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Women in the middle:
Mothers' experiences of transition to
part-time and flexible work in
professional and managerial occupations

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PHD SOCIOLOGY

March 2017

I hereby declare that this thesis has not been and will not be, submitted in whole or in part to another University for the award of any other degree.

Signature:

Acknowledgements

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Summary

This study explores the limits and potential of flexible working through the lived experience of women in professional and managerial jobs who adjust their employment because of their motherhood. A qualitative, longitudinal research strategy using repeat narrative interviews follows 30 mothers through a year of their lives as they go part-time, job-share, flex their schedules, and work from home. They typify Hakim's (2000; 2006) 'adaptive' category of women, which Lewis and Simpson (2017) argue exemplifies a new 'postfeminist subject' (p128): women required to perform well simultaneously in both work and domestic domains. Anchored theoretically in debates about the relative influence of structure and agency in determining women's employment participation and outcomes. This thesis critiques choice in relation to employment and motherhood. It contributes new explanations why professional women 'choose' different types of flexible working arrangements and how the experience of 'doing' flexible work tallies with expectation.

The study finds women's transitions into part-time and flexible work arrangements rarely reflect their ideal preference of job, working hours, schedules or locations. The working arrangement women arrive at is a complex and pragmatic settlement of competing practical and ideological pulls, constraints and incentives. Maternal responsibilities endure, irrespective of women's working hours. Choices are neither clear nor unfettered, and are fraught with anxiety. Five narratives reflect the diverse range of personal intentions behind women's work-life choices made at particular biographical moments in specific social circumstances. The narratives reveal that moves into part-time and flexible work can be tactical, restorative, professionally expansive, are morally potent, socially informed and often a compromise.

This study advances understanding of how women working flexibly experience work and are incorporated into organisations. Their lived experience is characterised by trial and error, work intensification, work-life integration, and frequent further adjustments. Most women expected, demanded, and benefited from very little practical involvement of their employers in developing effective job-designs for flexibility. Over time many felt fatigued by their responsibility to manage their arrangements invisibly, minimising inconvenience to others at work and at home. This has implications for flexible working policy and workplace practice. This thesis makes clear that solutions to gender troubles at home and at work are collective and involve politicising the family as well as the workplace in order to achieve *genuine* choice for women in the occupations they pursue and the success they achieve.

Contents

Chapter 1: Introduction

It seems that in modern society the decision to combine paid work with care remains a *"dilemma for mothers"* (Gatrell, 2008 p178), when few would question paternal employment because the *"idea that paid work conflicts with men's domestic responsibilities simply never arises"* (Durbin and Fleetwood, 2010 p231). When academic and former US Government senior official Anne-Marie Slaughter hit world headlines with her reflective essay *Why Women Can't Have It All* (Slaughter, 2012), her simple explanation about why many professional women continue to feel divided between career and family touched a nerve (Rottenberg, 2014). In an era described as postfeminist, the narrative of gender progress thought to have been absorbed into mainstream liberal democracies (McRobbie, 2009), Slaughter's essay exposed what feminist cultural scholar Catherine Rottenberg (2013, 2014) describes as a hidden truth, that the contemporary cultures of business, management and politics remain as gendered as they ever were. It seems equality of choice and opportunity to develop organisational careers and be at least a good enough parent (Chodorow, 1978) remains an enduring challenge for working mothers whom continue to carry responsibility for the hard labour of family care (Gatrell, 2005). This challenge and how professional women in the UK approach its resolution is at the heart of my study.

The cultural image of the professional working mother as Superwoman is receding and Balanced Woman is gaining ground (Rottenberg, 2014). Fulfilment and success in both occupational and domestic domains is presented as something to strive for by Slaughter (2015) and other proponents of a new 'corporate' or 'choice' feminism (Hatton and Trautner, 2015). There is a proliferation of advice available to women on this topic should they seek it, dispensed chiefly by other successful and presumably happily balanced women, such as Facebook's Chief Operating Officer Sheryl Sandberg who encourages professional women to *Lean In* to their careers upon motherhood (Sandberg, 2013).

Highly-skilled women in employment today who are at the age and life stage of combining their professional work with family lives will have started their careers in the late 1990s and 2000s and are argued to have the potential to achieve economically and professionally as much as men (Wolf, 2013). The 25% of working women in the UK today who have progressed to occupations classed as Managers and Senior Officials or Professional Occupations (Office for National Statistics, 2013a) have professionally grown-up in workplaces promoting family-friendly employment policies, work-life balance and flexible working in ways that were not available to previous generations of working mothers (Lewis and Campbell, 2008). In this climate it is easy to see why the opportunity to adjust working hours, schedule or location of work under a flexible working arrangement (FWA)

might hold some best-of-both worlds appeal for a high-achieving and balance-seeking generation of women for whom it is an available and affordable option (Armstrong, 2015).

However, the labour market outcomes for women working part-time and flexibly for extended periods are double-edged. Any gains in work-life reconciliation off-set by long-term losses in pay, promotions and prospects over the life-course that are evidenced in a substantial body of research: (Fagan and Rubery, 1996, O'Reilly and Bothfeld, 2002, Cousins and Tang, 2004, Walters, 2005, Tomlinson, 2006a, Connolly and Gregory, 2008, Gash, 2008, Manning and Petrongolo, 2008, Gangl and Ziefle, 2009, Bianchi and Milkie, 2010, Holt and Lewis, 2011, Lyonette *et al.*, 2011, Bukodi *et al.*, 2012, Dex and Bukodi, 2012, Fagan and Norman, 2012, Janus, 2013, Lanning *et al.*, 2013, Cory and Alakeson, 2014, Harkness, 2016, Rubery *et al.*, 2016). These stubborn resistances challenge the narrative of gender progress and signal the difficult trade-offs that women make when they become mothers and attempt to craft a life that combines professional work with family care.

The relatively few women who currently occupy professional and managerial roles on a part-time or flexible basis comprise a small and comparatively under-researched population (Durbin and Tomlinson, 2010). They hold positions of responsibility within large organisations but are not the most powerful. They are not the elite group of 300 women (Vinnicombe *et al.*, 2014) who have made it through the glass ceilings and into the boardrooms of listed companies and on whose lives and work-life strategies many studies concentrate (Wolf, 2013, Tutchell and Edmonds, 2015). My interest is decisively in the lived experiences of women who I describe as *'in the middle'*. They hold jobs in the middle-to-upper tiers of organisational hierarchies and are in or approaching the middle of their organisational careers. It is about the women who data show at this life and career stage, start to disappear from the pipeline to leadership positions of power and influence in large organisations (McKinsey & Company, 2013, Ely *et al.*, 2014, Opportunity Now, 2014) and whose retention and advancement in corporate and public life is believed to be valuable for women and for society (Womens Business Council, 2012). Being *'in the middle'* is also a metaphor that aptly describes how the mothers in focus in this study are positioned in the middle of a network of social relationships that produce their lives. Their needs, wants and aspirations positioned relatedly to those of their children, their partners, their families, and their employers.

There is timely relevance to this study. Widening access to better quality part-time and flexible working opportunities for all is promoted by policy makers as a potential solution to the enduring patterns of gender inequality in domestic as well as professional lives (Women and Equalities Committee, 2016). Examining the views and experiences of professional women who are mothers and who have successfully accessed the opportunities

that policy-makers promote, brings policy to life and offers a more complete understanding of how individuals negotiate and experience it and the outcomes they achieve.

This is a study of the lived experience of transition to a flexible working arrangement among professional mothers living and working in the UK. My reference to 'professional mothers' applies to their occupational classification as either managers or professionals, and not to their approach to their mothering. I define mother as both social role and identity in that to be a mother has social, political, cultural and moral meaning, status, and relative influence. It is not necessary to have given birth to become a mother or to perform the mothering role yet it is an identity position conferred biologically and ascribed only to women's bodies. My reference to 'flexible working arrangements' is a term used interchangeably with 'flexible working patterns' and in abbreviated form as FWAs, and which I define as an individually negotiated adjustment to paid working time, timing and or location. I have deliberately extended the focus of this study beyond part-time working to better reflect the range of structural, spatial and temporal adjustments professionals and managers apply to their jobs. Questions investigated by this research are:

- What are the influences on the opportunities and choices professional mothers have to combine paid work with family care using flexible working arrangements?
- How do professional mothers experience transition to flexible working patterns? How do they implement and sustain them, and what is the nature of the work involved in doing so?
- What can be concluded about the transformational potential of part-time and flexible working arrangements for professional women who are mothers?

The experiences of 30 women as they told them at the time they were living them form the basis of this study. A qualitative, longitudinal research strategy inspired by the innovative methodological work of McLeod and Thomson (2009) walked alongside professional women as they navigated a transition into a flexible working arrangement. The women were employed in public and private sectors, in 'City' professions in banking and finance, consulting and professional services, and in public service in central and local government, health, education, and protective services. Around half the professional mothers were approaching the transition to a FWA simultaneously with their first return-to-work transition post maternity, and the other half approached the transition at a different biographical point: when children were older, after second or subsequent maternity leave, following an absence from employment, or changing from another form of flexible working arrangement. Most women were in dual earning couple relationships. One partner was in a same-sex relationship but most were in heterosexual partnerships and gendered divisions of labour were heavily present in discussions of relationships.

A repeat interview design captured the before-and-after anticipations and reflections of this small and relatively under-researched group of women and generated over 100 hours of rich narrative insight that illuminates choices, circumstances, continuity and change in individual lives.

1.1 Context for research questions

Gender progress can legitimately be claimed in employment participation at least, evidenced by high and rising rates of maternal employment. Over 5 million women in the UK with dependent children are in employment making up 40% of the female workforce. Most women adopt a full-time working pattern of around 40 hours per week (7.4 million) yet 5.2 million women in the UK work part-time for 20 hours per week or less, and the majority (53%) are mothers of children under age 18 (Office for National Statistics, 2013a). The transition to part-time work on becoming a mother is not unique to employed women in the UK compared to other countries with the highest rates of female employment. Just over 50% of mothers with school-age children work fewer than 20 hours a week in the UK compared to an OECD average of 30% (Hegewisch and Gornick, 2011), and less than 20% of British mothers of school-age children work 40 hours or more per week compared to 45% OECD average (Alakeson, 2012). The comparatively high proportion of mothers who make the shift and the endurance of a part-time working pattern in their lives beyond the age at which children go to school marks maternal employment in the UK as distinctive and worthy of focused enquiry.

Part-time working is the most common form of flexible working arrangement (Office for National Statistics, 2011, Chartered Institute of Personnel Development, 2012) and characterises maternal employment and employment at the lower occupational levels. Only 16% of all female part-time employment – around 950,000 workers – is in professional and managerial jobs (Office for National Statistics, 2014). Overall women occupy 34.8% of manager, director and senior official positions and make up only 6.9% of executive board positions in FTSE 100 listed companies (Vinnicombe *et al.*, 2014). The availability of FWAs such as part-time hours, flexi-time, job-sharing, and home-working is believed to have done much to secure access to employment for women with caring responsibilities and retain them in the labour market, yet little to advance women in their organisational careers (Lewis, 2010). Scholars, politicians and campaigners agree that there is a dearth of part-time and flexible working opportunities in more senior occupational roles which is doing little to facilitate women's labour market mobility and progress (Tomlinson *et al.*, 2009, Durbin and Fleetwood, 2010, The Timewise Foundation, 2013a, Women and Equalities Committee, 2016).

The business case for flexible working is reasonably well understood (Tomlinson, 2004). Employers are thought to benefit from greater employee loyalty and productivity and reduced employee turnover and absenteeism and increased retention of valued employees (Roehling *et al.*, 2001, Hostetler *et al.*, 2007, Kelly *et al.*, 2014, Moen *et al.*, 2016). Industry surveys indicate that most large employers offer some form of flexible working arrangement (Chartered Institute of Personnel Development, 2012, Institute of Leadership & Management, 2013), although these are rarely available to employees from day one in a job. Just 8% of quality job vacancies (defined as earning over £20,000 per anum) are advertised as suitable for part-time or flexible working according to research by flexible work campaigners The Timewise Foundation (2016). In evidence submitted to the Select Committee for Women and Equalities, The Timewise Foundation claims that the demand for greater flexibility in working time, timing and location is high and rising and estimates that 46% of the working population in the UK (14.1 million) want more work flexibility (Women and Equalities Committee, 2016).

Despite a trend towards gender parity in attainment in higher education and in patterns of graduates' early career employment, and a significant narrowing of the gender pay gap among the under 30s (The Institute of Fiscal Studies, 2016), the transition to part-time working hours upon parenthood remains one that mothers are more likely than fathers to make (Brannen *et al.*, 1997, Sheridan, 2004). Although men in heterosexual couple families today are thought to be doing more domestic work and childcare than men in previous generations (Sullivan, 2001, Sullivan and Gershuny, 2011), a work-family management strategy that relies on the woman's participation in paid work on a part-time basis means that gender inequalities in domestic work allocation are often left unchallenged. Even in seemingly the most egalitarian of couple relationships studies have shown that mothers continue to be positioned as responsible for the emotional and physical well-being of their children and for the regulation of family routines (Hochschild, 1989, Harkness, 2008, Thomson *et al.*, 2011, Alger and Crowley, 2012, Craig and Mullan, 2012, Nilsen *et al.*, 2013a), especially so in middle-class heterosexual dual-earner households (Lyonette and Crompton, 2015).

The legislative right is to *request* a flexible working arrangement of an employer, not to do it. This right was extended to all employees with at least six months service in June 2014 when previously it was afforded only to parents and carers (Department for Business Innovation & Skills and ACAS, 2014). National policy co-exists with organisational policy and as most large employers (60%) had extended the 'Right to Request' to all employees for many years, few anticipated great practical impact of the national policy change (CBI, 2013). Feel-good organisational discourses around flexible working arrangements meeting the life-loads of women often mask agendas focused on employer's resource agility and in which

employees actually have little control or choice (Smithson and Stokoe, 2005, Durbin and Fleetwood, 2010, Wood, 2016). Working part-time still means long hours, often more than are remunerated (Stone, 2007, Kelliher and Anderson, 2010, Lewis and Humbert, 2010) and is associated with occupational downgrading and employee marginalisation (Gatrell, 2008, Cahusac and Kanji, 2014). The part-time hidden 'brain drain' (Equal Opportunities Commission, 2005) has been described as a waste of education and skills (Connolly and Gregory, 2008) and contributing to gender inequality (Rubery *et al.*, 2016). Working in ways that reduce an employee's physical presence in a workplace and limits their availability to respond to employer demands challenges conventional notions of productivity, work commitment and professionalism (Dick and Hyde, 2006, Evetts, 2011). All together this substantial body of evidence points towards a subject position of a part-time and flexible worker in a professional or managerial occupation as a stigmatised identity and prompts the question: why do women choose part-time and flexible work?

