. As well as affecting matters such as the size of the premises and whether employees knew the names of all their colleagues, it also meant they had different infrastructures. For example, Nordica's HR department was centralised in Europe making it harder for employees to discuss personnel issues, such as flexible working, with anyone other than their line-manager. It also meant that there was less scope to cover and disseminate job roles and tasks internally at Nordica which may have resulted in a more rigid approach to flexible working. Secondly, although the two companies occupied the same location within a sub-sector of finance, their business model and markets were slightly different. Although DBK financed assets in masculine dominated sectors such as IT and agriculture, Nordica's sole market was the haulage sector as they were owned by a commercial vehicle manufacturer. This is a heavily male-dominated industry sector which may explain why the culture at Nordica was less accommodating for women who were mothers.

These practical explanations, which focus on the infrastructure of the two organisations, is significant but does not go far enough to explain why gender was embedded in their flexible working practices. Returning to feminist theory, there was a difference in how Nordica and DBK viewed gender equality. At Nordica, gender equality was understood on the basis of equality of sameness, whereby all employees were offered the same flexible working practice irrespective of their individual needs. Conversely, at DBK, gender equality was recognised as an equality of difference, providing different flexible working practices to suit the work-life balance challenges of (some) individual employees. These different principles informed the organisational cultures and policies around flexible working practices and worked alongside other influencing factors, such as the company infrastructure, and the age and work-life experience of the senior-management team. Intergrating these practical and theoretical explanations reiterates the importance of emphasising context in comparative research and helps explain how gender and flexible working practices can be experienced so differently across two organisations within the same small sub-sector of finance.

Contribution to the field

These findings have contributed to the wider field of work-life balance research in several ways. Broadly, this study adds to the work-life conflict literature by exploring how gender is embedded in the flexible working practices which support employees' work-life balance. I align my research with scholars who seek to dismantle the socially constructed spatial and temporal boundaries between work and home (Eikhof, Warhurst and Haunschild, 2007; Eräranta and Kantola, 2016; Fagan *et al.*, 2012; Gambles, Lewis and Rapoport, 2008) by arguing that the gendered experience of negotiating flexible working practices is not confined to the workplace but extends into the home and the rest of life.

Specifically, I used social theories of negotiation to show how gendered norms around work and time shaped experiences of flexible working practices for employees in these organisations. By deconstructing the process of negotiations these findings develop sociological understandings of what it means to say that employees negotiate flexible working practices, both in the organisation and in the home. Firstly, I argue that employees were negotiating how time and work were distributed and that the outcome of the negotiation was influenced by gendered power relations, at both the organisational and social level. I have also shown how a manager's subjective construction of the ideal worker can impact access to flexible working practices and how this construction can change over time. By recognising the ideal worker as contextually dependent, this method of analysis critiques the common assumption that there is one fixed understanding of the ideal worker which is desirable in all organisational settings. Finally, by identifying an experience of time which is specific to asset finance, I add nuance to the findings of existing work-life balance studies in the finance sector by recognising that the cultural norms and expectations of the sector are not homogenously experienced. Rather, characteristics of a wider finance culture combine with specificities of the sub-sector and the organisation to construct a temporal experience which is particular to that context.

Limitations

As discussed in the Methodology chapter (Chapter Four) and commented upon elsewhere across the thesis, the sample of interviewees was not always representative of the wider population within these organisations. Allowing the organisations to manage the sampling created potential biases and this is evident at both organisations. For example, the self-selection process at Nordica resulted in some groups' voices being heard more than others, where the young, mostly white men of the Business Administration department were over represented and working mothers were underrepresented. The implications of this are discussed in greater depth in the Methodology (Chapter Four), but this sample bias must be considered throughout the interpretation of these results.

I designed this research to be a feminist study which was inclusive of all genders but having a male-dominated sample has led me to question my own feminist research ethics. Can I confidently locate this study within a history of feminist research, which offers a voice to marginalised women, if I have been mostly hearing from men? Moreover, the majority of women in this sample were white, British women, many of whom had higher education qualifications and secure, fairly paid job. As such, this study could be critiqued for situating flexible working practices as a white, middle-class 'problem' (Warren, 2015a). A way to overcome this in future research would be to take greater responsibility over participant recruitment. Contacting employees directly may provide greater access to those who are underrepresented in work-life balance research and this strategy could also address the issue of potential gender bias. This method may also help answer a question which has emerged from this research: why were women less likely than men to volunteer to be interviewed about flexible working practices? If I had recruited employees myself I may have been better placed to understand why women were underrepresented or been able to encourage more to participate.

The data used in this study was overwhelmingly generated through interviews with employees and this process involved spending two days in each organisation. Some of the issues I raise around work, time and culture could have been explored by using a broader range of data sources. Firstly, to learn more about the organisation's approach to work-life balance, I could have gathered information

about other employee benefits and initiatives which were offered alongside flexible working practices. I was able to obtain a copy of Nordica's flexitime policy but documents such as employee handbooks may have improved my understanding of the organisation's work-life balance culture. Some of this information could also have been gathered by treating my fieldwork experience as a mini ethnographic study. I made several entries to my research journal during fieldwork and whilst I acknowledge that these would have shaped my interpretation of the data, these fieldnotes were not treated as sources of data themselves. I do not think this warrants a substantial limitation to the validity of the findings, particularly as the focus was on flexible working practices not policies, but I would consider using a wider source of data in future projects if it were relevant for answering the research questions.

Implications & Recommendations

This research is important because it shows how gendered norms are embedded in the everyday negotiations which initiate and sustain flexible working practices. I have used an original framework of analysis which foregrounded contextual experiences to critique how flexible working practices were gendered in two asset finance organisations. I used the framework to show how the use and experience of time were taken for granted and that time was a gendered social construct which restricted access to flexible working practices. As well as offering a feminist critique of socially constructed time, this framework also challenges gendered constructions of work. By suggesting that the characteristics of an ideal worker are contextually dependent, the findings of this research offer an alternative framework for understanding how managers make decisions about distributing flexible working practices. Finally, by focusing on how flexible working practices are negotiated, this study has highlighted that everyday routines require ongoing, multifaceted negotiations at work and across the rest of life. Interviewees were continuously negotiating how work and time were distributed, an experience which was shaped by social norms and imbued with unequal power relations.

The framework drew upon three distinct but complementary theories and elements of the framework could be used independently and applied to different research contexts within the wider field of work-life balance. This study has focused on the asset finance sector, as a sub-sector of financial services, but similar studies could be replicated in other workplaces to understand how the specificities of their culture are gendering flexible working practices; especially those cultural characteristics which have been internalised by employees because of their career history, present circumstances and future aspirations. Although work-life balance research is fundamentally about how individuals use and experience time, there is relatively little engagement in the field with social theories of time or feminist critiques of these theories. As flexible working practices challenge the institutionalised notion of time which is entrenched in capitalist structures, researchers can use feminist social theories of time to critique how gendered temporal norms restrict access to flexible working practices in other workplace cultures.

Within organisations, departmental and HR managers ought to recognise that it is easier for some employees than others to negotiate access to flexible working practices. Although organisations and managers say they support flexible working, they would benefit from paying more attention to the working cultures that are promoted and supported within their teams. If managers are encouraging their teams to prioritise work, for example by insisting on overtime at month-end or responding to emails out of working hours, they are fostering a culture which values the characteristics of the traditional ideal worker, a model which is incompatible with caring commitments and responsibilities across the rest of life.

If managers were encouraged to critique their own working practices they may begin to recognise that the requirements of an ideal worker shift across time and space. This may help managers to consider how different types of flexible working practices can bring mutual benefits to the organisation and the employees, by recognising that both business and personal needs fluctuate over time. This critique of time could extend to thinking about how the companies organise working time and whether a reliance on industrial time is fundamental to the performance of the department or overall business. If managers were able to deconstruct the way

(paid) working time was organised it may help employees manage their caring responsibilities, both for others and of themselves.

In both case-study organisations, flexible working practices were made available to all employees but some felt more empowered to ask than others. If managers took responsibility for instigating flexible working negotiations with their staff then this could make access fairer across the organisation. This recommendation links to the idea that flexible working practices can have mutual benefits for employers and employees, as managers are usually better placed than the employee to recognise the impact the arrangement would have on the performance of the department.

Managers who implement flexible working practices could also be encouraged to think outside the spatial boundaries of the workplace and consider how flexible working practices are negotiated in the home and across the rest of life. Some employees may benefit from temporary flexibility and others from fixed routines. Others may prefer changing where they work, whereas some may benefit from greater temporal flexibility. Flexible working practices are varied and complex, and different practices would suit different people in different organisational and social contexts.

These recommendations have assumed managers are one homogenous group within the organisation but most companies have a hierarchy of managers with increasing levels of authority. At Director level, managers may be involved in shaping flexible working policies and their attitudes can determine the accessibility of flexible working practices across the company. At the other end of the scale, departmental line-managers and team leaders may have little autonomy over the flexible working practices available to staff or even lack the authority to approve flexible working requests. This study has produced and analysed data from managers across the organisational hierarchy and has found that irrespective of their seniority, the attitude of managers is important because their position in the social order is always higher than that of their staff. However, managers are employees too and as such, they may also benefit from an improved work-life balance as a result of these recommendations.

Concluding Thoughts

Gender is embedded in flexible working practices in the asset finance sector because employees' subjective constructions of gender shape the way they negotiate time and work, both in the workplace and in the home. By deconstructing taken-for-granted practices across the boundaries of work and the rest of life, the findings of this study create possibilities for change, for researchers and practitioners alike. Flexible working practices are central to the wider work-life balance discourse which is currently reshaping workplace practices in the UK and the conclusions of this research make an original contribution to this important work.

Appendices

Appendix i) Call for research participation
(case-study organisations)

Research on the take-up of flexible working arrangements by employees within the UK finance sector – the implications for work and home life.