1.2 Theoretical framework

A basic assumption underpins this study, that being able to engage in productive and meaningful work and to be an active participant in family life are desirable outcomes to be achieved in most industrialised societies (Sen, 2000). My focus on how women make sense of their opportunities and enact their choices to reconcile professional work and motherhood using flexible forms of work is grounded in theories of structure and agency.

The relationship between structure and agency has been articulated in many ways across the disciplines of the social sciences and a key debate is how structures determine the extent to which 'agents' are free to act as they wish. Structures can be external and include legislative and policy frameworks, workplace processes, and material circumstances (i.e. financial and non-financial resources including education, skills and status). McCrae (2003) argues structures can also be normative and include the limitations we place upon ourselves and on others to comply with social expectations. In this sense cultural norms, or shared ideologies, about gender roles within families, about mothering practices, and about careers are structuring influences on women's opportunities and choices. The structure/agency debate and its fundamental tension between voluntarism and determinism in shaping human experience is important to understand because the questions it raises about the potential for change and transformation of individual lives, of social institutions, and society.

For Giddens (1984, 1991), structure and agency are intrinsically linked represented in a duality that is mutually constitutive, in other words, two sides of the same coin. Giddens' structuration thesis emphasises that social structures and are both the mechanism and the outcome of the practices they organise, and structures can be both constraining and enabling. Margaret Archer (1982, 2007) is critical of Giddens' emphasis on agency and the enabling

qualities of social structures, arguing that the structuration thesis fails to account for the conditions under which individuals' choices are *more* enabled or *more* constrained. More balanced accounts emphasise both internal and external structures, as well as agency in understanding how individuals make sense of and act out their lives. Archer views social structures institutions and conventions not as what people produce, but *"what people confront and have to grapple with"* (1982, p463) and argues for the *analytic* distinctiveness of agency and structure, rather than what she considers their misleading conflation. Conceptualising agency and structure separately makes it possible to see where the individual ends and society begins and to study their causal properties and interactive dynamism. It is the *interaction* of individual agency with structures through time, which Archer terms the morphogenic cycle (Archer, 1982) that leads to either reproduction or transformation of social structures.

Theoretical framing of this study therefore pivots on that dynamic interaction, of agency and structure through time in the context of two social institutions: of the family and the employing organisation. Following Archer's realist perspective, I conceptualise women's agency as freedom to make choices and appreciating that at the same time they are constrained in their actions. The theoretical contribution of this study is its examination of the constraining and enabling components of the frameworks around professional women's lives and exploration of what power they have to construct the maternal and professional lives they seek and in so doing to comply with, resist, or even transform gendered structures and expectations at work and inside the family.

In concluding her study of how first-time parents narrate choice in relation to paid work and childcare, Tina Miller (2012 p51) proposes that the *"complex relationships between policies, normative and gendered societal expectations, and individual intentions and practices need to be considered further in future research."* This empirical work engages with that call by pursuing two strands of analysis. It examines both individual choice about part-time and flexible work in the context of motherhood, and it examines the individual practices, or the 'doing' of part-time and flexible work. Theorizing why more women than men apparently 'choose' less well rewarded part-time work over full-time employment led Catherine Hakim (1991, 1998, 2002, 2006) to suggest that doing so reflects women's intrinsic desires and natural orientation towards family life. Hakim's Preference Theory posits a rational-choice, economic model of individual career decision-making. She casts the individual as a free and knowledgeable economic agent who approaches each employment decision with full information about the costs and consequences of their possible actions. Preference Theory has been influential, although widely and robustly criticised for gender essentialism and over-emphasis of women's freedoms to choose the life they want to live (see Crompton and Harris, 1998; McCrae, 2005; Leahy and Doughney, 2006). This study offers further critique of Preference Theory and rational-choice theories of women's decisions about employment and family life

by attending to the interactive dynamism of the range of internal and external forces influencing women's opportunities and choices.

De Certeau (1984) argued that the agentic ways in which we practice, or 'do' every day life may either reproduce or resist social norms. In relation to the 'doing' of part-time and flexible work in the context of motherhood, Rosemary Crompton and collaborators' (1998, 2002, 2007a, 2011b) analysis of women's work-life reconciliation styles and approaches, and their later reinterpretation by Jennifer Tomlinson (2006b) are significant influences on my thinking about the strategies available to women and the and tactics they adopt to navigate the work-life opportunities and constraints in their lives. Little is known about how part-time and flexible working works in practice, about how managers and professionals 'do' their work in these ways and I engage with an emerging literature in this field (see Bailyn (2011); Correll *et al.* (2014); Gascoigne, (2014); Perlow *et al.* (2014); and Moen *et al.* (2016)). Time is a central theme, in terms of biographical time and clock time, and the time-work that individuals do in workplaces and families to control time and their experience of it. The ideas of eminent sociologist Arlie Hochschild (1989, 2007, 2008, 2012) about time-bargaining it heterosexual couple relationships informs my thinking about how women approach and negotiate time, their roles and their identifications.

Feminist and sociological scholarship and psychosocial perspectives on gender, identity and motherhood (Hays, 1996, Miller, 2005, Baraitser, 2008, Thomson *et al.*, 2011, Hollway, 2015) provide a framework for my thinking about interactions of choice and structural and normative constraint on women's capacity for paid work in the context of their motherhood. This study also engages in a critical conversation with dominant discourses and cultural representations of contemporary motherhood and women's professional work. In particular how the intensification of maternal responsibility in contemporary times (Thomson *et al.*, 2011), interacts with what feminist cultural scholar Ros Gill (2016 p17) describes as the *"current of individualism"* that characterises a postfeminist sensibility and impacts women's lives on the ground. Hakim (2000) categorised women's work-life preferences as either home-oriented, work-oriented or somewhere in between as 'adaptive' and which is the largest of her three preference groupings comprising around 60% of working women. The women in focus in this study can be considered 'adaptive' in the sense that they seek some combination of paid work alongside an active mothering role. Adaptive women are argued to exemplify an emerging *"postfeminist subject position"* (Lewis and Simpson, 2017), a new feminine duty to perform well simultaneously in both work and domestic domains. This project therefore takes place at an emergent point for new forms of feminism and conceptualisations of femininity that scholars argue emphasise the individual and agency at the expense of examining framing structures (Walby, 2011, Phipps, 2014). I draw on feminist critique of neoliberal modes of femininity and call out popular and political discourse that signal

problematic developments in feminism impacting women's lives (McCarver, 2011). This empirical project is therefore also political. It seeks to examine what feminist scholar Alison Phipps (2014 p3) terms the *"omnipresent politics of personal responsibility"* and its contribution is to give voice, examine structures, and to make visible the fine-grained detail of women's lives as they are lived.

1.3 Contribution

This study analyses the experience of change and continuity in women's lives through a peculiarly and enduringly gendered employment transition. Researching the experiences and outcomes for women who seek to combine paid work with childcare using part-time and flexible working arrangements is important for two reasons. First in the contribution to advancing an understanding of the problem of gender inequality in contemporary workplaces and inside family life, and second in its potential application to the development of policies and practices that address it and promote genuine choice for women in the work-life strategies they adopt and the labour market positions they achieve. I focus on professional women's transitions because they are heavily invested in education and work experience and therefore professional identity is likely to be an important element of their sense of self. The decisions about work and motherhood they make are likely to impinge at deeper level than strictly economic and to be about core aspects of identity and selfhood. As other studies have observed, professional women are also likely to experience tension between their responsibilities as mothers and workers (Blair-Loy and Wharton, 2004, Haynes, 2008, Crompton and Lyonette, 2011a, Bloch and Taylor, 2012). This is not to imply that the identity work, employment experiences, and work-life tensions of women employed at other occupational levels are less worthy of scholarly inquiry; it is simply not the focus of the present study.

The transition experience shared by the 30 women whose lives inform this thesis is a voluntary move into a flexible working arrangement that they anticipate will offer them greater control over their working hours, schedule, or location. Their transition is described as voluntary only in that they and not their employers initiated it. Transitions are an important site of study in employment and careers research generally and specifically in the context of motherhood (Evetts, 2000, Tomlinson, 2006b, Gash, 2008, Fenwick, 2013). Mothers' transitions in and out of part-time work have been identified as strategic, reactive or compromised (Tomlinson, 2006b) in terms of the labour market outcomes they achieve. Most studies focus on outcomes such as job satisfaction, stress and organisational commitment. The process aspects of transition to a flexible working arrangement is an emerging area of study, see for example Gascoigne (2014). Surprisingly little scholarly attention has yet been paid to how individuals experience transition to the various forms of

flexible working and the individual practices they use to implement and sustain them. It is important to consider the work that is involved at the individual level because for complex reasons this is activity it is typically managed privately. An overwhelming majority of working women with children (93%) agree that it is hard to combine caring and a successful career (Opportunity Now, 2014), and feel that much of the effort to do so is largely unrecognised and unvalued by employers. This feeling is very well illustrated by a participant in Opportunity Now's ground breaking survey of 25,000 men and women aged 28-40 in the UK:

> I would like an improved attitude, appreciation and recognition of women's skills who work part-time. There is a sense that you are working part-time, a woman, and a parent you're not totally focused on your role. A more positive attitude that these are people who are amazing at juggling their life and their children's lives, plus still managing to move things forward with massive pressures on them is a key strength that seems to be missed.

Rachel Thomson (2011) emphasises that little is known about the kinds of cognitive, emotional, and psychic work that goes into women's simultaneous efforts to be a good enough mother and a good enough worker. These insights are inadequately served by the concept of work-life balance which undervalues unpaid care work by implying it is just another part of the non-work domain (Perrons *et al.*, 2005, Gambles, 2006). The work involved in reconciling paid work with all other parts of life is largely invisible to the employing organisation yet seemingly is essential in order for the individual to achieve a functional passage across the inclusion boundaries of masculine work cultures and retain paid employment commensurate with their skills, experience and potential. Making this work visible is the key contribution of this thesis. As a professional applied researcher and advisor to organisations, my applied perspective urges me to attend to transitional difficulties and tensions as a way of looking for opportunities to make change whilst studying people in change (Greenwood and Levin, 2006). Formulating recommendations to support change at individual, couple, organisational, and policy levels, and to further academic and applied research is another important contribution of this thesis.

1.4 Structure of this thesis

Chapter two locates the study in its theoretical, empirical and policy contexts. It provides an overview of the social and demographic drivers of the significant rise in maternal employment in the UK. A quantitative overview of women's participation trends in employment precedes discussion of gendered patterns of employment and enduring problems of pay, progression, and occupational segregation. Contemporary conceptualisations of motherhood and mothering are discussed in the context of feminist, psychosocial and sociological literatures that extend to examination of the couple relationship and approaches

to sharing or dividing responsibilities for childcare and domestic work. The chapter concludes with an overview of flexible working policy, which frames the context in which the professional women in focus in this study are making decisions about work and working hours.

Chapter three discusses the rationale for a qualitative longitudinal research strategy as the best way to generate insight into the lived experience of transition. Explaining my design choices situates my approach in a broader feminist theoretical and postmodern philosophical framework. Reflexively locating myself in this research, I explore the ethical demands and dilemmas encountered during the process. The benefits and the complexities of mobilising, managing, and analysing narrative data co-created in 76 interviews with 30 professional mothers is discussed. The chapter concludes with detailed description of the similarities and differences between the employment and domestic circumstances of the research participants and the patterns of work to which they were transitioning. Chapter four offers insight into why professional mothers apparently choose the flexible working arrangements that they do. Forming a dialogue with Crompton & Harris' (1998) important analysis of professional women's work-life approaches, and Tomlinson's (2006b) assessment of women's transitions through part-time work across the life-course, the significant original contribution in this chapter is the identification of five *transition narratives* that reveal the meaning and significance of transition to a flexible working arrangement in women's lives. Single case illustrations of each of the five transition narratives make visible the inter-locking factors that influence the inter-linked decisions of how to work and how to care for children. Chapter five unpicks five structuring factors that were dominant in women's collective transition narratives and discusses the strength and direction of their influence on women's work and career opportunities and their choices of flexible working arrangements. The structuring influence of money, childcare networks, partners' attitudes and working patterns, women's work status and relationships with line-managers, and personal *moralities of mothering* are discussed in turn. The influences of dominant cultural ideologies of mothering are acknowledged in this discussion (Hays, 1996, Thomson *et al.*, 2011) as is the relational frame (Greenhaus and Powell, 2012, Brimrose *et al.*, 2014) within which women make decisions about how they will work relative to the practical and temporal requirements of their children, their childcare providers, and in the context of their partners' employment patterns and careers.

Chapters six and seven shift the discussion from women's real and perceived work-life opportunities to the lived experience of *enacting* their choices. Analysis that moves between women's accounts of their family lives and their work lives illuminates how they interpret and execute their responsibilities for and within both domains. Analysis benefits from a longitudinal perspective and draws on the multiple narrative accounts of women

gathered between three and 12 months after they embarked on their new flexible working arrangements. Chapter six discusses women's experiences during the early weeks and months of moving to a new working arrangement in the context of their enduring maternal responsibilities for children and much of the emotional work and master-planning of family life. In the tradition of feminist scholarship this analysis makes visible the intense and varied kinds of emotional, cognitive, physical, psychic, and practical work women do to fit their maternal and professional lives and selves together. Chapter seven extends the analysis to give more focus to how individuals manage time, place, boundaries, and relationships at work and accomplish their flexible working arrangement. In focus are women's daily experiences and practices of combining, separating, and breaching the boundaries between their domestic and professional worlds, to which sociological theorising of time, boundaries, and emotion offer explanatory power (Hochschild, 1989, Hochschild, 2007). Chapter seven concludes with discussion of the common and distinctive circumstances and experiences and relate the outcomes from a year of working flexibly back to the expectations that women expressed in their transition narratives.