My name is Heather Griffiths, and I am a Sociology PhD Student from the University of Warwick. I am looking for a diverse group of participants for a research council funded study into the take-up of flexible working policies and practices in the finance sector and the impact on gender roles both within work and outside of work.

The Government claims that its policies are designed to improve work-life balance for all employees in the UK, not just for women or those working flexibly, so would like to talk to male and female employees at all levels, including those with children and those without.

I would like to assure you that participation in this study will not cause undue disruption to the working environment as each individual interview will take around 45 minutes and will involve no more than 20 employees. Any information collected will remain confidential and [COMPANY NAME], and your employees, will be given full anonymity. Participants will be free to withdraw at any time.

There will be no additional workload for you or any other employee as I will personally arrange and co-ordinate the interview and prepare a mailshot that can be distributed to all employees stating the nature of the research as well as my direct contact details.

I hope that [COMPANY NAME] will be willing to take part in this important research and I look forward to hearing from you. If you have any questions at all about the

research or your requirements, please do get in touch via email heather.griffiths@warwick.ac.uk. Alternatively I can be contacted on Twitter or via LinkedIn if you would like any further information about me or this study.

Appendix ii) Sample guide for case-study organisations: recruiting interview participants at Nordica

Dear XXXX

It was good to catch up with you again today, albeit rather briefly. Thank you for inviting me along, it was really useful to meet everybody and have a discussion before I come in next week. I was pleased with how positive everyone one was, and I am looking forward to working with you all some more next week. I hope it was helpful from your perspective too, and if anyone has any questions please feel free to pass my details on and I will do my best to answer them.

As discussed, I have attached the information sheet that I have put together for potential participants. The format works so that it can be attached to the email asking for volunteers, if you think that will be useful. I agree that we should approach those who are willing first of all, but just so you know what I am looking for the ideal sample would be along the lines of:

- 10 participants (12 max)
- 50/50 gender split
- To include roughly 3-4 sales staff, 4 -5 office staff, 1 – 2 managers
- A range of ages, backgrounds, ethnicity etc (but this may just depend on who comes forward, as well as being fairly representative of the company overall).

It would also be really useful to take a look at the company policies, particularly around flexible work, as well as some demographics on the employee base (if available/possible).

In case it may be useful, I have also attached the slides I used at the meeting.

Thank you for your continued support, I look forward to working with you again next week. As always, if you need anything further please do get in touch.

Kind Regards, Heather Griffiths

Appendix iii) Sample guide for case-study organisations: recruiting interview participants at DBK

Dear XXXX

Thank you for taking the time to speak to me on Wednesday, it was a useful and enjoyable discussion.

As agreed, I have attached some text that can be included in an email to employees, as well as a more detailed information sheet that can be attached to that email. Please do let me know if anything needs changing and I would be happy to amend the wording as necessary. I have suggested interested employees contact me directly if that would make things easier for you.

I would be looking for around 10 – 15 employees, but as you identified any more than 12 would mean stretching over three days rather than two as each interview would be approximately 40 mins and it is best to leave a few minutes between each one. I am happy to do this but conscious of not taking up too much of your time.

As for the 'sample' itself, the ideal scenario would be as follows:

- a 50/50 gender split, of whom two thirds work some form of flexible arrangement.
- a representative spread of age/life stage.
- a range that represents the organisational hierarchy, as I realise the experience of flexible work changes according to seniority, and this will also capture those who have the tough job of making decisions about flexible working requests from staff.
- a few employees from a range of departments as it would be interesting to see how different departmental cultures and job roles experience flexible work.

(I will be using the definition of flexible working which features in the 'right to request' legislation, which as you will know is rather broad and includes part-time, compressed hours, home working as well as many other creative combinations.)

I appreciate this is a lot to ask and in reality, it will be determined by who offers to get involved, but I thought it would be beneficial to know what I am aiming for in case there is any way we can target the initial email. The email is written in a way that it can be sent to individuals who have been identified as 'ideal' candidates but can also be sent as a blanket email to all staff.

You mentioned concerns of confidentiality when we spoke, and this is something that I and the university take very seriously. We recognise that when talking about their place of work, employees want to be reassured that what they say will not be relayed to their employer, so although you may be aware of who I am interviewing their identity will be anonymised from thereon in. The 'data' collected will be used in my PhD thesis as well as any subsequent publications in academic journals, but organisations and employees involved will not be able to be identified. I am happy to provide you with more information about my procedures, as well as the universities ethical guidelines.

Kind regards

Heather

Appendix iv) Table of research participants by organisation

Nordica Sample

Name	Age	Job Title	Gender	Household Formation	Type of flex work	Reason for flex work	Caring Responsibilities	Ethnic Group
Michelle	32	Accountant	F	Married	Flexitime	Company Policy	One child (teenager)	White British
Sharon	51	Business Administrator	F	Co-habiting	Flexitime	Company Policy	Parent/s, Siblings, Nieces/Nephews Partner, Pets	White British
June	34	Credit Controller	F	Co-habiting	Flexitime	Company Policy	Parent/s Pets	White British
Rebecca	29	Area Sales Manager	F	Married	Mobile working, working from home	Job Role Childcare	One child (pre-school age), Partner, Pets	White British
Josh	24	IT	M	Living with parents	Flexitime	Company Policy	No caring responsibilities	White British
Stephen	35	Accounting Manager	M	Married	Flexitime	Company Policy	Two children (one pre-school and one primary school age)	White British
Richard	59	Business Administration Director	M	Married	Flexitime	Company Policy	Parent/s-in-law, One adult child (living independently)	White British
Mike	59	Area Manager	M	Married	Mobile working, working from home	Job Role	One child (teenager)	White British
Max	23	Business Administrator	M	Co-habiting	Flexitime	Company Policy	Pets	Mixed Other
Dylan	23	Business Administrator	M	Living with parents	Flexitime	Company Policy	No caring responsibilities	White British

| Josh | 23 | Business Administrator | M | Living with parents | Flexitime | Company Policy | No caring responsibilities | White British |
| Ben | 29 | Internal Sales | M | Married | Flexitime | Company Policy | Two children at home (primary school age); Parent/s | White British |

DBK Sample

Name	Age	Job Title	Gender	Household Formation	Type of flex work	Reason for flex work	Caring Responsibilities	Ethnic Group
Mena	36	Credit Admin Assistant	F	Married	Part-time Work from home	Childcare Elderly care	Two children (one pre-school and one primary school age); Parent/s-in-law	Asian - Indian
Raquel	39	Account Manager	F	Living alone	Remote working, Work from home	Job role	No caring responsibilities	White Other Spanish
Elaine	43	Credit Auditor	F	Married	Part-time, Work from home, Remote Working	Childcare	Three children (two primary school age and one adult child living independently)	White British
Julie	57	Business Administration	F	Living alone	Shifts	Job role	One adult child (living independently)	White British
Liz	52	Team Leader - Business Administration	F	Married	None	Not Applicable	Two adult children (both living at home)	White British
Ruth	43	Asset Sales Administrator	F	Living alone	Start/Finish times	Second job	No caring responsibilities	White British
Dani	38	Credit Underwriter	F	Married	Part-time	Childcare	Two children (primary school age)	White British
Alan	57	Senior Credit Underwriter	M	Married	Work from home	Location; Caring for partner	Partner Two adult children (one at home, one living independently) Parent/s-in-law	White British

Mark	56	Director of Credit	M	Married	Work from home	Health	Two adult children (live independently)	White British
Ankit	46	Senior Credit Underwriter	M	Married	Start/Finish times	Childcare	Two children (primary school age) Parent/s	Asian
Dave	55	Risk Officer	M	Married	Mobile working Work from home	Job role	Two children (teenagers)	White British
Baz	56	Business Development Manager	M	Living alone	Work from home Remote Working	Job role	No caring responsibilities	White British
Imad	24	Executive Assistant	M	Living with parents	Remote working; Work from home	Studying Job role	No caring responsibilities	Asian Pakistani
Eddie	48	Manager of Asset Sales & Customer Services	M	Married	Remote working	Job role	Two children (teenagers)	White British

Pilot Study Sample

Employee name	Job Title	Gender	Age	Caring Responsibilities	Flexible working practice/s	Interview Setting
Nicki	Accounting Manager	F	33	Two children, six and four years old	Part-time: 0.8 FTE over 5 days	Meeting room on employers' premises
Lily	Sales Support Administrator	F	49	Two adult children, both moved out	Flexitime variation	Local pub regularly used by employees

John	Accounts Reconciliations Manager	M	46	One child, thirteen, visits every other weekend.	Currently none – previously adjusted start and finish times	Interviewee's home

Appendix v) Information Sheet for Research Participants

What is the research all about?

The research will be exploring how workers from the UK financial sector experience flexible work. It is particularly interested in whether these experiences differ according to gender, as well as observing the effects of organisational culture.

My name is Heather Griffiths, I am a PhD Researcher from The University of Warwick with funding from the Economic and Social Research Council. My work is based in the Sociology department and supervised by Lynne Pettinger and Clare Lyonette.

Who is being invited to take part?

I am looking for a diverse sample of people, whether you consider yourself to work flexibly or not. Many studies of this kind focus solely on parents of young families, but I hope to show that flexible work can be for everyone, irrespective of their age or domestic arrangements.

Why take part?

Participating in research can often be an enjoyable and rewarding experience. It is a chance to talk freely about your experiences to an interested and impartial listener, as well as having an input into a much wider academic and political discussion around flexible work in the 21st century.

If you know of anyone within the organisation who may also be interested in getting involved in the research, please feel free to pass my details on to them.

What will happen if I take part?

Each interview will take less than an hour of your time and will be conducted during the working day. We will meet in a quiet, private space on company premises where you feel comfortable to talk freely and where we won't be interrupted.