Chapter eight discusses over-arching themes of personal responsibility, of hard work, and suppressed ideals. This final chapter considers the implications of the research findings for professional mothers, partners in parenting, employers and policy-makers in order to challenge gendered norms and responsibilities for earning and caring that frame women's work-life opportunities and choices. Recommendations are made that may help support individual transitions through part-time and flexible working arrangements; designing professional and managerial jobs for greater flexibility: re-thinking work and re-thinking divisions of childcare and household labour and fostering more positive attitudes and experiences of crafting lives that combine both.

At this pivotal point for flexible working and gender equality in the UK, this thesis makes visible the multiple and hidden labours of professional mothers to make flexible working work. In so doing it opens space for debate about what is reasonable and meaningful for employers and employees to expect of each other for accessing, transitioning to and from, implementing and sustaining flexible working arrangements in contemporary managerial and professional work.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

This chapter reviews the literature germane to this investigation into the lived experience of motherhood, professional work, and flexible working in contemporary times. The study examines the personal relationships, institutional interactions, and social experiences of women crafting lives that combine paid work with childcare. Drawing on feminist, sociological, and psychosocial theories of gender, identity, agency and structure, it examines the complexities and trade-offs; the gains and the losses that women experience through their negotiations in workplaces and in the family because of their motherhood.

Section 2.1 presents a descriptive overview of the social, cultural and economic context in which women today are making decisions about work and care. It examines participation trends and the demographic and social drivers of maternal employment in professional and managerial occupations. Gendered inequalities in pay and progression, and the problem of occupational segregation are discussed. In section 2.2 feminist sociological and psychosocial literature relating to motherhood as identity and social role is presented that explain the range of influences on mothers' capacities for and attitudes to mothering and occupational careers. Longstanding sociological debates about the relative influence of individual agency and constraint in women's occupational choice and decision-making are reviewed. An extended discussion considers the influence of traditional and egalitarian partnerships in dual-career households and on gendered divisions of domestic labour. Section 2.3 concludes the chapter by discussing flexible working policy and workplace practices. Key debates about the efficacy and outcomes of different forms of employee flexibility and the way they are brought to life by employers are reviewed, opening space for debate about the transformational potential of flexible working for gender equality and progress.

2.1 Maternal Employment: participation trends and problems

Throughout history women have engaged in paid work outside the home to provide materially for their families. Historically women's participation in employment has been distinct from that of men's and with different rewards. The 40 year rise in the percentage of women in employment corresponds with a fall in the percentage of men, which is thought tied to the decline in demand for manufacturing skills and rise in service industries and demand for interpersonal and social skills (Hunt, 2009). Today 67% of women aged 16 – 64 are in paid work (13.4 million) and 76% of men (Office for National Statistics, 2014). The demographic and social drivers of the dramatic shift in the economic behaviour of women are well documented and explored only briefly here. The contraceptive pill since the mid-1960s and legalisation of abortion enabled women to gain more control over their fertility, to delay child rearing, and to limit the number of children they had (Barrett, 2004). Expansion of

higher education and the broad-based curricula offered by the new universities appealed to women, whose participation increased significantly and by the 1990s female students outnumbered male students in UK institutions. Since the early 2000s nearly six in 10 higher education entrants have been female, 57% in 2012/13 (Universities UK, 2015). The increasing numbers of skilled and qualified women entering the labour market and going into professional work both influenced and was influenced by delays in starting families. Increased participation in the labour market helped women to accumulate the economic, psychological or social resources to better support becoming a parent (Miller, 2012). The general trend in the UK is towards having children later, the average age for women to have their first child increased from 23.7 in 1971 to 28.1 years in 2012 with nearly half of all live births in 2012 (49%, 361,000 births) to mothers aged 30 and over (Office for National Statistics, 2013b). There are differences in the social circumstances and age at which women become mothers, the average age at first birth is five years older among highly educated women compared to women with lower level qualifications (Joshi, 2008). Women becoming mothers today do so having accumulated many years experience of paid work that they might identify as a career. Careers, in the sense of a sequence of employment experiences that offer reward, development and growth, are now an established norm for graduate women. Career attachment therefore, is potentially significant to the employment choices women make once they have children.

Families have changed dramatically too. Of the 8 million families in the UK with dependent children in the household, married or civil partnered couples make up the majority (63%), 15% of dependent children live in opposite sex cohabiting couple families, and 22% of children live in lone parent families (Family & Parenting Institute, 2009). From an earnings perspective, by the mid-1990s the traditional one-breadwinner family ceased to be the most common family type in Britain and dual-earner families became the norm (Brannen *et al.*, 1997, Klett-Davies and Skaliotis, 2009). Dependent children today live in families in which at least one parent and more likely, both parents are in paid employment. The employment rates for mothers and fathers differ significantly. The employment rate for mothers of a child under five years old is 57%, compared to around 90% for fathers. The percentage of mothers in employment increases as children get older, and 69% of mothers with a youngest child aged between five and ten are in paid work, and 78% whose youngest child is age 11-15 (Office for National Statistics, 2013a).

2.1.1 Leaky pipelines, sticky floors, and glass ceilings

Despite increasing levels of labour market participation, women are still under-represented in the upper levels of organisational leadership and management. It is noticeable that women disappear from the pipeline to leadership roles in significant numbers around the

middle management tiers and they stay longer in grade before getting promotion (McKinsey & Company, 2012, KPMG, 2014). In the financial services sector for example, almost half of all employees are women but their representation shrinks by more than half at middle management level to 22% (McKinsey & Company, 2012) signalling the 'sticky' nature of middle management jobs that fix women's feet firmly to the floor of those roles. The effect on gender diversity at managerial levels is often referred to as a 'leaky pipeline' to leadership after Rosabeth Moss Kanter's (1999, revised May 2003) case study and is explained by scholars in a variety of ways. Indicative either of women's preferences for 'doing' roles rather than 'leading' roles; a lack of ambition to climb the ladder; the unappealing lifestyles of those in power; or indicative of a failure of meritocracy in organisations and institutionally gender-biased promotion processes (Cech and Blair-Loy, 2010). The greater proportion of women than men who take absence from employment for maternity and parenting is thought to contribute to the leaky pipeline, however Ely *et al.* (2014) found women's lower representation in senior management roles could not be explained by the fact that they took more breaks from the workplace than men. Their survey of Harvard MBA graduates found that 28% of Generation X women (born in the 1970s and early 1980s), and 44% of Baby Boomers (born in the 1960s) had taken breaks compared to 2% of men across both generations. When controlling for a range of factors such as age, sector, size of organisation, and factors relating to family status and parenting including the presence of part-time work in work histories, they could not find a statistical link between these factors and women's lower representation.

It remains an issue that women's peak child-bearing years, their twenties to forties, correspond with the period they are most likely to be developing their organisational careers. Using data from the Millennium Cohort Study to look for systematic differences in hourly wages in part-time and full-time work for groups of mothers with broadly similar qualifications, Neuberger *et al.* (2011) observe that downward occupational mobility after a birth of a child still affects a substantial minority of women who have children. The gender pay gap proves powerful and persistent over 40 years after the introduction of the Equal Pay Act (*Equal Pay Act*, 1970) at 18.1%, which means that for every £1 a male worker earns a female worker earns 82p (ONS, 2016). Having children marks not only a drop in participation in paid employment among mothers, but also the start of a ten-year decline in earnings relative to men and to women without children (Brewer and Paull, 2006, Manning and Petrongolo, 2008, The Institute of Fiscal Studies, 2016). Lanning et al (2013) found that mothers born in 1970 earned around 11 per cent less than women of the same age who did not have children (controlling for other individual characteristics such as educational attainment and social class). Neuberger *et al.'s* (2011) analysis revealed how a switch from full-time to part-time hours over the period of first childbirth frequently entailed a change of

employer, a reduction in job status, and a decrease in relative hourly earnings. It is reasonable to assume a greater degree of upward social mobility among women without primary responsibility for children, and in pay terms, this is borne out by evidence that the gender pay gap has reduced in the under 30s age groups (The Institute of Fiscal Studies, 2016). It is therefore reasonable to hypothesise a link to the stubborn retention of the pay gap during the family formation years of women's lives, and the low value attached to both part-time work and the type of work that women do in and for the family.

Reducing working hours and adjusting work schedules provide a welcome enabler to the reconciliation of work and family life for those to whom the opportunity is available and affordable. Seventy-five percent of 14,000 women aged 28-40 in the UK surveyed by Opportunity Now (2014) said that they were *"grateful"* for the opportunity to adjust their participation in these ways (p26), however there are clear penalties in pay, prospects and promotions over the life course that are evident in a substantial body of research: (Fagan and Rubery, 1996, O'Reilly and Bothfeld, 2002, Cousins and Tang, 2004, Walters, 2005, Tomlinson, 2006a, Connolly and Gregory, 2008, Gash, 2008, Manning and Petrongolo, 2008, Gangl and Ziefle, 2009, Bianchi and Milkie, 2010, Holt and Lewis, 2011, Lyonette *et al.*, 2011, Bukodi *et al.*, 2012, Dex and Bukodi, 2012, Fagan and Norman, 2012, Janus, 2013, Cory and Alakeson, 2014, Harkness, 2016, Rubery *et al.*, 2016).

It seems that mothers who move into part-time roles accept lower status work. At first grateful for the flexibility to fit the demands of their dual roles of mother and worker together, Gatrell (2008) found that over time mothers felt side-lined by their exclusion from vital networks and by lower status or unchallenging work. It is these disheartening experiences that contribute to exit for some from organisational life, which is termed 'opting-out' by Pamela Stone (2007).

2.1.2 Opting-out

The process of professional women leaving their organisational careers is termed 'opting-out' (Stone, 2007) or 'off-ramping' (Hewlett, 2007) and describes the apparently voluntary decisions of successful professional women to leave corporate employment and retreat to the domestic sphere. Stone's work contributed much to de-bunking the myth of the pull-of home by presenting empirical evidence that most women who opted-out in fact remained in employment when followed-up 12 months after their exit. In a 2014 survey of 25,000 Harvard Business School (HBS) graduates, Stone and Hernandez (2013b) found only 11% were out of the workforce completely to care for children full-time, and their stories indicated they were 'mommy tracked' on return from maternity leave, that is given roles marginal to the business or of lower status. In the later study Stone with Ely *et al.* (2014) contrasted the workplace experiences of high-achieving MBA graduate Baby

Boomers (age 49-67 in 2014), Generation X (age 32-48), and Millenials (ages 26-31). They found that male and female graduates alike aimed for fulfilling professional and personal lives yet their ability to realise them played out very differently according to gender. Among graduates working full-time men were significantly more satisfied than women with their experience of meaningful work, of opportunities for growth, and with the compatibility of work and personal life. Women's stymied goals and lesser satisfaction is masked by a competing discourse that emphasises women's willingness to opt-out, ratchet back, scale down and forgo opportunities. The premise that women value career less than men do, and that mothers do not want high-profile or challenging work does not reflect reality for Harvard MBA graduates, or the substantial majority of women aged 28-40 in the UK who participated in the Opportunity Now (2014) in which 75% of women expressed intentions to lead, and signalled ambition to progress to senior management and leadership positions.

Hewlett (2007) and later, Lovejoy and Stone (2012) found that 'on-ramping' after a period of absence was much more treacherous than previously high-earning and high-achieving women in the US anticipated. They found that their positions disappeared and their salaries plummeted. In the UK Cahusac and Kanji (2014) interviewed professional and managerial mothers in London who had opted-out of organisational careers. They found a few women had managed successfully to implement creative working-time solutions that permitted their participation in personal *and* professional roles, but even those who were seemingly supported by their employer to work fewer hours were often side-lined to lower status roles for which they were under paid and under valued in relation to their experience and previous seniority. Explaining their findings Cahusac and Kanji (2014) emphasise the key role that hegemonic masculine cultures play in pushing mothers out of organisational careers. Their in-depth interviews reveal working time norms that require these mothers to work very long hours and to operate permeable time boundaries even when they have negotiated reduced working hours. They concluded that "*professional mothers face a 'take it or leave it' situation and either commit to the working practices of the dominant masculinity - boundless time schedule, suppressed personal life, reduced investment in care – or they must accept lower status work*" (p70). The temporal experience of work and the meaning of time in contemporary professional and managerial work is an important context to consider.

2.1.3 Time, work commitment and work-life balance

Work demands have intensified in globalised economies such that employers now expect adaptability and flexibility in managerial employees (Sennett, 1998, Perrons *et al.*, 2005, Colley *et al.*, 2012). The amount of time spent at work in the UK is almost the highest in Europe with 42.7 the average usual working hours for full-time employees (Office for National Statistics, 2011). Those in professional jobs e.g. Doctors, Teachers, Accountants,

Solicitors, and at the senior managerial and director levels in organisations spend more hours at work than other occupational groups when they are not paid for it. Comparing data from the Annual Survey of Hours and Earnings (ASHE) with Labour Force Survey data on hours worked, ONS (Office for National Statistics, 2011) estimated 6.8 and 7.2 hours per week on average in unpaid overtime was typically worked by full-time employees in professional and senior managerial occupational groups. The effect of intensified work demands for adaptability and responsiveness among managers, and of long working hours on subjective well-being remains unclear. Some studies have suggested a positive impact of the number of hours worked on life satisfaction up to a certain point, and others have shown a negative impact of the number of hours worked on happiness and health outcomes (Voydanoff, 2005a, Voydanoff, 2005b, van Daalen *et al.*, 2006, Burke and Fiksenbaum, 2008). Some scholars emphasise the self-doubt and identity struggles that frequent organisational change exerts on the individual, making it difficult for people to find meaning and direction in life through their paid work (Sveningsson and Alvesson, 2003).

Scholarship that explores the difficulties workers experience reconciling ever-increasing work demands with everything else in life has flourished in this environment. The term work-life balance although often used is roundly rejected by many scholars. Scholars argue against the conceptualisation that paid work exists in binary opposition to life, rather than being one part of it. Notions of balance promote a false possibility of an objective and equitable division of life and self across what are positioned as two competing and conflicting domains (Gambles, 2006).'Work-life conflict' more accurately describes the struggles people experience reconciling their responsibilities and demands in the work domain with their everyday lives (Crompton *et al.*, 2007c). Crompton (2007b) focuses on the experience of working long hours and the consequent need for negotiating arrangements for care of the family. She argues that female professional and managerial employees experience particularly high levels of work-life conflict because they work long hours, because mothers amongst them are likely to be in partnerships with men who also work long hours and yet the women are more likely to take the major responsibility for childcare and domestic chores. Domestic division of labour is discussed in more detail in Section 2.2.4.