It is important that the location is relatively quiet and free from commotion, because the interviews will be audio recorded so that they can be transcribed by me after the interview. This is standard practice in many research interviews to ensure what you tell me is accurately recorded and represented.

How can I be sure this will all be confidential?

To ensure your information remains confidential all interview records will be kept completely anonymously, and your name will be changed when the thesis is written up. I am the only one who will know who you are.

Your employer may request an executive summary of the research outcomes. If so any data supplied to them will be also be anonymised and your identity protected.

Confidentiality is as important to us as researchers as it is to you, because without willing volunteers like yourself we would not be able to conduct these important studies.

What if I change my mind?

Although I hope you will find the experience interesting and worthwhile, you are free to withdraw from the research at any point, even if you have already been interviewed. I will not be asking you to discuss anything too personal or recount harrowing experiences, but it is important to me that you feel comfortable and in control of the process.

If you feel unsure about your participation or have any questions that have not been covered here please do feel free to get in touch and I would be happy to help. My email address is heather.griffiths@warwick.ac.uk, and mobile number XXXXXXXX.

Appendix vi) Informed Consent Form

Project: Flexible Work in the UK Finance Sector

Researcher: Heather Griffiths, PhD Researcher

Research Institution: Sociology Department, The University of Warwick, Coventry, CV4 7AL

Contact email: heather.griffiths@warwick.ac.uk

This consent form is intended to check you are happy with the information you have received about this study, that you are aware of your rights and responsibilities as a participant and to confirm that wish to take part in the study.

Please tick the boxes, and sign at the bottom of the page:

I have read and understood the information sheet provided by the researcher. ☐

I have been given the opportunity to ask and clarify and questions I had about the research, and my participation. ☐

I have been provided with enough information to make a comfortable decision about taking part in the study. ☐

I understand I have the right to withdraw from the research at any point, including during and after the interview process. ☐

I am aware that content of the interview will be recorded, stored electronically and transcribed, and that extracts from the interviews may be used in the researchers' thesis and any future publications. ☐

I understand that the information I provide will be treated in the strictest confidence, and any personal details provided will be completely anonymised. ☐

I confirm that quotations from the interview can be used in a final research report and other publications. I understand these will be used anonymously, with names, places and identifying details changed.

Name in block capitals _____

Signature _____

Date _____

Appendix vii) Interviewee demographic form

Interview number_____ Date_____ Time_____

Name:

_____

_

Age: _____

Job Title:

_____

Living arrangements:

_____

Gross salary:

Under £20,000 ☐   £20k - £30k ☐   £30k - £40k ☐   40k - £50k ☐   £50k

or over ☐

(pro rata, including commission, not including bonus)

Household income contribution:

Main earner   ☐   Secondary earner ☐   Equal

earner ☐

Caring responsibilities:

_____

Appendix viii: Interview topic guide/questions

<u>Introduction (5 mins)</u>

Thank you for time

Briefly explain how this interview fits into overall PhD

No right or wrong answers, I am interested in listening to what you think and how you feel.

Explain interviews will be recorded, and that I will also take notes to use as prompts and reminders.

Discuss confidentiality, anonymity, and right to withdraw

Consent form and ask them to sign it

<u>The organisation and its culture (15 mins)</u>

Let's start by talking about your current role:

What is your job title?

What does your job involve?

What are some of the regular tasks?

What is your typical working pattern?

What time do you start work in the morning and/or finish in the evening?

Do you feel this pattern offers you the flexibility you need?

Where did you work before you came here?

If <u>outside</u> financial services: How does working here compare to your previous places of work?

If <u>inside</u> or no previous work experience: How does working here compare to where your partner/family/friends work?

Are you aware of the Government's policy that gives all employees the right to request flexible work?

Are you aware of [employer's] own flexible working policy?

Have you utilised it?

you feel the organisation is supportive of those who take up these provisions?

Do you feel your colleagues are supportive of flexible working?

Do you feel your line manager(s) are supportive of flexible working?

Are the forms of flexible work available to you truly flexible?

What are the best things about working for [employer]?

What does [employer] do well?

What are some of things you like about your job?

Remembering this is confidential, what are some of the worst things about [employer]?

What would you like to see [employer] do better?

What are some of the things you dislike about your job?

Outside work (10 mins)

What do you do when you're not at work?

Leisure
How do you spend your leisure time?

Do you have any hobbies? Or participate in any clubs or organisations?

Caring and housework

Do you spend time with friends and family?

Do you have members of the family that depend upon you to look after them? How is this shared with your partner/siblings/parents etc?

What about housework? How is it shared in your house?

Work creeping

Do you find works creeps into your leisure time? Do you take work home?

What about commuting to work? Getting ready for work?

Do you study?

Summary (5mins)

So, what about balance…? Are there things you would like to be doing more/less of each week?

What are the barriers to stopping you doing…*x, y, z*?

Finally, is there anything you would like to talk about that we have not covered?

[NORDICA] FINANCE GREAT BRITAIN LIMITED

FLEXITIME POLICY

[NORDICA] operates a flexitime policy. The scheme is being re-launched to coincide with the introduction of an automated administration system which is expected to be installed in January 2012 and the revised policy and guidelines are set out below.

PRINCIPLES

The new scheme will be administered by the use of an automated system comprising of a biometric reader and reporting software.

All staff must sign in when they arrive in the mornings and sign out when they leave. In all cases, you will be expected to consider other members of staff whilst the scheme is in operation and adequate cover must be provided during normal office hours (9:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m.).

You must at all times make your manager aware of your planned working day to ensure that your department will be adequately covered during core office hours. Your manager may at any time decline your request for flexitime usage.

Within these constraints, staff will be able to vary their working times, should they wish, as follows:

Standard Working Day	**Core Hours**
7.5 Hours	10:30 am to 3:30 pm

Flexi Hours

7.30 am to 10:30 am

3:30 pm to 6:30 pm

Flexi hours cannot be accrued beyond the "flexi hours" limits without prior authority in writing from your senior line manager.

All staff will be expected to take a lunch break of at least 30 minutes and must sign out for this period. If you have not signed out for this period, 1 hour will automatically be deducted from your time for that day.

If it becomes necessary to work outside of the flexi hours, this must be <u>pre-approved</u> by a senior manager. The additional hours worked will be credited in the following way.

Week Days	Standard Rate
Saturday	Time and a half
Sunday	Time and a half
Bank Holidays	Double Time (Bank Holiday hours may be taken as time in-lieu
or cash)	

Appointment time will need to be taken out of accrued flexi hours.

Smoking breaks must also be taken from accrued flexi hours (sign out required).

ACCRUED HOURS

Hours worked will be counted on a weekly basis and staff will be advised of hours gained or of any shortfall in hours worked (via the automated system).

No more than 3 hours shortfall is to be carried over a month end. Additional shortfall must be made up before the end of the month.

No more than 10 hours are to be carried over a month end without written authority from your senior line manager.

Up to 1 full day may be taken as a flexi day in any one calendar month (with prior written approval from your manager).

BUSINESS TRAVEL

Business travelling time will not accrue flexi hours but will be counted as a standard working day.

SCOPE OF THE SCHEME

The following events will have no effect on flexi hours accrued:-

Sickness, where the company rules for sick time are followed

Annual Leave, approved in advance by your manager

Compassionate Leave, approved by your manager

BOOKING FLEXI DAYS

All flexi days are to be booked via "your workspace" within the flexi system.

Flexi days are to be approved by your manager in exactly the same way as annual leave i.e. in advance, with your line managers validation.

MANAGERS

Managers (members of the Management Team) may participate in flexitime but with the following restriction.

The flexi system is used to enable managers a degree of flexible working and as such any hours accrued may be used to vary the length of the working day.

At the end of each month, all accrued hours will be cleared down and replaced with 5 Managers Hours. Managers Hours are to be used for all day and half day bookings which must be validated through the system.

GENERAL

Please bear in mind that we are a very small organisation and it must be emphasised that we rely on close cooperation between colleagues to make the scheme viable.

Appendix x) table of flexible working policies by organisation

Company	Nordica	DBK
Size of UK enterprise (n)	Approx. 50	Approx. 200
Dominant form of flexible working practice	Flexitime	Remote working
Flexible working practices available	Flexitime only	Remote working (home or mobile), part-time, adjusted start/finish times, shift patterns, job-share
Core hours/office cover required	9am - 5pm	9am - 5pm

Appendix xi) Report for Nordica: executive summary of findings

Introduction

This review will explore the preliminary findings from 12 interviews conducted with [Nordica] employees in April 2016. This discussion points are a collection of emerging themes and common responses based on initial analysis of all the interviews, which were transcribed and coded in-line with common qualitative research methodology.

The report includes a summary of the organisations' strengths and weaknesses; a discussion on the links between flexitime and teamwork; how well flexitime facilitates caring responsibilities; and a comment on who was and who was not represented by the sample. The final section includes some recommendations and a closing statement.

Workplace strengths and weaknesses

When asked, what is the best thing about working for the organisation, the response was overwhelmingly the culture of the company the people in it. The employees I interviewed felt it was a good company to work for because of how the organisation was run, and because they get on well with their colleagues. A number also appreciated that they were treated well; being taken out for dinner and having opportunities to study were as well regarded as the standard benefits package.

When asked, what is the worst thing about working for the company, the results were varied but could be broadly collated as lack of communication or interaction between teams, slow decisions and resistance to change. A few respondents could not think of anything negative!

Flexitime and teamwork

The sense of community within the organisation was a recurring theme for many respondents, with some even referring to it as the '[Nordica] family', which chimes with management strategies targeted at building organisational culture. This sense

of camaraderie and team work may be part of the long-running success of the flexible working scheme, as interviewees comments showed that negotiating time-off relies on good communication and support amongst team members.

In particular, the partnering scheme in Business Administration enables employees to manage time amongst themselves, delegating responsibility away from management, thus overcoming a common criticism of flexitime i.e. how the coming and going of team members will be managed. This fosters a culture of shared responsibility and respect amongst individuals in a team, but - as with all relationships - they require investment from all parties.

The idea of flexitime being a system of 'give and take' was common amongst employees, and it was often seen as part of the wider benefits packages and a highly regarded advantage of working for 'Nordica'. When wrapped up as part of this benefits package, flexitime did appear to act as a retention tool as employees recognised these advantages would be hard to find elsewhere. A few even directly cited the flexitime system as a reason for their long-service.

Flexitime and care

Two thirds of those interviewed had caring responsibilities of some kind outside of work. Of the 12 employees interviewed, three had children of primary school age, two had children in secondary school, and of those almost all played an active role in parenting including co-ordinating childcare, doing the school or nursery run, and taking time off when children were sick.

As well as caring for dependents, 5 interviewees also played an active role in caring for parents or siblings, due to ageing and/or ill health. Employees managed everything from ordering medication online, taking family to hospital appointments, caring for the children of sick relatives and providing general emotional support, both outside and during the working day.

Responsibilities	Frequency*

Children at home	5
Parents	4
Siblings	1
None	4

*employees may feature in more than one row.

Many reported that the flexitime scheme, as well as the supportiveness of the organisation, helped them to fulfil these commitments meaning their caring responsibilities would not interfere with their work. Yet those who cared for others talked about a tension between their personal responsibilities and work, with half of all interviewees receiving phone calls at work about big or small family incidents, and two mothers used the metaphor of life being a 'juggling act'.

Those not represented in the sample

<u>Age</u>

The table below shows the age demographic of those interviewed - although the average age of the sample was 35, this was skewed by a range of 36 years between the youngest and eldest interviewees. This was because 1 in 3 respondents were under 25, and 1 in 4 were over 50. Some of this can be attributed to sample bias, but a few interviewees indicated this was representative of the company as whole, with those in their 30s and 40s being underrepresented in the organisation.

Ages:	Years:
Mean (average)	35
Median (the middle value)	32
Mode (most frequent)	23
Youngest	23
Eldest	59

Age Range	36
Standard deviation from the mean	13

As well as being a concern for succession planning, this also suggests a lack diversity and research shows that diverse teams perform better than homogenous ones. Diversity can include an awareness of gender balance, as well as other social demographics such as ethnicity, age, background, education etc.

<u>Gender</u>

Unexpectedly, the sample of volunteers was two thirds male to two thirds female, even though the organisation had a 50/50 gender balance at the time of interviewing. Every department was represented in the sample, with Business Administration having the highest respondents (45 per cent of the department) and Credit the fewest (13 per cent of the department).

However, of the 5 respondents from Business Administration only one was female despite the department having a 60/40 female to male ratio over all. Of the four male respondents, three were all just 23 years old so it is unlikely their responses were representative of the department as a whole, and perhaps begs the question why they were more willing to volunteer than their female counterparts.

Alternative working patterns

I asked interviewees about other working arrangements and no one could name any colleagues within the organisation who worked part-time, compressed hours or a job share.

Interestingly, some interviewees identified colleagues who had requested fixed hours of work, the most common being 8am – 4pm. There were mixed feelings about the feasibility of such requests with some departments more able to facilitate this than others.

Interestingly, although office based employees initially said they didn't work fixed hours, 8 out of 10 could specify their usual start and finish times. Flexitime did

facilitate flexibility at either end of the day, but half of office based staff varied their start or finish time by less than 15 minutes and the other half by less than 30 minutes.

Recommendations

As employees tend to work routine hours, and core hours are required, there may be an opportunity to give some employees the option of opting out of the flexible working scheme, effectively removing themselves from the 'give and take' of working overtime for hours in lieu. This has the obvious draw-back of removing them from the month-end processes, but could offer a way to retain or attract good employees who are less able to give additional hours. This measure could be utilised permanently or temporarily depending on employee or organisational needs.

It was also apparent that all employees (excluding sales) came into the office daily, which probably contributes to the collective team spirit and flat hierarchy. However, rather than (or as well as) the option to opt out of flexitime, employees could be offered the opportunity to work additional hours from home, facilitated by advancing technology. This enables employees to continue to work out of hours, especially if they are unable to stay in the office past a certain time i.e. due to childcare restrictions, community commitments, or even to avoid traffic hotspots.

Combining flexitime and 'flexiplace' could offer some creative working patterns which are mutually beneficial if well thought through and sensitively implemented. However, increased teleworking must be treated with caution as research shows that those who work from home are likely to increase the amount they work (referred to as 'work intensification'), to the detriment of their work-life balance, so any increase in teleworking would need to be given careful consideration and preferably incorporated into any existing wellbeing policies.

Final statement

The big financial employers now promote flexible working options as part of their benefits package, and in a recent survey, 80 per cent of accounting and finance professionals said that flexible working options are something they look for before joining a company, and half said they would rather have these options than a 5 per cent pay rise.

With a lack of alternative flexible working arrangements, the flexitime scheme becomes a one-size-fits-all policy, and although the majority of current employees were satisfied with this, the company may be missing out on a pool of talent who prefer alternative working patterns such as job-sharing, compressed working hours or part-time hours.

These options may better suit older workers, those caring for elderly relatives, or simply those who are making pro-active choices about their work-life balance. However, the obvious demographic is parents with young children, particularly mothers returning from career breaks with vast experience, who often re-enter the labour market into roles they are over-qualified for because they are unable to reduce or reschedule their working hours.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank everyone at [Nordica] for their hospitality, and especially to Alan for agreeing to meet with me and champion my cause, as well as those who took the time to come and talk to me. I very much enjoyed meeting some of your employees and I hope you find this review as valuable as my time was with your organisation. I wish you all well from the future, and I hope we can keep in touch in the future.

Heather Griffiths

Doctoral Researcher, Department of Sociology, University of Warwick

June 2017

Bibliography

Acker, J. (1990) 'Hierarchies, Jobs, Bodies: A Theory of Gendered Organizations', *Gender & Society*, 4(2), pp. 139–158. doi: 10.1177/089124390004002002.

Acker, J. (1994) 'The Gender Regime of Swedish Banks', *Scandinavian Journal of Management*, 22, pp. 195–209.

Acker, J. (2006) 'Inequality Regimes: Gender, Class, and Race in Organizations', *Gender & Society*, 20(4), pp. 441–464. doi: 10.1177/0891243206289499.

Acker, S. (2000) 'In/out/side: Positioning the researcher in feminist qualitative research', *Resources for Feminist Research*, 28(1/2), p. 189.

Ackerly, B. and True, J. (2010) *Doing Feminist Research in Political and Social Science*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.

Adam, B. (1994) *Time & Social Theory*. Oxford: Blackwell Publishers.

Adam, B., Whipp, R. and Sabelis, I. (2002) 'Choreographing Time and Management: Traditions, Developments, and Opportunities', in Whipp, R., Adam, B., and Sabelis, I. (eds) *Making Time: time and management in modern organizations (e-book)*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, pp. 1–28.

Alasuutari, P., Bickman, L. and Brannen, J. (2008) *The SAGE Handbook of Social Research Methods*. 1 Oliver's Yard, 55 City Road, London EC1Y 1SP United Kingdom: SAGE Publications Ltd. doi: 10.4135/9781446212165.

Alkhaled, S. (2017) '"Are You One of Us, or One of Them?" An Autoethnography of a "Hybrid" Feminist Researcher Bridging Two Worlds', in Thwaites, R. and Pressland, A. (eds) *Being an Early Career Feminist Academic*. London: Palgrave Macmillan, pp. 109–128.

Ayudhya, U. C. N. and Lewis, S. (2011) 'From "Balancers" to "Integrators"? Young Professionals' Talk About "Work" and the Rest of "Life" in the UK', in Kaiser, S. et al. (eds) *Creating Balance?* Berlin, Heidelberg: Springer Berlin Heidelberg, pp. 47–63. doi: 10.1007/978-3-642-16199-5_3.

Bailyn, L. and Fletcher, J. K. (2018) 'Reflections on Joan Acker's influence on us and on her legacy: A dialogue', *Gender, Work & Organization*, pp. 1–6. doi: 10.1111/gwao.12235.

Banks, J. A. (1998) 'The Lives and Values of Researchers: Implications for Educating Citizens in a Multicultural Society', *Educational Researcher*, 27(7), p. 4. doi: 10.2307/1176055.

Barker, D. K. (2013) 'Feminist economics as a theory and method [electronic resource]', in Figart, D. M. and Warnecke (eds) *Handbook of research on gender and economic life*. Cheltenham: Edward Elgar Pub. Ltd, pp. 18–31.

Beauregard, T. A. and Henry, L. C. (2009) 'Making the link between work-life balance practices and organizational performance', *Human Resource Management Review*, 19(1), pp. 9–22. doi: 10.1016/j.hrmr.2008.09.001.

Been, W. M., den Dulk, L. and van der Lippe, T. (2015) 'Dutch top managers and work-life arrangements in times of economic crisis', *Community, Work & Family*, pp. 1–20. doi: 10.1080/13668803.2015.1013019.

Bittman, M. and Wajcman, J. (2000) 'The rush hour: The character of leisure time and gender equity.', *Social Forces*, 79(1), pp. 165–189.

Blair-Loy, M. *et al.* (2015) 'Stability and transformation in gender, work, and family: insights from *the second shift* for the next quarter century', *Community, Work & Family*, 18(4), pp. 435–454. doi: 10.1080/13668803.2015.1080664.

Bond, S. (2004) 'Organisational culture and work-life conflict in the UK', *International Journal of Sociology and Social Policy*, 24(12), pp. 1–24.