Technology has developed that both alleviates and compounds the experience of being squeezed for time by means of any time, any-where working. Collapsing the physical boundaries between home and work many commentators observe, can cut deeply into human lives and work against efforts to minimise stress and achieve at least a sense of work-life balance (Strazdins *et al.*, 2004, Strazdins *et al.*, 2011, Colley *et al.*, 2012).

Time is central to professionals and managers' demonstration of commitment and success in their chosen field and as such it has symbolic meaning. Long hours are a proxy for, and often taken for granted as evidence of an individuals commitment to their work, to their

employer and to their career (Williams *et al.*, 2013). Long-hours and continuous availability are characteristics associated with the stereotyped 'ideal worker' (Acker, 1990). Men without children are better positioned that other workers to fulfil the ideal worker construct because the ideal worker is full-time, available to work longer than the prescribed hours, and is free from responsibilities for care and household work. It is these legacy norms of an industrial past and a male-breadwinner family model that underpin the structures, systems and processes that form contemporary organisational life. Lewis and Giullari (2005) argue that it is the ideal worker assumptions that obscure the potential organisational injustice that occurs when women who go part-time accept lower pay for reduced hours but do not get a reduction in workload, and which contribute to women's own low sense of entitlement to be rewarded for their work outputs not their input of time. Already challenged by their assumed lack of commitment to developing their organisational careers, part-time workers and those adopting flexible working patterns that reduce their visibility in the workplace face a challenging path to navigate towards the next organisational role.

Lack of importance attached to the role of mother in contemporary western society is suggested to further undermine the perceived competence of workers who are mothers (Correll *et al.*, 2007). Ridgeway and Correll (2004) argue that motherhood is a status-devalued role, and accordingly that for activities that are not the specific role-based tasks of nurturing and care, there is a normative cultural assumption that mothers will make less valuable contributions than non-mothers. This normative discrimination is thought to arise because success in the labour market, particularly in jobs traditionally considered masculine, signals stereotypically masculine qualities such as assertiveness or dominance. These qualities are inconsistent with those that are culturally expected of mothers, such as being warm and nurturing (Blair-Loy and Wharton, 2004). It follows therefore that when a mother violates these norms by showing a high level of professional competence and commitment she will be disliked and viewed negatively. This is consistent with other research on women managers in which women acting *"gender inappropriately by fulfilling a masculine work script"* (Kelan, 2010 p182) presents them with more problems in masculine work areas where they are doubly punished for not being woman enough. Further intersection of ideal worker norms with ideologies of motherhood is evident in the gendered assumption that mothers are likely to be *less* engaged at work than fathers and employees with no children. Gatrell *et al.* (2014) found evidence to the contrary, that women's work engagement was *not* predicted by parental status. Mothers focus on and fulfilment from in-work tasks was shown to be higher than fathers but this contribution to organisational success tends to be obscured by attitudes that women with children are "no longer considered players"(Ely *et al.*, 2014).

2.2 Contemporary motherhood

The maternal body remains a site of power relations between women and men. Although not every woman becomes or wants to become a mother a cultural assumption that women do shapes the experience of being a woman in society whether they become mothers or remain child free (Phoenix, 1991 , Gatrell, 2008, Phipps, 2014). For women who do embark on motherhood there is a sense that motherhood itself has become professionalised and intensive (Hays, 1996, Thomson *et al.*, 2011, Christopher, 2012) yet reproductive labour and the effort of good mothering remain largely hidden from conceptions of what constitute work in contemporary society (Gatrell, 2013, Van Amsterdam, 2015). The metaphors that are often used to convey the problem of gendered occupational segregation in organisations: leaky pipelines, sticky floors, and glass ceilings invoke images of structures and systems, and yet the differential labour market outcomes between women and men are often ascribed to women's preferences, personal qualities and self-confidence. Feminist scholars provide important challenge to perspectives on women's lack. This section presents literature germane to my investigation that contextualises the situation for professional women becoming mothers and crafting a life today that combines motherhood with paid work.

2.2.1 Motherhood identity

The transition to motherhood is a time of significant change in a woman's life. Research that compares women's post birth experiences with their expectations and ideals for motherhood during pregnancy, consistently shows that becoming a mother can concurrently be described as hugely disorienting, overwhelming, deeply fulfilling and enriching, and a profound shock despite being anticipated (Miller, 2005, Lupton and Schmied, 2013). Thomson and collaborators (2011) examined modern motherhood in cultural perspective and drew attention to the intergenerational connections and distances the transition to motherhood introduces into women's lives; simultaneously closing and expanding relations between women along generational and classed lines. The transition to motherhood begins long before the event of a birth and continues long after. The social status of mother and the responsibilities of motherhood are conferred upon birth or adoption but becoming a mother is a generative process that demands learning, adaptation, and social and economic resources. Feeling like a mother is considered to be a lifelong reflexive project that is often in flux (Miller, 2005).

Expressing the transition to motherhood in narrative terms, Bailey (1999) described the sudden transition from woman to mother as *"a narrative pivot in the construction of a reflexive biography"* during which women experience a heightened awareness of different aspects of themselves. Identity transformation Bailey argues is not inevitable. It is possible for a woman to feel like the same me, but different upon motherhood, and as such to experience a sense of

continued self rather than encountering a disjuncture or a splitting of the self as post-modern accounts of identity fragmentation would suggest. This is not to suggest that are no disruptions. There are tensions between different aspects of women's lives and between identities as workers and as mothers. These tensions, Christine Bataille (2014) argues, inhibit women's opportunities to express a globally whole identity as professionals *and* mothers and urge them towards one or the other.

Radical feminist scholars of the 1970s and 1980s, like Chodorow (1978) argued against notions that relations between mother and child are naturally occurring and biologically inevitable, and called for dual parenting to enable boys and girls to associate nurturing as a parental quality from an early age, rather than a specifically feminine role. Second-wave feminists through the 1980s and 1990s further disputed the notion of biologically determined roles by drawing attention to the social construction of gendered roles that maintained the subordination of women in the power relations between couples and confined women to the home. In 40 years the dominant ideologies that *"powerfully and pervasively surround and shape motherhood"* (Miller, 2005, p56) appear not to have radically changed. Ideas that caring is intrinsically female imbue dominant models of motherhood today. It appears that the intensity of mothering and its demands on women has strengthened over recent decades as more mothers have entered employment.

In this study I work with a conceptualisation that mothering ideologies are socially and culturally constructed, and as Hayes (1996) argues, that what it is to be a good mother and what is considered socially appropriate with regards to child-rearing has varied through history. Johnston & Swanson (2007 p6) explain how mothering ideology *"is based on beliefs and values about mothering that mothers must either embrace or reject, but can seldom ignore"* and point to research that suggests that intensive mothering expectations define the dominant mothering ideology in US and Northern European cultures and is held up as a standard for good mothering. Hayes (1996 p21) first identified intensive mothering expectations as:

> The model of intensive mothering tells us children are innocent and priceless, that their rearing should be carried out by individual mothers and that it should be centred on children's needs, with methods informed by experts, labor-intensive and costly. This we are told is the best model, largely because it is what children need and deserve.

Intensive mothering ideology was further expanded by Thomson *et al.'s* (2011 p277) research in the UK as an *"intensification of responsibility"* that describes both the commercialisation of motherhood and a new duty to be an informed and professional parent; that is, to respond to the pressure to buy goods and to engage the help of so-called experts ranging from tutors and coaches, writers on childcare, journalists and mothers writing blogs. They also noted *"the inflation of parental expectations and the proliferation of interventions aimed at improving children"* (p.277) and observed that this trend is an expression of the desire to help

children become more competitive which has also become an outlet for competition between women who are more home-centred and those who work longer hours out of the home. The competitive development of children features in Lisa Baraitser's (2008) conceptualisation of motherhood as being played out in public in mothers' desires to mould their child into an individual who stands out from others and is fully prepared for life's competition. Explanation for the intensification of motherhood and its responsibilities, it has been suggested is attributed to liberalisation and to individualisation that is reflected in a twin shift in national policy of a pro-family focus and an increased emphasis on personal obligation (McRobbie, 2009, Lewis, 2010, Gill and Scharff, 2013). Such that now it seems family values are important and motherhood is idealised, as Vincent *et al.* (2004 p373) suggest mothers are now ascribed *"an almost holy status"*. Individualism however, works in opposition emphasising personal responsibility to emancipate oneself through paid work, which Ann Crittenden (2001 p61) argues persuasively, contributes to an economic devaluation of motherhood and serves to disappear mothers unpaid work at home. Women's actions to reconcile their dual responsibilities for mothering and paid work are therefore held in tension by contradictory discourses that simultaneously emphasise maternal care and oblige women to fulfil their emancipated economic destinies.

Normative views about mothers as expressive nurturers and fathers as instrumental providers put women in a difficult ideological and social position. Women are required to comply, re-shape, or resist the dominant mothering ideology and to justify their decisions to engage in paid work outside the home. Johnston & Swanson (2007 p447) describe the *"cognitive acrobatics"* that women experience in their constructions of a coherent worker-mother identity and the challenges of doing so in a cultural climate that promotes both a strong worker identity and intensive mothering expectations. Despite an inherent incompatibility with women's continued participation in the labour market upon motherhood, the essentialist and naturalising emphasis on maternal care rather than paternal, or even parental care, and the moral emphasis of intensive mothering as the right way to raise children have proved hard to resist. Mothers must therefore construct a worker identity that justifies their decisions to work outside the home against this demanding standard of good mothering that insists they should provide an informed, involved, and continuous maternal presence. It is in this space that a new discourse has proliferated, promoting balance of ambitions and identifications across work and family spheres.

Catherine Rottenberg (2014) describes how balance has become the quest of professional women's lives, and Gill observes (2016) that in this postfeminist era, a vocabulary of choice and empowerment has been converted into a much more individualistic discourse. Cultural scholar and commentator Rottenberg's take on Anne-Marie Slaughter's enormously popular essay *Why Women Still Can't Have It All* (Slaughter, 2012), and of the

best-selling, self declared feminist manifesto by Facebook Chief Operating Officer Sheryl
Sandberg, *Lean In*, published shortly after (Sandberg, 2013), is that it marks *"a profound, if
subtle, cultural shift in the conceptions of what constitutes 'progress' for white middle-class women …
sparking a re-envisioning of progressive womanhood as a balancing act"* (Rottenberg, 2014 p2). With
gender progress and liberation of the 1970s more women escaped domestic confinement and
become visible in the public sphere. Rottenberg argues that expectations of women to be
'Superwomen' (Conran, 1975) and perform in the presumed separate spheres of work and
family have receded, and now over 40 years later women's progress and liberation has been
reconceived as the ability to happily balance public and private aspects of the self.
Rottenberg suggests that Slaughter's message about achieving balance is calling women to
bridge family and professional spheres without disavowing or disparaging either. Achieving
balance the Anne-Marie Slaughter and Sheryl Sandberg way still requires women and not
men to be present in *both* spheres, which is why promoting balance as the quest of
professional women's lives, social commentator Rebecca Traister (2012) argues, is a risky
business and a potential un-doing of feminine gains.

2.2.2 Reconciling motherhood and paid work

It was evidence of downward occupational mobility, lower pay and restricted
promotions associated with part-time work that led Catherine Hakim (1991, 1998, 2002,
2006) to theorise about why it was that women appeared, paradoxically, to choose it over
better quality full-time jobs. Hakim's controversial Preference Theory has been instrumental
in the debate about women's work and childcare choices and necessitates some discussion
here. By equating working patterns with work-life preferences, Preference Theory suggests
that in choosing part-time work a woman is demonstrating her preference for mothering and
domestic life and hence her weaker work and career commitment. One of the main reasons
that Hakim's theory is so controversial is its implication that women working part-time are
less committed to their paid work and to their professional identities. Hakim grouped
women's work-lifestyle preferences into three ideal types thought to be a reflection of closely
held personal values: the home-centred woman, represents 20% of women for whom family-
life and children are the main priorities throughout life; the work-centred woman represents
another 20% of women, mostly childless and whose main priority in life is employment or
equivalent activities in the public arena. Hakim's majority group are the adaptive women, the
60% of women who seek to combine work and family, because, Hakim offers, they are less
committed to their paid work than their full-time counterparts and less committed to work in
the family evident in their attempts to limit time in both spheres.

Critics of Hakim's theory do not deny that women exercise agency, they can and they
do make choices, however critics point to failure of Preference Theory to attend sufficiently

to the constraints on women's choices (Leahy and Doughney, 2006). Constraints that include the material realities that determine how women work and the labour market position they achieve such as the availability, cost and quality of childcare (Nowak *et al.*, 2013, Thompson and Ben-Galim, 2014); the presence of family and social support networks (Ben-Galim and Thompson, 2013); organisational policies and management approval (Dick, 2010, Fagan and Walthery, 2011); and the gendered moral understandings about the right thing to do that guide mothers' decisions about their labour market participation (Duncan, 1999, Duncan and Irwin, 2004). Robust criticism of Hakim's theory came from feminist sociologist Rosemary Crompton (2007b) who along with many other scholars, see for example Ginn *et al.*(1996) critiqued the theory for its inattentiveness to the complex web of competing pulls and constraints that mothers have to face, and to the significant identity work required in reconciling mothering and working. McRae (2003) argued in her deft assessment of Preference Theory, that women may have similar attitudes and orientations but their differential capacities for overcoming constraints lead to different labour market outcomes. Longitudinal studies have been helpful in demonstrating that women do not end up doing what they would have chosen and their work-home arrangement does not necessarily match their orientation towards mothering and working. Houston and Marks (2003) found that some women seemed to have withdrawn from working to *preserve* rather than compromise their professional identities, some remained childless and not necessarily due to a strong career orientation, and some returned to full-time work after one child and reduced to part-time after two.

In response to Hakim's over emphasis on voluntary choice, and conceptualisation of working pattern as an expression of work or family preference and commitment, Crompton and Harris (1998) developed a 6-category typology of personal styles of managing work and family combinations, and which was further developed by Jennifer Tomlinson (2006b). In both studies the authors identified a minority of professional women (in Crompton's study, Doctors and Bankers, in Tomlinson's Managers) giving primacy to domestic-life and some to their careers. They also identified much more nuanced differentiation within the majority group of women whose circumstances, identifications, and strategies were directed towards reconciling the two. Tomlinson concluded, in agreement with Crompton and Harris that most women attempt to 'satisfice' their work and family lives. A satisficing approach involves a conscious and unconscious simultaneous scaling-up and down of goals for family life and professional career such that neither is maximised at the expense of the other. In both studies women's transitions through part-time work were found typically to be a reaction to changing external circumstances such as divorce and redundancy, or a restricted framework of opportunity compromised them (for example, a lack of affordable childcare and part-time working hours). Overall women's transitions were much less likely to be strategic, planned

or, as Hakim might argue, a reflection of personal preference. By foregrounding factors in individual life biographies such as divorce, pressure of work, and organisational restructuring in the shaping of personal styles of managing home and work, Crompton and Harris (1998) and Tomlinson (2006b) position individual choice as socially constructed, and whilst not denying that women make choices and exhibit agency, their options are gendered, classed, and constrained in ways which may not be fully appreciable by the individual at the time.

Research on identity transformation and motherhood in the psychosocial field has been particularly useful in positioning internal understandings of motherhood and mothering within the social context and as mutually constitutive. Attempting to bring the cultural and economic rationales for maternal employment together to explain worker-mother identity construction, Duncan and Edwards (1999, 2004) propose to call the construction of employment and mothering choices *gendered moral rationalities'* (GMRs), the moral guidelines of the appropriate and responsible decision a mother should make in regard to employment, shared parenting, and childcare. These socially-patterned understandings are gendered in that they delegate childcare to mothers, moral in that they recommend cultural values, and rational in that these values are used as the basis for making decisions about how children are raised. In their study of lone-mothers' caring and work decisions, Duncan and Edwards (1999) found GMRs take three forms: primary-mother (physically caring for the child yourself); primary-worker (separating the identities of mother and worker); and mother/worker integral (defining employment and financial support as part of good mothering). They found that rather than the task of care being simply a constraint to participation in paid work, they concluded that to care was often a deeply felt moral obligation and that mothers' wished to do so. This complicates the notion of choice by introducing an element of agency that simultaneously structures decisions about work and care. Himmelweit and Sigala (2004) similarly found that mothers making the interlinked decisions about childcare and their own working patterns had both internal as well as external constraints, in other words, individual attitudes (which the authors use analytically as a proxy for identity), as well as dominant external factors such as finances, childcare and working hours limited mothers' choices. They observed how mothers' attitudes informed how they construed their decisions so that they did not consider options for childcare or working patterns that did not accord with their identities. For example, in couching views about mothering and working in statements that begin *"I'm not the kind of person/mother who…."* (p.490) behaves in a certain way, women ruled out possible courses of action such as not working and becoming a stay-at-home mother, and confirmed their position by the process of ruling them out, so for example would not consider full-time work or full-time childcare.

Holloway (1998) developed the notion of moral geographies of mothering, which become dominant within localities over time in interaction with the local organisation of childcare provision. These moral geographies consist of institutions and social networks through which notions of good mothering are circulated. McDowell *et al.* (2005) drew on Holloway's ideas and concluding their analysis of decisions about caring responsibilities amongst women in London with a pre-school child, they highlighted the inter-relationship of multiple factors influencing decision-making about childcare including occupational position, differing capacities to pay for care, and concurring with Duncan *et al.* (2004), complex gendered moral rationalities relating to caring responsibilities between couples.

Scholars who focus on the lives and experiences of women who continue to pursue careers while raising children conclude that identity, in addition to autonomy and control, is an integral part of combining career and family (Cohen *et al.*, 2009). These discoveries support the claim that, integrating work and family life is intimately tied to constructions of identities (Emslie and Hunt, 2009). Matters of the self and identity have a long history in the social sciences, and conceptions of the self and identity across disciplines of social psychology, psychoanalysis, and sociological thought present multiple and distinct perspectives. However there are patches of agreement and some shared interests around the theoretical and applied issues as it has become clear that identity and selfhood are implicated in a broad range of research interests and in popular culture. There is an emergent scholarly consensus that identity refers to the *"meanings that individuals attach reflexively to themselves and are developed and sustained through social interactions as we seek to address the question of 'who am I?'"* (Brown, 2014 p24), and the dynamic nature of identity is clearly established in the sociological and psychological literature. To sociologists identity represents a sort of conceptual bridge where the individual meets the social continually being worked-on through our social interactions (Webb, 2001). For social psychologists identity and identities are more bound up with intrinsic needs for both individuation, or, uniqueness, and elements of a singular 'me' and social validation through sameness (Sedikides and Brewer, 2001).

In a move to distance from the orientation models of women's work-life preferences that position all women along a spectrum with either family or career at opposite ends of the axis, Bataille (2014) re-conceptualised professional mothers' orientations to work and family as distinct identities that may be labelled 'professional identity' and 'mother identity' and they are not always in conflict. The two identities are are continuously being worked-on as women move towards a better understanding of who they are, who they were, and who they want to be, through significant junctures in their lives notably the early career transition from education to work; the transition to motherhood; and the continuous series of transitions that characterises combining motherhood with career. Applying an identity lens to women's work-life combinations highlights change and continuity as important themes; how a

woman's sense of self changes or persists over time as she pursues a professional identity, takes on a mother-identity, and crafts a life in which she combines career and family. Professional women who are mothers do not see themselves in terms of 'or' but in terms of 'also' few would describe themselves as career-oriented *or* family-oriented (Houston and Waumsley, 2003). Bataille suggests that professional women describe themselves as mothers and professionals, perhaps as a *"globally independent woman who enjoys her career who is also a dedicated and engaged mother"* (p130). Whilst this research does not have an exclusive focus on identity and its conflicts and coherence in an evolving life narrative, matters of identity and selfhood (which are also referred to as subjectivity) are important in a holistic appreciation of women's lived experiences of combining work and motherhood.

2.2.3 Women's careers

The deeply contextually embedded ways in which women make decisions about what success in personal, family and work domains means to them at different points in time has been emphasised in much research into women's career transitions (Greenhaus and Powell, 2012, Brimrose *et al.*, 2014). Tomlinson (2006b, 2010) found that mothers make decisions about work and career in relation to the needs of their children and relative to the work and career opportunities of their partners, and not single-mindedly in pursuit of status or self-actualising fulfilment. These aspects of relatedness in women's subjectivities is under-emphasised or completely absent from the traditional age-and-stage theories of career construction that tend to view psychological forces and social expectations at different ages as influencing individuals to address particular accomplishments and issues, see for example Super (1981), and Levinson (1986). The prevalent logic of career-making is linear and cumulative; an uninterrupted and upwards trajectory within the professional sphere (Evetts, 2000). This, it is argued, is particularly diminishing of women's worldview which may well include a work career that is more typically experienced as an interdependent part of life rather than a separate component of it (Crompton and Harris, 1998, Sullivan and Mainiero, 2007, Durbin and Tomlinson, 2010, Maher, 2013). The emphasis of paid work as central in careers constructs what is perceived as the normal or the desirable way to progress in work and is problematic for many whose life circumstances do permit such a neatly linear pattern. Much research shows that women's work career patterns appear more heterogeneous and complex than male patterns, characterised by interruptions and transitions in and out of the labour market, changes of occupations, and moves in and out of full and part-time work that are tied to caring responsibilities over the life course (Crompton, 2002, Kirchmeyer, 2006, Bukodi *et al.*, 2012).

Living of life is rarely a smooth, staged progression nor is it unproblematic. Many metaphors and symbols have been invoked to communicate the non-linear patterning of

women's lives such as careerscapes (McKie *et al.*, 2013), and kaleidoscopes (Mainiero and Sullivan, 2005) and patchwork careers (Halrynjo and Lyng, 2009). Sabelis and Schilling (2013) propose the notion of 'frayed careers' to address the deeply temporal character of careers as part of a life-course, as well as to expose the intersections of gender, age and class that produce the interruptions that fray women's career paths. Whilst acknowledging that the term 'frayed' produces negative connotations, Sabelis and Schilling argue that this is both realistic and that an intentional focus on notions of deficit and disruption render the linear age-and-stage career logic irrelevant. They call for new whole-life career models that attend to the rhythms of life in theorisations of career, rhythms that require constant adaptation of spatial and temporal arrangements. Maher (2013 p172) argues that far from being a sign of *"fraying careers or fracturing family lives"*, multiple changes and reformations of family and career can be understood as adaptive and resilient responses to the everyday nature of disruption and the consistency of family change. Maher usefully reconceptualises the many and frequent changes in how women combine career and care over the life-course as connected and constructive and not always signalling conflict and breakdown. Similarly O'Neil and Bilimoria (2005) describe women's career development phases as a sequence of idealism, endurance and reinvention. In both models temporality is emphasised, but a chronology of careers is retained since the model does not appear to allow for how a young women may seek authenticity or reinvention, and an older woman challenge.

The boundaryless career model offers a description of contemporary careers of both men and women that encompass movement in and out of the labour market, across occupational roles and sectors (Arthur, 1994). The boundaryless career model emphasises agency and choice, and attends little to the conditions under which there may be more or less of these things. At the heart of notions of the boundaryless career is an image of the individual as a self-propelled career-agent, for whom career is not a structure or an occupational position that an individual temporarily inhabits, rather it is constituted within the individual themselves through their accumulation and expression of multiple skill sets, interests, networks and resources. As Cohen *et al.* (2009) argued that boundaryless career models are not a true celebration of individual freedom and independence to create or find opportunities from the widest possible field, because individuals do not have free reign as to how they enact their careers. A further criticism of such choice-based explanations for the shapes of careers is a failure to recognise and to explain the adaptive nature of individual's preferences for the lives they want to live: that desires are formed in response to circumstances. As the development economist Amartya Sen (2000, pp62-63) argues, individuals adjust their desires in accordance with the way of life they know. If the prevailing circumstances of what is known to mothers in employment embody a history of discrimination and disadvantage that is evident in few promotions to senior positions for

women with children who work non-standard patterns, and enduring inequalities in pay and rewards, then based on experience women might well consider careers in todays workplaces out of reach and so adjust their desires to take part (Leahy and Doughney, 2006). This sort of adaptive decision-making about careers could be considered making the best of a bad lot, or giving-up on a desire once had, and in essence reflects the boundaried - not boundaryless - framework of opportunity shaping the careers of professional mothers.

2.2.4 Who cares? Domestic divisions labour

The adult-worker family model may be established in the minds of policy-makers, yet social policy expert Jane Lewis (2010 p9) argues that albeit convenient to assume progress towards this fully individualised model that treats men and women as the same in terms of economic and family potential, there is *"a danger that the new set of assumptions about the desirability and inevitability of the adult-worker model is out-running the social reality, chiefly because there are profound gender divisions in both paid and unpaid work"*. Gendered patterns of paid and unpaid work are fundamental to the problem of gender inequality, and feminist scholars contend that discussion of women's opportunity for paid employment cannot reasonably be separated from discussion of who does how much domestic and care work inside the home (MacDonald *et al.*, 2005, Crompton *et al.*, 2007a, Lyonette and Crompton, 2015). Equality and empowerment in the arena of paid work will not offer genuine opportunity and choice to women unless accompanied by shifts in the gendered division of labour and care.

Studying dual-career couples in the 1980s led Arlie Hochschild (1989) to argue that the gender role strategy between couples features prominently in women's decisions about work and family and in their evaluation of satisfaction with their current arrangements. Strategies reflect how ideologies are implemented in daily life, and Hochschild proposed they may be egalitarian, traditional or transitional. The egalitarian ideology expects that men and women identify in the same spheres: of work, of family, or some combination of the two, and share power within the marriage equally. The traditional ideology expects the male career to take precedence and women are expected to identify with the domestic sphere. In between the egalitarian and traditional ideologies is the transitional ideology, whereby both partners are expected to seek fulfilment from work, although the male partner identifies as the primary breadwinner who supports the female partners desire to work and she expects and is expected to balance work and family herself. Ely *et al.* (2014) noticed a mismatch between the gender role expectations and lived realities among highly qualified women graduates. They found that half the women they described as Generation X (born in the 1970s and early 1980s; the birth cohort that aligns to the birth years of the women in focus in this study) expected egalitarian relationships and a sharing of responsibility for childcare, yet two-thirds described a lived reality that was much more traditional. Ely *et al.* (2014) suggest that this

dashing of expectations leads to women's lower levels of satisfaction with their careers, and Hochschild (1989) suggests is implicated in women's lower reported satisfaction with their couple relationships than their male partners. Hochschild (1989) described the second shift of domestic work in the 1980s that women in dual-earner couples undertook after returning home from work. Based on qualitative couple interviews she confirmed that the women in those relationships for the most part continued to undertake significantly more domestic work and care than men even when both worked full-time. She estimated that these working mothers were putting in an extra four weeks per year (of 24-hour-days) into unpaid domestic and care work at home. In an afterword to a revised edition of *The Second Shift*, Hochschild (2011) draws on evidence from a more recent study of time use in US households by Milkie *et al.* (2010) to conclude that 25 years of female labour market participation did not rid women of the second shift, but it did cut it in half. The four weeks in the 1980s had been cut to two weeks more than their male partners by the 2000s.

Parents in the UK today spend more than treble the time on childcare in the 2000s than in the 1970s. Research by the Centre for Time Use Studies at the University of Oxford shows that the time spent on domestic chores that are in part generated by having children is more than double the time spent on the childcare itself (Sullivan and Gershuny, 2011). Mothers are still doing most of the work, and fathers are doing more than they did in previous decades. British fathers now spend around 36 minutes a day on childcare and up to 100 minutes on housework, DIY and shopping. British mothers spend up to 86 minutes per day on childcare and up to 158 minutes on housework. By simply multiplying the maximum additional time spent by women on domestic work and care (although it should be noted that not all the women in Sullivan and Gershuny's study are workers), it seems that women undertake an additional 27 days, or almost 4 weeks of 24-hour-days, of care and domestic work per year compared to their male partners. Coltrane (2008) showed that fathers are more likely to engage in care work the more hours their female partner works and the more their partner earns. This finding strengthened social policy expert Jane Lewis's (2010) suggestion that policy interventions that focus on improving the labour market position of women would be better placed to bring about a desirable knock-on effect of increasing fathers time spent on care and domestic work, than interventions that attempt to directly influence men's engagement in unpaid domestic work.