Borgkvist, A. *et al.* (2018) '"I might be a bit of a front runner": An analysis of men's uptake of flexible work arrangements and masculine identity', *Gender, Work & Organization*. doi: 10.1111/gwao.12240.

Brannen, J. (2005) 'Time and the Negotiation of Work–Family Boundaries: Autonomy or illusion?', *Time & Society*, 14(1), pp. 113–131. doi: 10.1177/0961463X05050299.

van den Brink, M. and Benschop, Y. (2012) 'Gender practices in the construction of academic excellence: Sheep with five legs', *Organization*, 19(4), pp. 507–524. doi: 10.1177/1350508411414293.

Britton, D. (2000) 'The Epistemology of the Gendered Organization', *Gender & Society*, 14(3), pp. 418–434.

Bryman, A. (2012) *Social Research Methods*. 4th edn. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Bryson, V. (2007) *Gender and the politics of time: feminist theory and contemporary debates*. Bristol: Policy Press.

Burchell, B., Ladipo, D. and Wilkinson, F. (2005) *Job insecurity and work intensification*. Routledge.

Burnett, S. B. *et al.* (2010) 'Well-balanced families?: A gendered analysis of work-life balance policies and work family practices', *Gender in Management: An International Journal*, 25(7), pp. 534–549. doi: 10.1108/17542411011081356.

Butler, C. (2015) 'Making interview transcripts real: the reader's response', *Work, employment and society*, 29(1), pp. 166–176.

Calás, M. B. and Smircich, L. (2014) 'Feminist Theorizing and Organization Studies', in Adler, P. et al. (eds) *Adler, P.S. et al., 2014. The Oxford handbook of sociology, social theory and organization studies: contemporary currents, Oxford.* Oxford University Press, pp. 605–659.

Charmaz, K. (2006) *Constructing grounded theory*. London; Thousand Oaks, Calif: Sage Publications.

Chelcea, L. (2015) 'Post-socialist acceleration: Fantasy time in a multinational bank', *Time & Society*, 24(3), pp. 348–366. doi: 10.1177/0961463X14563018.

Ciccia, R. and Bleijenbergh, I. (2014) 'After the Male Breadwinner Model? Childcare Services and the Division of Labor in European Countries', *Social Politics: International Studies in Gender, State & Society*, 21(1), pp. 50–79. doi: 10.1093/sp/jxu002.

Clark, S. C. (2000) 'Work/Family Border Theory: A New Theory of Work/Family Balance', *Human Relations*, 53(6), pp. 747–770. doi: 10.1177/0018726700536001.

Coltrane, S. (2000) 'Research on Household Labor: Modeling and Measuring the Social Embeddedness of Routine Family Work', *Journal of Marriage and Family*, 62(4), pp. 1208–1233. doi: 10.1111/j.1741-3737.2000.01208.x.

Cooper, M. (2000) 'Being the "go-to guy": Fatherhood, masculinity, and the organization of work in Silicon Valley', *Qualitative Sociology*, 23(4), pp. 379–405.

Coyle, A. (2005) 'Changing times: Flexibilization and the re-organization of work in feminized labour markets', in Pettinger, L. et al. (eds) *A New Sociology of Work?* Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, pp. 73–88.

Craig, L. and Brown, J. E. (2017) 'Feeling Rushed: Gendered Time Quality, Work Hours, Nonstandard Work Schedules, and Spousal Crossover', *Journal of Marriage and Family*, 79(1), pp. 225–242. doi: 10.1111/jomf.12320.

Craig, L. and Jenkins, B. (2015) 'Grandparental childcare in Australia: gender differences in the correlates of providing regular grandparental care while parents work', *Community, Work & Family*, pp. 1–21. doi: 10.1080/13668803.2015.1027176.

Craig, L. and Powell, A. (2018) 'Shares of Housework Between Mothers, Fathers and Young People: Routine and Non-routine Housework, Doing Housework for Oneself and Others', *Social Indicators Research*, 136(1), pp. 269–281. doi: 10.1007/s11205-016-1539-3.

Crawford, M. and Pini, B. (2011) 'The Australian Parliament: A Gendered Organisation', *Parliamentary Affairs*, 64(1), pp. 82–105. doi: 10.1093/pa/gsq047.

Creswell, J. W. (2013) *Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design: choosing among five approaches*. Third Edition. London: SAGE Publications Ltd.

Crompton, R. and Le Feauvre, N. (1992) 'Gender & Bureaucracy: women in finance in Britain and France', in Savage, M. and Witz, A. (eds) *Gender & Bureaucracy*. Oxford: Blackwells.

Crompton, R. and Lyonette, C. (2011) 'Women's Career Success and Work–life Adaptations in the Accountancy and Medical Professions in Britain', *Gender, Work & Organization*, 18(2), pp. 231–254. doi: 10.1111/j.1468-0432.2009.00511.x.

Crow, G. and Heath, S. (2002) 'Introduction', in Crow, G. and Heah, S. (eds) *Social Conceptions of Time: Structure and Process in Work and Everyday Life*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, pp. 1–7.

Daverth, G., Cassell, C. and Hyde, P. (2016) 'The Subjectivity of Fairness: Managerial Discretion and Work-Life Balance: The Subjectivity of Fairness', *Gender, Work & Organization*, 23(2), pp. 89–107. doi: 10.1111/gwao.12113.

Davis, K. (2008) 'Intersectionality as buzzword: A sociology of science perspective on what makes a feminist theory successful', *Feminist Theory*, 9(1), pp. 67–85. doi: 10.1177/1464700108086364.

Dermott, E. (2005) 'Time and labour: Fathers' perceptions of employment and childcare', *The Sociological Review*, 53(s2), pp. 89–103.

Drake, P. and Heath, L. (2011) *Practitioner research at doctoral level: developing coherent research methodologies*. Abingdon, Oxon, England; New York: Routledge.

Duckworth, J. D. and Buzzanell, P. M. (2009) 'Constructing Work-Life Balance and Fatherhood: Men's Framing of the Meanings of Both Work and Family', *Communication Studies*, 60(5), pp. 558–573. doi: 10.1080/10510970903260392.

den Dulk, L. and de Ruijter, J. (2008) 'Managing work-life policies: disruption versus dependency arguments. Explaining managerial attitudes towards employee utilization of work-life policies', *The International Journal of Human Resource Management*, 19(7), pp. 1222–1236. doi: 10.1080/09585190802109986.

Duxbury, L., Lyons, S. and Higgins, C. (2008) 'Too Much to Do, and Not Enough Time: An Examination of Role Overload', in Korabik, K., Lero, D., and Whitehead (eds) *Handbook of Work-Family Integration*. London: Elsevier, pp. 125–138.

Eikhof, D. R., Warhurst, C. and Haunschild, A. (2007) 'Introduction: What work? What life? What balance?: Critical reflections on the work-life balance debate', *Employee Relations*, 29(4), pp. 325–333. doi: http://0-dx.doi.org.pugwash.lib.warwick.ac.uk/10.1108/01425450710839452.

Elwood, S. A. and Martin, D. G. (2000) '"Placing" Interviews: Location and Scales of Power in Qualitative Research', *The Professional Geographer*, 52(4), pp. 649–657. doi: 10.1111/0033-0124.00253.

Eräranta, K. and Kantola, J. (2016) 'The Europeanization of Nordic Gender Equality: A Foucauldian Analysis of Reconciling Work and Family in Finland: The Europeanization of Nordic Gender Equality', *Gender, Work & Organization*, 23(4), pp. 414–430. doi: 10.1111/gwao.12136.

Fagan, C. (2001a) 'The temporal reorganization of employment and the household rhythm of work schedules: The implications for gender and class relations.', *American Behavioral Scientist*, 44(7), pp. 1199–1212.

Fagan, C. (2001b) 'Time, Money and the Gender Order: Work Orientations and Working-Time Preferences in Britain', *Gender, Work & Organization*, 8(3), p. 239.

Fagan, C. *et al.* (2012) *The influence of working time arrangements on work-life integration or 'balance': a review of the international evidence*. Geneva: ILO.

Fine, G. A. (1984) 'Negotiated Orders and Organizational Cultures', *Annaul Review of Sociology*, 10(1), pp. 239–262.

FLA.org.uk (n.d.) 'Why Use Asset Finance?' Finance & Leasing Association. Available at: http://www.fla.org.uk/main-data-content/files/2014/redirect/765gjtY/submo_776yietRWTREYYGUGIHI_87/Guide-to-Asset-Finance.pdf (Accessed: 20 September 2018).

Fleetwood, S. (2007) 'Why work–life balance now?', *The International Journal of Human Resource Management*, 18(3), pp. 387–400. doi: 10.1080/09585190601167441.

Folbre, N. and Nelson, J. A. (2000) 'For Love or Money - Or Both?', *Journal of Economic Perspectives*, 14(4), pp. 123–140.

Ford, J. and Collinson, D. (2011) 'In search of the perfect manager? Work-life balance and managerial work', *Work, employment and society*, 25(2), pp. 257–273. doi: 10.1177/0950017011398895.

Fox, N. J. (2014) 'Post-structuralism and Postmodernism', in Cockenham, W., Dingwall, R., and Quah, S. (eds) *The Wiley-Blackwell Encyclopedia of Health, Illness, Behavior and Society,*. Chichester: Wiley, pp. 1855–1860.

Frost, N. and Elichaoff, F. (2014) 'Feminist Postmodernism, Poststructuralism, and Critical Theory', in Hesse-Biber, S. (ed.) *Feminist Resesarch Practice: A Primer*. Second Edition. London: SAGE Publications Ltd, pp. 42–72.

Gambles, R., Lewis, S. and Rapoport, R. (2008) *The Myth of Work-Life Balance: The Challenge of Our Time for Men, Women and Societies [E-Book].* Chichester, England: John Wiley & Sons Ltd.