When new fathers inhabit the familiar worlds of paid work and the newly unfamiliar world 'home with baby' they report that their priorities have changed; work outside the home is articulated as more economically important and at the same time as a lower priority and less of a preoccupation (Miller, 2011). In contrast the previously employed women's horizons, Miller reports have receded, as early mothering is largely restricted to the perceived safety of the home and new mothering is experienced as unexpectedly perplexing

and often difficult and lonely. By the time Miller followed up with the new parents after 9-10 months, almost all the mothers had returned to some type of paid work and they had done so part-time in order to accommodate the caring responsibilities that they had become more expert at than the fathers during the intervening months of maternity leave.

That women work part-time in the proportion that they do in the UK can be considered a solution to the childcare conundrum of which both state and society approve (Himmelweit and Sigala, 2004). The UK is unique among European countries in the way its youngest children are looked after, with no state provision of childcare for under 2s and high fees for institutional infant care. The commercial market is now a significant third party supplier of care and domestic services that are outsourced by the family and it is fundamental in supporting many dual earning and working lone-parent families fulfil their adult-worker duties. The availability and affordability of quality childcare is a significant enabler and conversely its inaccessibility is a significant constraint on maternal participation in paid work full-time and at all. Advocating reform of the childcare system and greater state support for childcare in the UK, the Institute of Public Policy Research (IPPR) estimates that the continuous rise in hourly rates of nursery places evident in the UK in recent years leads to half a million mothers being priced out of the workplace. Mothers of two to four year olds and lone parents are especially vulnerable (Thompson and Ben-Galim, 2014). The average cost of a nursery place for a child under two is now £4.26 per hour across Britain, £5.33 per hour in London and nursery costs for three and four year olds in England are only 1.9% cheaper than are costs for children aged two and under (Daycare Trust and Family Parenting Institute, 2013).

Couples in the UK where both parents work use a median of 19.5 hours of formal childcare for children aged three to four and 15 hours for children aged up to two, and most use a pattern of either five days or three days per week (Huskinson *et al.*, 2011). In their analysis of the hours in which children are enrolled in early years childcare in European countries, Plentega and Rumery (Plentega and Rumery, 2013) identify the UK as an outlier among European countries on two dimensions, first in the low levels of state support for early years childcare (currently 15 hours per week for children aged three and four, and recently extended to children aged two on a means tested basis), and second in relatively few weekly hours that the majority of children spend in formal childcare (19.5 hours), when other countries experience attendance in formal settings typically above 30 hours per week.

The costs of childcare are significant in the UK and rising at a rate higher than inflation. The UK has the highest costs of childcare across OECD countries in the west with the costs of full-time care for one child consuming 25% of the average wage in dual-earner households, and with two children costs rise to 43% (OECD, 2012). This compares to the one-child costs against the average dual-earner wage in Sweden of 5%, and 6% for two-

children; 20% and 27% in the US; and 15% and 25% in France. The average cost of part-time nursery placement for a child under two is £133 in London, £125 in the South East and the UK average is £106 (for less than 25 hours per week), a 77% rise since 2003 according to a recent survey by the Daycare Trust and the Family and Parenting Institute (Daycare Trust and Family Parenting Institute, 2013). Nurseries operate rigid start and finish times of sessions, as do many child-minders who provide care in their own homes for small numbers of children. Core session times tend to be between 8.30am and 5.30pm and may not align with work start and finish times, particularly for those with an extended commute to and from their place of work. Employing a private nanny typically offers more flexibility for the parent in setting the hours, the pattern and the location of work although this flexibility comes at a higher price. Average nanny hourly rates of pay are between £8 and £12 (Little Darlings Nanny Agency, 2014), which puts this option out of reach for many families particularly those in low-paid work.

Not only are women still mainly responsible for domestic labour they also perform most of the emotional work in families for example, listening to and comforting children, giving emotional support to partners, and doing things to improve relationships (Strazdins *et al.*, 2004, Strazdins *et al.*, 2006, Harkness, 2008). Mothers' life loads seem also to extend to reconciling the costs associated with childcare services provided outside of the family. Harkness (2008) has shown that in the UK the costs of childcare are borne entirely by women in 60% of families where women work part-time, and in 44% of families where they work full-time. This could indicate that children and childcare are still largely viewed as a woman's responsibility and it has to be financially worth her while going out to work.

2.3.1 Flexible working

Flexible working is pervasive in the UK labour market and yet it is poorly understood (Hill *et al.*, 2008); survey data show that the vast majority of employers (90%) offer employees some form of temporal or spatial flexibility permitting employees to request a variation in the amount of hours, the timing or location of work (Chartered Institute of Personnel Development, 2012). The same survey shows that most workers (75%) report they work flexibly either formally or by informal agreement with managers. Flexible working can be defined in the broadest sense as employee autonomy and control over what, when, where and how paid work gets done. A flexible working arrangement (FWA) is defined as an individual variation in working time, space, place, or job structure that make it distinct from a full-time (typically between 30 and 48 hours per week), permanent, fixed day-time working arrangement on employers premises (Hill *et al.*, 2008).

There is little agreement about which FWAs constitute flexible working. UK labour market statistics distinguish 10 types of flexible working arrangement (ONS, 2015): Part-

time, job-share, flexi-time, term-time working, self-employment, zero-hours, annualised hours, home-working, temporary employment, and compressed hours). Surveys offer anything between eight and 18 specific types of arrangement (Chartered Institute of Personnel Development, 2012, The Timewise Foundation, 2013a). Variation is typically around the inclusion of self-employment, temporary employment or zero-hours contracts as flexible working patterns; and the addition of career-break/sabbatical; study leave; phased retirement; short-hours contracts (which is where there is a promise of minimum number of hours per week); flex-up contracts (where the hours offered to an individual can be increased within a specified margin); commission outcomes (no fixed hours, only output targets); remote-working; multisite-working; working at client/customer sites; and working whilst travelling. Where there does seem to be some agreement is about the dimensions of flexibility. Sweet and Moen (2007) categorised the 'types of choices' that workers can make and distinguish between schedule, intensity, career, and place flexibilities. Similarly The Timewise Foundation (2012) describes how the 'flexibility characteristics' of a job can vary by time, task, location and contract. There are different degrees of flexibility afforded by these different working arrangements. OECD data suggest that the UK lags behind Sweden, Germany, Denmark and Finland in its low level of access to the most flexible option, which is the possibility to accumulate additional hours worked and use them for holiday or leave. This model of time-off in lieu makes up over 40% of provision in other countries, compared to around 20% in the UK (Cory and Alakeson, 2014). In the US management literature Rousseau *et al.* (2016) define flexible working arrangements as I-deals, idiosyncratic deals that employees successful negotiate for themselves that are intended to serve the needs of both employee and employer. The benefits thought to accrue to the employer are in the retention of skilled workers upon whom organisational effectiveness depends, although the use of flexibility I-deals is not systematic and tends to be clustered in the lower-mid levels in the organisational hierarchy.

2.3.1 Flexible working policy

In 2000 the term 'work-life balance' was introduced in UK policy under the Labour administration and subsequently used widely in Government and academic literature to describe a basket of employment and social policies at the level of the state and the employer that support the combination of paid work with unpaid family care work and also voluntary and leisure activities for employees (Lewis, 2010). These policies included childcare provision, early years education, maternity and paternity rights and leaves, and framed one part of the policy package in particular: the legislation concerning flexible working patterns that was introduced in 2003 (Lewis and Campbell, 2008). The Right to Request Flexible Working gave parents of children aged under six (or of children with disabilities aged under

18) the right to apply to work flexibly and required employers to consider applications seriously. It also increased the generosity and reduced the eligibility conditions for paid maternity leave. Amended in the Work and Families Act (2006), the Right to Request Flexible Working was extended to parents and carers of children under 18 in England, Wales and Scotland (Walsh, 2008). In June 2014 the Right to Request Flexible Working was further extended to all employees, which the Government estimates will in the first 10 years bring overall economic benefits of £465m from increased productivity, lower labour turnover, and reduced absenteeism as well as improvements to employee health and well-being by achieving a better work-life balance (Department for Business Innovation and Skills, 2012). Survey data indicate that 63% of workplaces had already extended their policy to all employees and many had done so since it was first introduced (CBI, 2013). For these employers, the 2014 national policy adjustment will have introduced little administrative change. Some commentators argue that widening access to the Right to Request a Flexible Work pattern is a beneficially inclusive position that will assist in reducing the potential for backlash from workers without dependent children or adults previously unable to formally request flexibility for reasons other than care (Working Families, 2008). The legislative Right is to *request* flexibility, not for employers to grant it. How employers evaluate and prioritise potentially competing demands for flexibility from a more diverse group of employees is a further issue raised by those concerned that leaving the decision about the relative merits of flexibility requests for care or leisure purposes to local managers may risk further disappearing the challenges for working families from the contemporary workplace as acknowledgment of family responsibilities is replaced by validation of the rights of all individual employees to competing interests. This is likely to reinforce what Leahy and Doughney (2006) refer to as the vicious cycle of barriers to participating in paid work and care, by making less call on employers social responsibility for being part of the solution to such challenges and pushing the responsibility further into the private domain of the individual and the family.

2.3.2 Flexible working: bridge or trap?

On the whole researchers have found that worker autonomy to manage personal work-schedules, or to vary the timing and place of work generates positive outcomes for individuals, organisations and communities (Strazdins *et al.*, 2004, Brannen, 2005, Voydanoff, 2005c, Shockley and Allen, 2007, Hill *et al.*, 2010, Hill *et al.*, 2013). These effects are mediated by aspects of organisational culture, management processes, and operating context, which was demonstrated clearly in Blair-Loy's (Blair-Loy, 2004, Blair-Loy, 2009) studies of schedule-flexibility in the US. The benefits of being able to vary the start and finish times of

work were felt least among workers in high-commitment, elite client-service occupations in financial services due to the constant on-demand requirement of workers.

As a work-life reconciliation strategy, working flexibly can have a positive influence on both work and personal domains but for some people it can relate to higher degrees of conflict between work and family-life as the boundaries can become blurred. Gatrell *et al*. (2014) analysed the relationship between work engagement and relationship quality using employee survey data, and found that flexible working was predictive of higher work engagement but also of slightly lower relationship quality. This means that the adoption of flexible working practices helps employees achieve a positive work-related state of fulfilment, absorption and satisfaction, yet is simultaneously associated with lower satisfaction with couple relationships, and particularly among women. These findings are consistent with the extant literature that finds flexible working may allow job demands to penetrate further into the home domain, facilitated by technological change that means individuals can work almost anywhere and anytime (Burnett *et al.*, 2012).

Views on the efficacy of flexible working vary according to whether it is offered to employees as a non-wage benefit or instead introduced by employers as a way of changing workplace practices, and in either case, according to the degree to which employees have choice over which type of flexible working they perform. Research has highlighted the tensions and incompatibilities of satisfying employee requirements for work-life balance and organisational goals for resource agility and efficiency, concluding that some forms of flexibility in certain operational contexts may be more transformational for individuals than others (Warren, 1999, Walters, 2005, Walsh, 2007).

What employers might call a benefit of increased retention of employees by providing access to flexible working opportunities, employees might call a trap. Seventy-seven percent of respondents to a recent survey by The Timewise Foundation (2013b) reported feeling trapped in their current job and would move if they were able to retain their flexible status. Part-time and flexible jobs at higher salary levels are rarely advertised, just 8% of quality job vacancies (defined as earning over £20,000 pa) were advertised as flexible in the last six months (The Timewise Foundation, 2016)). Flexible work appears to be a privilege afforded to valued employees and is not yet instrumental in the design of jobs and vacancies. A small and inadequate jobs market for quality, flexible work in the UK further constrains mothers' genuine choices about what, when and how to work and locks women in to roles under their skill level.

Some forms of flexibility may suit the employee but are not favoured by the organisation, particularly those that impinge on worker availability to the organisation, its clients or customers. Based on case analysis of four multinational service organisations Michielsens *et al.* (2013) found that when flexible work patterns impact on worker

availability, in the form of part-time work and restricted schedules, they are acceptable to organisations only if they do not impact negatively upon the client, an insight that was also observed by Haynes (2008) studying women's employment transitions in the accountancy profession. This pressure to prioritise the clients' needs contributes to sustaining norms of long working hours and presenteeism and works against flexible working, and against part-time working in particular. Valuing employee responsiveness over their own private time could account for the reported under utilisation of flexible working practices at managerial levels even in the most encouraging of environments (Smith and Gardner, 2007). There is a marked difference in seniority of those who say they would take up flexible working if they had the chance according to the CIPD's formerly bi-annual flexible working survey that was last issued in 2012. The majority (60%) of male and female senior managers reported that they would not, compared to over 60% of lower ranking managers who said they would. This finding is consistent with the comparative review of flexible working policies undertaken by the Equality and Human Rights Commission (EHRC) that found much less appetite for flexible working among senior staff, and that senior staff who do request flexibility are more likely to have their request refused (Hegewisch, 2009). It could also be that senior managers do not feel that they need to avail themselves of organisational policy to access flexibility and have sufficient autonomy and discretion to manage their own schedules. The evidence suggests that there is an uncomfortable co-existence of flexible working within workplace cultures that value the ideal-worker norms of availability and visibility, and that associate high inputs of working hours with high work commitment among managers. It is in these environments in particular in which the continued uptake of flexible working arrangements by women only serves to reinforce gender inequality (Sheridan, 2004, Crompton and Lyonette, 2011b); a situation described succinctly by Phillips (2008) *as long as flexible working is offered to women and uptake is strongest among women, it continues to create a female ghetto of flexible workers".*

In her comprehensive and compelling analysis of the development of work-family balance policies in the UK in the 1990s and 2000s and their role in enabling gender equality, Jane Lewis (2010) concludes that the access and reconciliation focus of UK employment policy has achieved its aims of increasing the numbers of mothers in labour market. Policy has made it possible to combine work and care in ways that were not available to previous generations, but the implications for gender equality are questionable because there are clear penalties for labour market absences through maternity leaves, breaks, and part-time work in terms of reduced pay, under-utilisation of skills, promotion opportunities foregone, and pensions out of reach. Lewis (2010, p18) works with a definition of gender equality that *"respects agency and seeks to enable real choice"*, that is, the capacity to make alternative choices which she argues must be separated from what she calls the *"political rhetoric of choice [that] is*

increasingly present in regard to work-family policies". She concludes, in agreement with others, Perrons (Perrons, 2006) and Lewis (Lewis and Humbert, 2010), that on the whole policy packages in the UK, in common with most European approaches, have been more concerned to permit mothers to shoulder their dual and often conflicting responsibilities for both paid and unpaid work, than to facilitate real choices how to reconcile work and care. The implications for the pursuit of gender equality have not been wholly beneficial. Current claims about flexible working tend to emphasise its transformative potential and the positive nature of flexible working for both employer and employee, see for example the Women's Business Council (2012). This enthusiastic approach gives an impression of compatibility between the time, schedule, and location requirements of both parties and which the evidence in this review suggests are in reality potentially at odds.

Chapter 3: Method

This study has two main methodological features: it is a qualitative enquiry that adopts a longitudinal approach to investigating the lived experiences of professional and managerial mothers as they transition to a flexible working pattern. My theoretical perspective is feminist in that one of my principal aims is to make visible the conditions for and experiences of women in society. It is also social constructionist in that I acknowledge the contextual and dynamic influences of social structures and culture on identity, on human development, and the meaning we make of our worlds. This study offers sociological insight and is explanatory in function in its concern for understanding the multiple and layered forces and influences on transitions to part-time and flexible work and the internal and external contexts in which these transitions occur (Robson, 2011, Yin, 2012). My applied orientation as an experienced social researcher urges me to listen for transitional difficulties in women's stories with a view to formulating ideas for change at multiple levels: for the individual, the family, organisations, and for policy. In section 3.1 I explain my thinking behind my design choices and in so doing situate my approach in a broader theoretical and philosophical framework.

3.1 Qualitative longitudinal research design

A qualitative approach is appropriate because this is an investigation into individual lives in all their dynamic complexity. The role of qualitative methods in seeking and providing explanation is widely recognised within a range of epistemological approaches and is now widely adopted across the social sciences (Miles and Huberman, 1994, Yin, 2012). Denzin and Lincoln (2011 p6) suggest that qualitative research can be defined as:

> … a set of interpretive, material practices that make the world visible. These practices transform the world…qualitative researchers study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of or interpret phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them

Typically associated with data collection techniques of interviews, observation, and focus groups, and with types of data that typically involve words and images rather than numbers, Silverman (2010) suggests a characteristic of a qualitative research design is its concern with addressing the 'how' and 'why' questions about social experiences, rather than concerns about prevalence and measurement. From a constructivist perspective, qualitative research seeks to *"elicit respondents understandings of situations of situations and events to gain insight into their assumptions, implicit meanings and tacit rules"* (Charmaz, 2006 p32).

The methodological choices I made were question-led and pragmatic, after Ritchie *et al.* (2014), in the sense of giving importance to choosing the appropriate methods for the

research question. According to Denzin and Lincoln (2011, p xiv) pragmatism is a theoretical position in its own right and as such aligns to interpretive, postmodern, and criticalist practices and theorising. This is not to reduce research to merely technique or method, which Dunne *et al.,* (2005) caution against. It means that I have given privilege to devising a coherent approach informed by a critical review of the extant literature about the limits and challenges of the type of research I aimed to conduct (Boejie, 2010). In this regard, the biographical life-narrative approaches used by Tomlinson (2006b) and Nilsen *et al.* (Nilsen *et al.*, 2013b), and the longitudinal case-based research with mothers by Thomson and collaborators (2011) have influenced my methodological thinking significantly, and others engaged in the wider field of scholarship on motherhood, identity, and transitions. This study contributes to what Thomson *et al.* (2011) describe as a reinvigorated empirical interest in studying what mothers do and where and how they do it. Renewed interest in the mother as a subject in her own right opens up new territory for theorising (Baraitser, 2008, Hollway, 2015). It builds what Crompton and Harris (1998) termed a 'bottom-up approach' to exploring work and family by engaging with individual accounts of decision-making about work, family and careers and placing these voices at the centre of analysis. The inherent person-centred focus of qualitative approaches offers significant policy interest in its potential to highlight the lived experience of rights and protections for workers and individual interpretations and enactments of national and organisational policies (Chamberlayne *et al.*, 2000, Flick, 2009).

Adopting a qualitative, longitudinal research strategy that seeks to engage the same participants in multiple research episodes through time is rare in social research. McLeod and Thomson (2009) observe that studies tend to either capture trends by repeating surveys with different groups of people or rely on remembered accounts of the past. Both Crompton (1998) and Tomlinson's (2006b) studies of the work-life management strategies of professional and managerial women asked women to remember their motives for and influences on their past moves in and out of the labour market and through full and part-time work. The temporality that is emphasised in these studies is the past as it is unpacked in the present, and although valuable, offers what could appear smoothed accounts of a sequence of decisions and actions. It is much less common for research to follow the same individuals over extended periods, in part this is due to the practical complexities of keeping in touch with participants over time and the necessarily open-ended nature of a longitudinal project (Mcleod and Thomson, 2009, Miller, 2015).

McLeod and Thomson (2009) explain that qualitative longitudinal research that is planned and prospective is particularly useful in understanding the interaction of the individual with the social through time and space. It is particularly suited to the study of transitions and progression that address questions of peoples 'becoming' and psychosocial

studies of girls becoming women and women becoming mothers have applied the method to great effect (Walkerdine *et al.*, 2001, Hollway, 2015). A quantitative approach to longitudinal research will likely place emphasis on standardised questions that can be repeated in a number of waves so as to compare like with like. Neale and Flowerdew (2003) use a cinematic metaphor to suggest that quantitative approaches are panoramic in their scope of social life yet lack detail. In contrast, they propose that qualitative approaches provide the close-up shot of real lives, with a focus on plot, storyline, turning points and defining moments. The approach taken in this study attempts to generate the close-up shots of individual lives during periods of personal and professional change.

Not all research starts out as intentionally longitudinal, yet it becomes so when participants are followed-up over time. Tina Miller (2005) followed 17 women's experiences through a year of their lives as they became mothers for the first time. Participants were interviewed on three occasions: before the birth, in the early weeks following the birth, and when the baby was about 10 months old. Data was collected between 1995 and 1998. In 2003 Miller went back. She hadn't planned to, and likened the experience of attempting to locate and reconnect with the original participants to *"feeling like stalking"* (Miller, 2015 p253) yet the opportunity to produce a longer view of mothering and motherhood was equally fascinating and challenging in terms of the ethical issues it posed. Ethical complexity related to avoiding coercion in re-recruiting the sample, and in handling the sometime therapeutic nature of the interviews that were once optimistic and future-oriented, and that were later reflective and involved coming to terms with lives that had unfolded in unforeseen and sometimes unsettling ways.

3.2 Repeat interview method

There are different perspectives on the in-depth interview method. Often described as a form of conversation (Kvale and Brickman, 2009), although *"one with purpose"* (Mason, 2002 p67), a good in-depth interview might look like a conversation but it will not feel like one because both participant and researcher are working hard (Ritchie *et al.*, 2014). Much longitudinal qualitative research is interview based, which as Miller (2005, 2011, 2012) describes in relation to her own narrative studies of transitions, enables accounts of biographically transformative experiences to be collected as they are lived through, reflected upon and narrated. Whilst it is argued that there are no feminist research methods per se (Ackerley and True, 2010), the qualitative method of depth-interviewing is associated with feminist research and in particular with research methods used by women studying women. Depth-interviewing can take narrative and biographic forms, and in the context of studies of the life-course have proved illuminating in their attention to context (Bold, 2012). They have been applied in affective approaches to research that attempt to access

participants' inner-worlds as well as their explicit contexts in which decisions and actions are taken (Wengraf, 2001, Hollway and Jefferson, 2013).

In the evolution of qualitative research approaches, narrative and biographical methods had taken hold by the beginning of the 21st century, inspired to some extent by the tradition of oral history which facilitates research participants to tell their own stories. The so-called narrative turn in the social sciences also reflects moves to increase the role and power of participants in research (Cresswell, 2013), offering a way of retaining faithfulness to the told stories and placing participants as experts in their own lives (Chamberlayne *et al.*, 2000). Narrative interview methods have offered rich insight into a wide range of social issues in the context of peoples own accounts of their personal development and histories. Narrative methods are much employed in study of transitions and processes of becoming, for example Nilsen *et al's.* (2013a) cross-national study of the transition to parenthood; and Bataille's (2014) examination of the identity processes at work during women's transitions to motherhood. Armstrong (2015) used narrative interview methods with intergenerational pairs of professional women and their adult daughters discussing their relationship to their careers, and MacGill (2014) applied narrative methods to understanding the experience of sustained part-time working in women's lives.

In order to gather women's accounts of their experiences a research design was required that made women's voices distinct and discernable (Ribbens and Edwards, 1998) and that mirrored the process of transition. At the very least I wanted to capture a sense of change and continuity that moving into a flexible working arrangement had brought, and to discover whether expectations reflected reality. I recognised that the event of a transition into a new working arrangement comes in the context of a wider personal evaluation of the meaning and significance of professional work in a woman's life. This is an evaluation that is prompted by the transition to motherhood and is revisited throughout motherhood. Gascoigne (2014) distinguishes between what she terms the 'original decision' to work part-time or flexibly and an individual's evaluation of the feasibility of doing so in a particular job. The two processes might not be contemporaneous. This complicates the design of a schedule of repeat interviews because my dual interest in both, in the original decision and the process, circumstances, practices and outcomes associated with the particular flexible working arrangement. I arrived at an ideal schedule that oriented around an individual's start-date for their particular flexible working arrangement. It was to run three interviews, the first before the transition, the second soon after (ideally within six weeks), and a third much later (between nine months and 12 months). The exact schedule was to be agreed with the individual. I refer to the repeat interview interval as 'ideal' because I expected that I would need to make adjustments as I further defined the sample and began recruiting participants to the study.

Ann Oakley's seminal research on motherhood in the 1970s transformed her own perspective and led feminist thinking on the characteristics of the interview process and the knowledge that is meaningfully derived from it. Oakley (1974, 1981, 1998, 2016) emphasises the importance of a reciprocal relationship between participants and researcher and challenges the idea of the researcher as a neutral observer, making the case that *"the goal of finding out about people through interviewing is best achieved when the relationship of interviewer and interviewee is non-hierarchical and when the interviewer is prepared to invest his or her own personal identity in the relationship."* (Oakley, 1981 p41). Oakley's perspective is particularly relevant to this study, which engaged me as the researcher and the participants in a form of trusted collaboration that required commitment from both parties to continue the relationship beyond a one-off interview. A research ethic that encouraged detachment seemed disingenuous given the longitudinal aspirations of this research. In the conduct of the interviews I did not assume that participants necessarily wanted to know lots about my life, nor did I seek to disclose information about myself purely as a rapport-building exercise. During participant recruitment and in interviews I explained why I was motivated to design and pursue this research and was open with prospective participants that the idea had formed out of my personal experience, and as such in the way Oakley suggests, my personal identity was invested in it.

My inspiration to pursue this project formed from my own experience and also from the frequent conversations I had with other women. Conversations with colleagues in snatched moments in the office, with other mothers at the school gates, and on rare and warmly welcomed evenings with friends about the ups and the downs of putting our lives and selves together as mothers, partners, *and* professionals. As well as supporting each other we were forming, informing and justifying our own approaches in our talk and I wanted to do something that made all the hidden individual and collective effort of women more visible. I had a professional interest in this topic as well. At the time I conceived this project I was in a senior management job in a large professional services firm where I was responsible for doing things to improve the gender balance up and down the organisation. The team of people I managed also promoted and monitored the flexible working policy and this was a job that I did, very unusually, in a job-share working part-time on a fixed 3-day week schedule. I had an insiders-view of an organisational perspective on gender equality, inclusion and flexible working and personal experience of the phenomena I sought to study. I volunteered this information to prospective research participants. That this project was personal, professional and political was not something I sought to conceal, I was careful however in how I facilitated our interview encounters to focus discussions on participants, not on me, and on helping them feel comfortable.

There were implications of my openness in the conduct of the interviews. There were times when participants seemed to assume that I would know what they meant, or seemed to test whether I shared their views and experiences of working motherhood and so abbreviated or curtailed their story-telling with phrases like *"well, I don't need to tell you that"* or *"you know what it's like"* or concluded with a question that was not necessarily as rhetorical as it sounded: *"I bet you've felt the same, haven't you?"* I made a commitment to always answer direct questions that were asked of me, and was careful to respond in ways that were not loaded with value judgement or opinion. As a professional researcher approaching this study with 15 years experience of research interviews for commercial and social purpose, I was able to facilitate interview encounters that were led by the participants, prompted reflection and probed for expansion whilst returning to core themes about the meaning of professional work in women's lives, the influences on their opportunities and choices, and their reflections on their transitions to part-time and flexible working as means to accomplish it.

3.2.1 Interview process

My ideal repeat interview schedule involved three interview encounters. The first interview invited telling of uninterrupted life stories during the first hour, and then moved to facilitate discussion of the influences on individuals' real and perceived opportunities and choices to work flexibly, the specifics of their planned arrangements, and the resources women drew upon to inform, prepare, and accomplish it. First interviews were planned for around 120 minutes and occasionally extended slightly longer. The second and third interviews adopted a similarly open style and invited women to narrate their experiences and then probed about the circumstances, continuities and discontinuities, and their feelings. Direct questions were asked about women's present circumstances and how these related to their expectations and how women explained any differences. Second and third interviews were shorter than the first, around 60 minutes, and were conducted in person except when travel and scheduling made in-person meetings difficult. Skype video calls were used as a second preference, and occasionally telephone when we could not access the Skype video call facility. I structured a topic guide for each interview around core themes yet left it open as to when and how those themes would be introduced and returned to as the interviews progressed (see Appendices). The topic guide featured question prompts that invited women to recall specific situations and occasions when they felt supported and unsupported at home and at work, comfortable and uncomfortable, content and fulfilled, and unhappy and under pressure. The thinking behind these prompts was to apply something of the critical incident interview technique (Butterfield *et al.*, 2005) to help surface meanings, beliefs, and feelings about combining professional work with motherhood that are hard to articulate, and to

which individuals may not have conscious access. Demographic data such as age, relationship status, and ages of children were gathered at the end of the first interview.