Gannon, S. and Davies, B. (2012) 'Postmdoder, Post-Structural, and Critical Theories', in Hesse-Biber, S. N. (ed.) *The Handbook of Feminist Research: Theory and Praxix*. Second Edition. London: SAGE Publications Ltd.

Gatrell, C. J. *et al.* (2014) 'Parents, Perceptions and Belonging: Exploring Flexible Working among UK Fathers and Mothers: Parents, Perceptions and Belonging', *British Journal of Management*, 25(3), pp. 473–487. doi: 10.1111/1467-8551.12050.

Gatrell, C. J. *et al.* (2015) 'The price of love: The prioritisation of childcare and income earning among UK fathers', *Families, Relationships and Societies*, 4(2), pp. 225–238.

Gatrell, C. J. and Cooper, C. L. (2008) 'Work-life balance: working for whom?', *European Journal of International Management*, 2(1), pp. 71–86.

Gerson, J. M. and Peiss, K. (1985) 'Boundaries, Negotiation, Conciousness: Reconceptualizing Gender Realations', *Social Problems*, 32(4), pp. 317–331.

Gherardi, S. (1995) *Gender, Symbolism and Organizational Cultures*. London: Sage Publications.

Glucksmann, M. (1998) 'What a difference a day makes': A theoretical and historical exploration of temporality and gender.', *Sociology*, 32(2), pp. 239–258.

Glucksmann, M. (2005) 'Shifting Boundaries and Interconnections: Extending the "Total Social Organisation of Labour"', in Pettinger, L. et al. (eds) *A New Sociology of Work?* Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, pp. 19–36.

Goodwin, J. and Horowitz, R. (2002) 'Introduction: The Methodological Strengths and Dilemmas of Qualitative Sociology', *Qualitative Sociology*, p. 15.

Gov.uk (2014) *Landmark Children and Families Act 2014 gains royal assent [Press release]*. Available at: https://www.gov.uk/government/news/landmark-children-and-families-act-2014-gains-royal-assent (Accessed: 26 September 2018).

Gray, D. (2018) *Doing research in the real world*. Forth Edition. Los Angeles: SAGE.

Green, F. (2001) 'It's Been A Hard Day's Night: The Concentration and Intensification of Work in Late Twentieth-Century Britain', *British Journal of Industrial Relations*, 39(1), pp. 53–80. doi: 10.1111/1467-8543.00189.

Green, F. (2004) 'Why Has Work Effort Become More Intense?', *Industrial Relations*, 43(4), pp. 709–741. doi: 10.1111/j.0019-8676.2004.00359.x.

Greenberg, D. and Landry, E. M. (2011) 'Negotiating a flexible work arrangement: How women navigate the influence of power and organizational context', *Journal of Organizational Behavior*, 32(8), pp. 1163–1188. doi: 10.1002/job.750.

Greenhaus, J. H. and Beutell, N. J. (1985) 'Sources of Conflict between Work and Family Roles', *The Academy of Management Review*, 10(1), p. 76. doi: 10.2307/258214.

Gregg, M. (2011) *Work's Intimacy*. Cambridge: Polity Press.

Grundy, E. and Henretta, J. C. (2006) 'Between elderly parents and adult children: a new look at the intergenerational care provided by the "sandwich generation"', *Ageing and Society*, 26(05), pp. 707–722. doi: 10.1017/S0144686X06004934.

Guest, D. E. (2002) 'Perspectives on the study of work-life balance', *Social Science Information*, 41(2), pp. 255–279.

Hamilton, E. A., Gordon, J. R. and Whelan-Berry, K. S. (2006) 'Understanding the work-life conflict of never-married women without children', *Women in Management Review*, 21(5), pp. 393–415. doi: 10.1108/09649420610676208.

Harding, S. (2004) 'Introduction: Standpoint Theory as a Site of Political, Philosophic, and Scientific Debate', in Harding, S. (ed.) *The Feminist Standpoint Theory Reader: Intellectual & Political Controversies*. London: Routledge, pp. 1–16.

Hassard, J. (1990) 'Introduction: The Sociological Study of Time', in Hassard, J. (ed.) *The Sociology of Time*. Basingstoke: Macillan Press, pp. 1–20.

Hassard, J. (2000) 'Images of Time in Work and Organization', in Grint, K. (ed.) *Work and Society: A Reader*. Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, pp. 14–40.

Hegewisch, A. (2009) *Flexible working policies: a comparative review*. Manchester: Equality and Human Rights Commission. Available at: https://www.equalityhumanrights.com/sites/default/files/research-report-16-flexible-working-policies-comparative-review.pdf.

Hekman, S. (2004) 'Truth and Method: Feminist Standpoint Theory Revisited', in Harding, S. (ed.) *The Feminist Standpoint Theory Reader: Intellectual & Political Controversies*. London: Routledge, pp. 225–241.

Hill Collins, P. (2000) *Black feminist thought: Knowledge, consciousness, and the politics of empowerment*. Abingdon: Routledge.

Hill, J. E. *et al.* (2008) 'Defining and conceptualizing workplace flexibility', *Community, Work & Family*, 11(2), pp. 149–163. doi: 10.1080/13668800802024678.

Himmelweit, S. (2007) 'The Right to Request Flexible Working: A 'Very British' Approach to Gender (In) Equality?', *Australian Bulletin of Labour*, 33(2), pp. 246–263.

Hines, S. (2008) 'Feminist Theories', in Richardson, D. and Robinson (eds) *Introducing Gender and Women's Studies*. Third Edition. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, pp. 20–34.

Ho, K. (2009) *Liquidated: An Ethnography of Wall Street*. London: Duke University Press.

Hochschild, A. (1997) *The Time Bind: When Work Becomes Home and Home Becomes Work*. New York: Metropolitan Books.

Hochschild, A. (2012) *The Second Shift: Working Families and the Revolution at Home*. London: Penguin Books Ltd.

Hofäcker, D. and König, S. (2013) 'Flexibility and work-life conflict in times of crisis: a gender perspective', *International Journal of Sociology and Social Policy*. Edited by A. Gregory, 33(9/10), pp. 613–635. doi: 10.1108/IJSSP-04-2013-0042.

Holmes, J., Schnurr, S. and Marra, M. (2007) 'Leadership and communication: discursive evidence of a workplace culture change', *Discourse & Communication*, 1(4), pp. 433–451. doi: 10.1177/1750481307082207.

Holmes, M. (2002) 'Politicizing Time: Temporal Issues for Second-Wave Feminists', in Crow, G. and Heath, S. (eds) *Social Conceptions of Time: Structure and Process in Work and Everyday Life*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, pp. 38–52.

Hope, W. (2006) 'Global Capitalism and the Critique of Real Time', *Time & Society*, 15(2–3), pp. 275–302. doi: 10.1177/0961463X06066943.

Hughes, C. (2010) 'Chapter Six: Time', in *Key Concepts in Feminist Theory and Research*. Available from: ProQuest Ebook Central. [10 November 2017]. London: SAGE Publications Ltd, pp. 130–150.

Irving, Z. (2015) 'Transformation and Persistence in the Gendered Division of Work', in Richardson, D. and Robinson, V. (eds) *Introducing Gender and Women's Studies*. Fourth Edition. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, pp. 212–228.

Jarvis, H. and Pratt, A. C. (2006) 'Bringing it all back home: The extensification and "overflowing" of work', *Geoforum*, 37(3), pp. 331–339. doi: 10.1016/j.geoforum.2005.06.002.

Jones, K. and Jones, E. (2011) 'Flexible Working Practices in the UK: Gender and Management Perspectives', *Women in Society*, 2. Available at: http://genderstudies.research.southwales.ac.uk/media/files/documents/2014-07-08/WIS.2.3.doc (Accessed: 30 July 2015).

Jones, S. (2004) 'Depth Interviewing', in Seale, Clive (ed.) *Social Research Methods*. London: Routledge, pp. 257–260.

Kanji, S. (2018) 'Grandparent Care: A Key Factor in Mothers' Labour Force Participation in the UK', *Journal of Social Policy*, 47(03), pp. 523–542. doi: 10.1017/S004727941700071X.

Kelliher, C. and Anderson, D. (2008) 'For better or for worse? An analysis of how flexible working practices influence employees' perceptions of job quality', *The International Journal of Human Resource Management*, 19(3), pp. 419–431. doi: 10.1080/09585190801895502.

Kelliher, C. and Anderson, D. (2010) 'Doing more with less? Flexible working practices and the intensification of work', *Human Relations*, 63(1), pp. 83–106. doi: 10.1177/0018726709349199.

Kerfoot, D. and Knights, D. (1993) 'Management, Masculinity and Manipulation: From Paternalism to Corporate Strategy in Financial Services in Britain*', *Journal of Management Studies*, 30(4), pp. 659–677. doi: 10.1111/j.1467-6486.1993.tb00320.x.

Kim, H., Bailyn, L. and Kolb, D. (2017) 'Revisiting the Dual Agenda: Why Companies Miss the Point If They Retract Flexible Work Arrangements during Bad Times', in Lewis, S., Anderson, D., and Lyonette, C. (eds) *Work-life balance in times of recession, austerity and beyond*. 1st Edition. New York: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, pp. 165–179.

Kleinman, S. (2002) 'Why Sexist Language Matters', *Qualitative Sociology*, 25(2), p. 6.

Kmec, J. A., O'Connor, L. T. and Schieman, S. (2014) 'Not Ideal: The Association Between Working Anything but Full Time and Perceived Unfair Treatment', *Work and Occupations*, 41(1), pp. 63–85. doi: 10.1177/0730888413515691.

Kolb, D. and McGinn, K. (2009) 'Beyond Gender and Negotiation to Gendered Negotiations', *Negotiation and Conflict Management Research*, 2(1), pp. 1–16. doi: 10.1111/j.1750-4716.2008.00024.x.

Korabik, K. and Warner, M. (2013) 'The Impact of Co-workers on Work-to-Family Enrichment and Organizational Outcomes', in Poelmans, S., Greenhaus, J., and Las Heras Maestro, M. (eds) *Expanding the Boundaries of Work-Family Research (E-Book)*. London: Palgrave Macmillan, pp. 254–276.

Korunka, C. *et al.* (2015) 'Changes in work intensification and intensified learning: challenge or hindrance demands?', *Journal of Managerial Psychology*, 30(7), pp. 786–800. doi: 10.1108/JMP-02-2013-0065.

Kreiner, G. E., Hollensbe, E. C. and Sheep, M. L. (2009) 'Balancing Borders and Bridges: Negotiating the Work-Home Interface Via Boundary Work Tactics', *Academy of Management Journal*, 52(4), pp. 704–730. doi: 10.5465/AMJ.2009.43669916.

Landsbergis, P. A., Cahill, J. and Schnall, P. (1999) 'The impact of lean production and related new systems of work organization on worker health', *Journal of Occupational Health Psychology*, 4(2), pp. 108–130.

Larsson, J. and Björk, S. (2017) 'Swedish fathers choosing part-time work', *Community, Work & Family*, 20(2), pp. 142–161. doi: 10.1080/13668803.2015.1089839.

Lewis, J., Campbell, M. and Huerta, C. (2008) 'Patterns of paid and unpaid work in Western Europe: gender, commodification, preferences and the implications for policy', *Journal of European Social Policy*, 18(1), pp. 21–37. doi: 10.1177/0958928707084450.

Lewis, S. (1997) '"Family Friendly" Employment Policies: A Route to Changing Organizational Culture or Playing About at the Margins?', *Gender, Work & Organization*, 4(1), pp. 13–23. doi: 10.1111/1468-0432.00020.

Lewis, S. (2003) 'Flexible Working Arrangements: Implementation, Outcomes, and Management', in Cooper, C. L. and Robertson, I. T. (eds) *International Review of Industrial and Organizational Psychology 2003*. Chichester, UK: John Wiley & Sons, Ltd, pp. 1–28. doi: 10.1002/0470013346.ch1.

Lewis, S. (2010) 'Restructuring workplace cultures: the ultimate work-family challenge?', *Gender in Management*, 25(5), pp. 355–365. doi: http://0-dx.doi.org.pugwash.lib.warwick.ac.uk/10.1108/17542411011056859.

Lewis, S. *et al.* (2017) 'Public sector austerity cuts in Britain and the changing discourse of work–life balance', *Work, Employment and Society*, 31(4), pp. 586–604. doi: 10.1177/0950017016638994.

Lewis, S., Anderson, D. and Lyonette, C. (eds) (2017) *Work-life balance in times of recession, austerity and beyond*. 1 Edition. New York: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group (Routledge research in employment relations, 38).

Lewis, S., Gambles, R. and Rapoport, R. (2007) 'The constraints of a "work–life balance" approach: an international perspective', *The International Journal of Human Resource Management*, 18(3), pp. 360–373. doi: 10.1080/09585190601165577.

Loretto, W. and Vickerstaff, S. (2015) 'Gender, age and flexible working in later life', *Work, Employment & Society*, 29(2), pp. 233–249. doi: 10.1177/0950017014545267.

Lyonette, C. *et al.* (2017) 'Work–Life Balance and Austerity Implications of New Ways of Working in British Public Sector Organisations', in Lewis, S., Anderson, D., and Lyonette, C. (eds) *Work-life Balance in Times of Recession, Austerity and Beyond*. New York: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group (Routledge research in employment relations, 38).

Lyonette, C. and Crompton, R. (2015) 'Sharing the load? Partners' relative earnings and the division of domestic labour', *Work, Employment & Society*, 29(1), pp. 23–40. doi: 10.1177/0950017014523661.

Maltby, J. and Rutterford, J. (2013) 'Gender and Finance', in Knorr Cetina, K. and Preda (eds) *The Oxford Handbook of the Sociology of Finance*. Online Edition. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

McCarthy, A., Darcy, C. and Grady, G. (2010) 'Work-life balance policy and practice: Understanding line manager attitudes and behaviors', *Human Resource Management Review*, 20(2), pp. 158–167. doi: 10.1016/j.hrmr.2009.12.001.

McCormack, C. *et al.* (2008) '"I Want to Do More than Just Cut the Sandwiches": Female baby boomers seek authentic leisure in retirement', *Annals of Leisure Research*, 11(1–2), pp. 145–167. doi: 10.1080/11745398.2008.9686790.

McDowell, L. (1997) *Capital Culture: Gender at Work in the City*. Oxford: Blackwells.

McDowell, L. (1998) 'Elites in the City of London: Some Methodological Considerations', *Environment and Planning A*, 30(12), pp. 2133–2146. doi: 10.1068/a302133.

McGuinness, F. (2018) *Women and the Economy*. Parliamentary Briefing, p. 16. Available at: researchbriefings.files.parliament.uk/documents/SN06838/SN06838.pdf (Accessed: 9 March 204AD).

Merriam, S. B. *et al.* (2001) 'Power and positionality: negotiating insider/outsider status within and across cultures', *International Journal of Lifelong Education*, 20(5), pp. 405–416. doi: 10.1080/02601370120490.

Merrick, J. (2014) 'Jenny Willott: 'Free childcare from 12 months should be our aim... and Lord Rennard is a nice guy', *The Independent on Sunday*. Available at: https://www.independent.co.uk/news/people/profiles/jenny-willott-free-childcare-from-12-months-should-be-our-aim-and-lord-rennard-is-a-nice-guy-9179107.html. (Accessed: 26 September 2018).

Metcalf, H. and Rolfe, H. (2009) *Employment and earnings in the finance sector: a gender analysis*. Manchester: Equality and Human Rights Commission.

Naples, N. A. (1996) 'A feminist revisiting of the insider/outsider debate: The "outsider phenomenon" in rural Iowa.', *Qualitative Sociology*, 19(1), pp. 83–106.

Naples, N. A. and Gurr, B. (2014) 'Feminist Empiricism and Standpoint Theory: Approaches to Understading the Social World', in Hesse-Biber, S. (ed.) *Feminist Research Practice: A Primer*. Second Edition. London: SAGE Publications Ltd, pp. 14–41.

NatCen (2018) *British Social Attitudes 35*. NatCen Social Research. Available at: http://bsa.natcen.ac.uk/latest-report/british-social-attitudes-35/key-findings.aspx (Accessed: 9 January 2018).

Oakley, A. (2004) 'Interviewing Women: A Contradiction in Terms', in Seale, C. (ed.) *Social Research Methods: A Reader*. London: Routledge, pp. 261–268.

O'Hagan, C. (2014) 'Broadening the Intersectional Path: Revealing Organizational Practices through "Working Mothers" Narratives about Time: Broadening the Intersectional Path', *Gender, Work & Organization*, p. n/a-n/a. doi: 10.1111/gwao.12056.

Ollier-Malaterre, A. and Andrade, C. (2015) 'Not for everyone: intra-organisational divides and the stratification of access to work–life policies', *Community, Work & Family*, pp. 1–19. doi: 10.1080/13668803.2015.1089840.

ONS (2018a) *EMP13: Employment by industry*. Office for National Statistics. Available at: https://www.ons.gov.uk/employmentandlabourmarket/peopleinwork/employmentandemployeetypes/datasets/employmentbyindustryemp13 (Accessed: 9 January 2018).

ONS (2018b) *Female employment rate (aged 16 to 64, seasonally adjusted)*. Office for National Statistics. Available at: https://www.ons.gov.uk/employmentandlabourmarket/peopleinwork/employmentandemployeetypes/timeseries/lf25/lms (Accessed: 9 January 2018).

Özbilgin, M. F. *et al.* (2011) 'Work-Life, Diversity and Intersectionality: A Critical Review and Research Agenda: Work-Life, Diversity and Intersectionality', *International Journal of Management Reviews*, 13(2), pp. 177–198. doi: 10.1111/j.1468-2370.2010.00291.x.

Ozcan, P., Han, S. and Graebner, M. E. (2018) 'Single Cases: The What, Why, and How', in Mir, R. and Jain, S. (eds) *The Routledge companion to qualitative research in organization studies (E-book)*. New York: Routledge, pp. 92–112.

Pedersen, V. B. and Lewis, S. (2012) 'Flexible friends? Flexible working time arrangements, blurred work-life boundaries and friendship', *Work, Employment and Society*, 26(3), pp. 464–480. doi: 10.1177/0950017012438571.

Pettinger, L. (2005) 'Friends, Relations and Colleagues: The Blurred Boundaries of the Workplace', *The Sociological Review*, 53(2_suppl), pp. 37–55. doi: 10.1111/j.1467-954X.2005.00571.x.

Pini, B. (2005) 'Interviewing men: Gender and the collection and interpretation of qualitative data', *Journal of Sociology*, 41(2), pp. 201–216. doi: 10.1177/1440783305053238.

Plester, B. (2009) 'Healthy humour: Using humour to cope at work', *Kotuitui: New Zealand Journal of Social Sciences Online*, 4(1), pp. 89–102. doi: 10.1080/1177083X.2009.9522446.

Preissle, J. and Han, Y. (2012) 'Feminist Research Ethics', in Hesse-Biber, S. N. (ed.) *The Handbook of Feminist Research: Theory and Praxis*. Second Edition. London: SAGE Publications Ltd, pp. 583–605.

Puwar, N. (1997) *Reflections on Interviewing Women MPs*. Available at: http://socresonline.org.uk/2/1/4.html (Accessed: 12 August 2015).

Pyper, D. (2018) *Flexible working*, p. 21.

Reeves, C. L. (2010) 'A difficult negotiation: fieldwork relations with gatekeepers', *Qualitative Research*, 10(3), pp. 315–331. doi: 10.1177/1468794109360150.

Roper, M. (1994) *Masculinity and the British Organizational Man since 1945*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Roulston, K. (2010) 'Considering quality in qualitative interviewing', *Qualitative Research*, 10(2), pp. 199–228. doi: 10.1177/1468794109356739.

Russell, H., O'Connell, P. J. and McGinnity, F. (2009) 'The Impact of Flexible Working Arrangements on Work–life Conflict and Work Pressure in Ireland', *Gender, Work & Organization*, 16(1), pp. 73–97. doi: 10.1111/j.1468-0432.2008.00431.x.

Sandberg, S. (2013) *Lean in: women, work, and the will to lead*. London: W H Allen.

Saunders, M. N. K. (2012) 'Choosing Research Participants', in Symon, G. and Cassell, C. (eds) *Qualitative Organizational Research: Core Methods and Current Challenges*. London: SAGE Publications, Inc. doi: 10.4135/9781526435620.

Saunders, M. N. K. and Townsend, K. (2016) 'Reporting and Justifying the Number of Interview Participants in Organization and Workplace Research', *British Journal of Management*, 27(4), pp. 836–852. doi: 10.1111/1467-8551.12182.

Savage, M. (1992) 'Women's Expertise, Men's Authority: Gendered Organisations and the Contemporary Middle Class', in Savage, M. and Witz (eds) *Gender & Bureaucracy*. Oxford: Blackwells.

Schmidt, E.-M. (2017) 'Breadwinning as care? The meaning of paid work in mothers' and fathers' constructions of parenting', *Community, Work & Family*, pp. 1–18. doi: 10.1080/13668803.2017.1318112.

Sharma, S. (2014) *In the Meantime: Temporality & Cultural Politics [online]*. Durham: Duke University Press. Available at: http://www.myilibrary.com?ID=576690 (Accessed: 27 September 2017).

Sigle-Rushton, W. (2013) 'Intersectionality', in Evans, M. and Williams, C. (eds) *Gender: The Concepts*. Abingdon: Routledge. Available at: http://eprints.lse.ac.uk/86427/.

Silva, E. (2002) 'Routine Matters: Narratives of Everyday Life in Families', in Crow, G. and Heath, S. (eds) *Social Conceptions of Time: Structure and Process in Work and Everyday Life*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, pp. 179–194.

Smith, D. (2003) 'The Standpoint of Women in the Everyday World', in Delanty, G. and Strydom (eds) *Philosophies of Social Science: The Class and Contemporary Readings*. Maidenhead: Routledge, pp. 405–409.

Smithson, J. and Stokoe, E. (2005) 'Discourses of Work–Life Balance: Negotiating "Genderblind" Terms in Organizations', *Gender, Work & Organization*, 12(2), pp. 147–167.

Stokes, L. and Wood, S. (2017) 'Employer Support for Work–Life Balance in Recession: Findings for Britain from the Workplace Employment Relations Survey 45', in Lewis, S. et al. (eds) *Work-Life Balance in Times of Recession, Austerity and Beyond*. Abingdon: Routledge, pp. 45–62.

Strauss, A. (1978) *Negotiations: Varieties, Contexts, Processes and Social Order*. First. London: Jossey-Bass Ltd.

Strauss, A. (1982) 'Interorganizational Negotiation', *Urban Life*, 11(3), pp. 350–367. doi: 10.1177/089124168201100306.

Strauss, A. and Corbin, J. (1998) *Basics of qualitative research: Procedures and techniques for developing grounded theory*. Second. London; Thousand Oaks, Calif: SAGE.

Stryker, S. (1987) 'The Vitalization of Symbolic Interactionism', *Social Psychology Quarterly*, 50(1), p. 83. doi: 10.2307/2786893.

Sullivan, O. (2017) 'Looking to the Future of Work and Family Theory and Research: Some Reflections: Looking to the Future', *Journal of Family Theory & Review*, 9(2), pp. 243–248. doi: 10.1111/jftr.12198.

Swedberg, R. (2003) 'Gender and the Economy', in *Priniciples of Economic Sociology*. Woodstock: Princeton University Press, pp. 259–282.

Sweet, S., James, J. B. and Pitt-Catsouphes, M. (2015) 'Discussing Work-Life Fit: Factors that Predict Managerial Promotion of Flexible Work Arrangements', *Research in the Sociology of Work*. Edited by S. K. Ammons and E. L. Kelly, 26, pp. 301–330. doi: 10.1108/S0277-283320150000026018.

Sweet, S., Pitt-Catsouphes, M. and Boone James, J. (2016) 'Successes in Changing Flexible Work Arrangement Use: Managers and Work-Unit Variation in a Financial

Services Organization', *Work and Occupations*, 43(1), pp. 75–109. doi: 10.1177/0730888415595094.

Sweet, S., Pitt-Catsouphes, M. and James, J. B. (2017) 'Manager attitudes concerning flexible work arrangements: fixed or changeable?', *Community, Work & Family*, 20(1), pp. 50–71. doi: 10.1080/13668803.2016.1271311.

Teasdale, N. (2013) 'Fragmented Sisters? The Implications of Flexible Working Policies for Professional Women's Workplace Relationships: FLEXIBLE WORKING AND WOMEN'S WORKPLACE RELATIONSHIPS', *Gender, Work & Organization*, 20(4), pp. 397–412. doi: 10.1111/j.1468-0432.2012.00590.x.

Thompson, E. P. (1967) 'Time, Work-Discipline, and Industrial Capitalism', *Past & Present*, 38, pp. 56–97.

Thrift, N. (1990) 'The Making of a Capitalist Time Consciousness', in Hassard, J. (ed.) *The Sociology of Time*. Basingstoke: Macillan Press, pp. 105–129.

Timewise (2017) *Flexible Working: a talent imperative a research study into the UK workforce: who wants flexibility, for what reasons, and how much it matters to them*. Timewise with EY. Available at: https://timewise.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2017/09/Flexible_working_Talent_-Imperative.pdf. (Accessed: 26 September 2018).

Tipping, S. *et al.* (2012) *The fourth work-life balance employee survey*. London: Department for Business Innovation & Skills.

Tomlinson, J. (2004) 'Perceptions and negotiations of the "business case" for flexible careers and the integration of part-time work', *Women in Management Review*, 19(8), pp. 413–420. doi: 10.1108/09649420410570225.

Tracy, S. J. (2010) 'Qualitative Quality: Eight "Big-Tent" Criteria for Excellent Qualitative Research', *Qualitative Inquiry*, 16(10), pp. 837–851. doi: 10.1177/1077800410383121.

Tyler, M. (2012) 'Postmodern Feminism and Organization Studies: A Marriage of Inconvenience?', in *Handbook of Gender, Work & Organization*. Hoboken: John Wiley & Sons Ltd, pp. 9–24.

Verhoef, M. *et al.* (2015) 'Childcare and parental work schedules: a comparison of childcare arrangements among Finnish, British and Dutch dual-earner families', *Community, Work & Family*, pp. 1–20. doi: 10.1080/13668803.2015.1024609.

Wada, M., Backman, C. L. and Forwell, S. J. (2015) 'Men's discursive constructions of balance in everyday life', *Community, Work & Family*, 18(1), pp. 117–133. doi: 10.1080/13668803.2014.965662.

Wajcman, J., Bittman, M. and Brown, J. E. (2008) 'Families without Borders: Mobile Phones, Connectedness and Work-Home Divisions', *Sociology*, 42(4), pp. 635–652. doi: 10.1177/0038038508091620.

Warren, T. (2002) 'Gendered and Classed Working Time in Britain: Dual-Employee Couples in Higher/Lower-Level Occupations', in Crow, G. and Heath, S. (eds) *Social Conceptions of Time: Structure and Process in Work and Everyday Life*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, pp. 88–108.

Warren, T. (2011) 'Researching the gender division of unpaid domestic work: practices, relationships, negotiations, and meanings', *The Sociological Review*, 59(1), pp. 129–148.

Warren, T. (2015a) 'Work-life balance/imbalance: the dominance of the middle class and the neglect of the working class: Work-life balance/imbalance', *The British Journal of Sociology*, p. n/a-n/a. doi: 10.1111/1468-4446.12160.

Warren, T. (2015b) 'Work-time underemployment and financial hardship: class inequalities and recession in the UK', *Work, Employment & Society*, 29(2), pp. 191–212.

Warren, T. and Lyonette, C. (2018) 'Good, Bad and Very Bad Part-time Jobs for Women? Re-examining the Importance of Occupational Class for Job Quality since the "Great Recession" in Britain', *Work, Employment & Society*, Online First, p. 21.

West, C. and Zimmerman, D. H. (1987) 'Doing Gender', *Gender & Society*, 1(2), pp. 125–151. doi: 10.1177/0891243287001002002.

Wilkinson, K., Tomlinson, J. and Gardiner, J. (2017) 'Exploring the work–life challenges and dilemmas faced by managers and professionals who live alone', *Work, employment and society*, p. 0950017016677942.

Williams, C. L., Muller, C. and Kilanski, K. (2012) 'Gendered Organizations in the New Economy', *Gender & Society*, 26(4), pp. 549–573. doi: 10.1177/0891243212445466.

Williams, J. (2000) *Unbending gender: why family and work conflict and what to do about it [electronic resource]*. Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press.

Williams, S. (2008) 'What is Fatherhood?: Searching for the Reflexive Father', *Sociology*, 42(3), pp. 487–502. doi: 10.1177/0038038508088837.

Woodfield, R. (2007) *What women want from work: Gender and occupational choice in the 21st century*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.

Worrall, L. and Cooper, C. L. (2007) 'Managers' work-life balance and health: the case of UK managers', *European J. of International Management*, 1(1/2), p. 129. doi: 10.1504/EJIM.2007.012921.