The first interview was conducted in person in a location of the participant's choice. I specifically asked participants to choose somewhere they felt most at ease, although their availability for a research interview was often the determining factor in our choice of location. Typically we met in participants' own homes, public cafes, or private meeting rooms on employer premises. To protect my own safety I told someone where I would be and contacted that person afterwards. I felt it was important to meet in-person for the first interview for a number of reasons. Primarily because this research centres on a cognitive process, a decision, or series of decisions that women make about why, how and when they engage in paid work. Their rationales were likely to be deeply rooted; set within personal understandings of themselves and influenced by personal values, attitudes and behaviours about which they may or may not be conscious. This is complex in terms of the intricacy and the levels of unpacking that is needed to formulate a belief or a view (Ritchie *et al.*, 2014). Delicate and responsive questioning was needed to enable participants to move below initial or stylised accounts which I felt was best achieved in person in preference to telephone or video when social and non-verbal signals are more difficult to read. In the event, 29 of 30 first interviews were conducted in person, and one by Skype video call. Scholarship about motherhood and combining mothering with working has established that decision-making operates at the level of identity as well as practicality and women's lives as they are lived involve compromise and complex trade-offs. Life might not unfold in expected ways and to narrate thoughts and feelings about this is likely to be an emotional experience. Hochschild's (1979, 2012) ideas about the emotion work and psychic costs of living with contradiction between lives lived and selves imagined drew me to open-ended styles of questioning and use of probing to ask about feelings as well as practical experience. I sought explanations for feelings, for example in second and third interviews I asked participants to recall when they felt really happy, to visualise the scene, and to explain why that was.

In the tradition of ethnographic note-taking (Atkinson, 1990), after each interview I wrote a reflective memo, the content of which was informed by the approach to recording self reflective field-notes adopted by Thomson and collaborators (2011) and which captured observations about access, interview setting, appearances, emotional dynamics, and emergent themes. This approach recognises the co-creative medium of the interview situation and allows the subjective feelings of the researcher to become part of that as a way to enhance interpretive meaning (Lucey *et al.*, 2003).

A challenge levelled at qualitative longitudinal research is to go beyond a series of snapshots obtained in episodic encounters (Pateman and Anks, 1999). This I think is a challenge that is levelled fairly at repeat interview studies and as such could be a potential

weakness of the approach to this study. Perhaps employing more continuous data collection techniques such as diaries, or ethnographic observation, alongside interviews might have generated more sustained and as-it-happens insight. I would argue however, that the resources required and the practicalities of accessing a characteristically time-poor group of women urged my design decisions towards pragmatism. I privileged a method of research participation that I felt most likely to yield what turned out to be over 100 hours of rich and fascinating narrative interview data.

3.2.2 Lifeline charts

Within the first interview I used lifeline charts to capture the biographical facts and sequencing of women's life histories. Lifelines were used not to establish a single 'truth' about the past, but rather to identify triggers and turning points and to open up discussion about the present in the context of the past. Lifelines are graphs where important factual events and phases in a participant's life are portrayed chronologically in relation to age and historical time. In some studies lifelines are created with the interviewees after the interview, in other instances the information is derived from the interview and graphs are drawn by the researcher at a later point (Nilsen, 1994). Particular inspiration was drawn from Nilsen *et al's* (2013a) use of lifelines in their cross-national study of transitions to parenthood to facilitate comparison of lives across time and place and to highlight unique and common experiences across multiple cases. Nielsen *at al.* (2013) found they were able to tease out how, for particular persons under particular conditions, resources at different levels such as public policy, employer practices and informal kinship support, intersect and impact on working parents' lives.

In this study, lifelines were used analytically to compare the life patterning and the contextual influences that were made visible on the charts across multiple cases. I experimented with introducing the lifeline in the interview in a number of ways. I asked women to prepare it in advance because I thought that this might enable more time to be given to their narration of it in the interview, however, as an interview pre-task it was rarely accomplished because participants said they did not have time. I then took to completing the lifeline chart together and experimented with its completion. Sometimes I held the pen and completed it while a participant talked, and sometimes participants drew and wrote on the template themselves. It was most effective as a tool to begin a conversation about the past, from which we then moved to the present and on to imagined futures. The lifeline served as an icebreaker in interviews; a gentle way of gathering factual information about life events about which I probed for participants' meanings. The lifeline instruction sheet and the template I gave to participants to guide completion is included in the Appendices.

3.3 Ethics and confidentiality

Ethical approval for this research was granted by the C-REC (Ethical Review Committee) at the University of Sussex in March 2014 and assessed as low risk. Fieldwork began soon after ethical approval was obtained and continued until September 2015. Participant confidentiality was a key concern that was raised as part of the ethical review process. I developed a policy that I explained verbally and in writing to prospective and confirmed research participants. Participants received an information sheet describing the details of the study (see Appendices). They also received the interview topic guide in advance of each meeting. Written consent was obtained from every participant, which gave notice of their right to withdraw at any time and to withdraw all previously collected data. I recorded every interview using a digital audio recorder. At the beginning of every interview I sought participants consent to record the encounter and restated that their recordings would not be made public or accessed by any other party. All recordings were downloaded from the recording device, assigned a unique reference number and saved on a password-protected server. All transcribed audio data was held securely in the same way.

Many of the women who participated in this study occupied senior and prominent positions in their organisations. Their flexible working patterns meant that they were the first and only individuals working in these ways in their organisations. The potential for disclosure of participant identities in writing-up and preparation of this thesis was minimised by use of pseudonyms and by removing references to personal information that might lead to the identification of individuals, their partners, their children or their employers. Some participants let me know that they would not have participated in the project had I not assured and reassured them of the confidential nature of the enquiry. No one withdrew from the study.

Part of being accountable for the knowledge that I have produced is acknowledging my position in the research by engaging reflexively in examination of my own views, assumptions, and experiences and how these influence my interactions and interpretations of participants' lives and experiences. Although this is not a personal project in the auto-ethnographic sense of researching my own life, it was inspired by personal experience. Yow (2006) discusses the impact of the research on the researcher as well as on the participants, and urges the researcher to ask questions of themself to support their critical self-awareness throughout the research process and to understand their own emotional reactions in interviews about experiences that are shared. Leaving my City career and beginning full-time doctoral research was my own professional transition, embarked upon in the context of being a partnered mother of an 18-month-old baby daughter and 4 year old son. My personal experience of working part-time and flexibly has been mixed; equally enriching and rewarding as frustrating, laborious and limiting. I remained mindful throughout the research

process of how my personal experience enriched my research both procedurally and interpretatively. As enriching as it was I also challenged myself not to assume that participants' experiences would be anything like my own.

Neale (2003) proposed that the ethical complexity introduced by a long-term engagement in research demands an additional ethical literacy of the researcher to manage the intimacy that is created through the shared intensity of a telling of a life story and of sharing personal highs and lows through time. The connection I made with some of my research participants at times felt more like friendship and which gave the feeling of being bonded together in a shared endeavour. Because I had my own life going on the complexities of which seemed often to mirror theirs, I sometimes found it difficult and emotionally draining to absorb their stories. In order to look after my own emotional care I managed a schedule that left some space between each interview, and I also tried to avoid interviewing late in the evening. After 14 hours of solo toddler care I was rarely at my best for a research interview with someone who had probably had much the same day as I had. My insider position as a mother I am sure was helpful in reassuring participants of an empathetic ear although as a more experienced mother than many of my participants (only in so far as my two children were a little older than infants) and an experienced flexible worker, might have tilted the power balance in our interactions towards me as expert. Offering participants an open space to share their biographies was my attempt to counter any power they might have felt I had. Being encouraging, reassuring, listening actively, and asking very few direct questions contributed significantly to a levelling of the power relations in the encounter.

3.4 Truths, claims, and implications

The validity of case based research in the sense of our confidence in the truths being told and of the generalisability of those truths, Lincoln and Guba (1985) propose places an obligation on the qualitative researcher to provide descriptions 'thick' or convincing enough to allow readers to draw conclusions about other cases or situations. Bryman (2008) rejects the notion of an objective true account of a social reality in favour of subjective interpretations of experiences and as such suggests that trustworthiness and authenticity are the most appropriate evaluation criteria to apply to qualitative research of this type. These criteria are further expanded in the context of the flexible analytic guidelines offered by the Grounded Theory school (Glaser and Strauss, 1967), to which Charmaz (2006) proposes criteria for evaluating research should consider its credibility, originality and resonance. Credibility is the extent to which the research has achieved intimate familiarity with the topic and sufficiency in data coverage and evidence; originality, is the freshness of new insights offered by the analysis; its resonance is judged in terms of the fullness of the studied experience and its resonance with the studied participants, and its usefulness in terms of

contribution to knowledge and interpretations that everyone can use in their every day worlds. The experiences of part-time and flexible working among professional mothers studied here are not assumed to be those of all women who work, or of all mothers, and yet may be relevant to them. As such my responsibility is to provide full, credible and resonant insights.

3.5 The research sample

This section sets out the thinking behind the composition of the research sample. In total 30 professional and managerial women who were mothers and working part-time and flexibly were recruited to this study and a total of 76 individual interviews took place. Fourteen women were interviewed twice in a 12 month period (average total interview time around 3 hours), and 16 were interviewed three times (average total interview time around four hours). Altogether 42 interviews were conducted in-person (including 29 of 30 first interviews), 18 via Skype video call, and 16 by telephone. The sample further divides into 12 first-time mothers approaching the transition to part-time and flexible working for the first time and in the context of their simultaneous transition to motherhood, and 18 women approaching the transition at a later biographical moment, as mothers of infants and/or older children.

Despite their differing theoretical stances, Crompton and Harris (1998) and Hakim (2000) concur that most women who are mothers will seek some sort of combination of work and family. They also suggest that this group will, in itself, be heterogeneous. It is this majority group that they describe as Maximisers and Satisficers (Crompton and Harris, 1998) and Adaptives and Drifters (Hakim, 2000) whom this study targeted for participation. Given the acknowledged heterogeneity in this majority group of women, my concern was to design a sample that would be sufficiently homogenous to allow themes to emerge. I defined a 'professional mother' as a woman with a biological or adoptive relationship to dependent children, and who was employed in professional and managerial occupations in large organisations and usually resident in the UK.

It is mostly women who work part-time and flexibly in professional and managerial jobs, however empirical work has demonstrated that the opportunities to do so are limited and overall the population is small and reportedly hard to find (Durbin and Tomlinson, 2010). Women in top executive positions and boardroom access was the focus of much industry, policy, and scholarly focus at the time I designed this study. My own personal and professional experience urged my focus a little lower down organisational hierarchies, just below the so-called 'glass ceiling' on women in professional and managerial roles whom I termed 'in the middle' with reference to both their organisational careers and position in organisational hierarchies of large employing organisations. The descriptor 'professional and

managerial' in this study aligns broadly to Standard Occupational Classification (SOC) 1 and 2 (Office for National Statistics, 2016) although the SOC classification was not used prescriptively in participant recruitment. In preference I developed a definition of professional and managerial roles that followed Evetts (2011 p5) p5, *"the knowledge-based category of service occupations, which usually follows a period of tertiary education and vocational training and experience"*, which sought women who were degree qualified and were established in their field having accumulated at least ten years' professional experience. Much academic and industry research points to the significance of the late twenties, thirties and early forties age groups for women starting families. It is a life transition that they approach having already accumulated perhaps 10 to 20+ years of professional experience and so it is reasonable to assume that career attachment might feature in their decision-making about work. Given the persistence of part-time working pattern in women's career histories in the UK long after the age at which children begin school (MacGill, 2014), I was interested to be able to compare the experience of women approaching the transition to for the first time and from their first maternity leave with women approaching the transition when children are older. I sampled to generate sufficient data within these two sub-groups to facilitate comparison and allow themes to emerge. Twelve first-time mothers were recruited to the sample who were approaching the transition to part-time and flexible working for the first-time simultaneously with their return-to-work transition post maternity leave. Eighteen mothers were recruited who were approaching the transition at a later biographical point, upon the birth of a second or third child, and when children were older. The consequences of these criteria for the sample were that most women were aged between 28 and 44 at the time of the first interview and were mothers to either one infant or up to four children under the age of 17 and who were usually resident with the mother.

The term 'flexible working' and 'flexible working arrangements', or patterns, are poorly defined and understood (Hill *et al.*, 2008), and the range of part-time and flexible working patterns available to workers varies significantly between employers. I worked with a definition for participant recruitment that invited women to self-select as a part-time or flexible worker if they were employed on a contract that varied the full-time or standard for their job and employment context. I suggested that these arrangements could include and were not limited to: reduced and part-time working hours, job-sharing, home-working, compressed hours, and term-time working. It was important for the sample that the adjusted working arrangement was a contractual one and not an informal agreement with a line-manager. The consequences of these criteria for the sample is that 29 of 30 women self-defined as part-time workers and their employment contracts reflected their pro-rated paid working hours; one woman self-defined her arrangement as 'full-time and compressed' which meant being paid for working full-time hours in fewer, longer days. Three of the 29 part-time

workers were also job-sharing that is, sharing the responsibilities of a role with another person. Little research attention is given to how part-time work is combined with other flexible arrangements such as home working and job-sharing to form an individual working pattern. Analysing the individual arrangements of women recruited to this study offers some insight and finds that part-time working hours was rarely the only characteristic of the flexible working arrangement (only in 9 cases), it was more often used in combination with either schedule flexibility, that is control or specificity about the timing of core hours and days of paid work (in 12 cases), and/or location flexibility, that is, control or specificity over a place of work, in 18 cases. The work circumstances of the 30 women were just as diverse as their individual working arrangements. Of 25 women who remained with the same employer for their transition, around half (13 cases) were converting their previous full-time jobs into part-time and flexible jobs and the other 12 women were simultaneously embarking on a new job and a new flexible working arrangement. Unusually, five women were navigating three new experiences simultaneously: beginning new working arrangements in new jobs with new employers; their working hours, schedule and location flexibilities negotiated as part of the recruitment process.

Partnered and non-partnered women were invited to participate and no recruitment criteria were applied to sexuality or to ethnicity. The recruited sample included 28 partnered women who were either married or cohabitating with their male partners, all of whom were the fathers of their children. One lone parent participated in the project, and one lesbian mother took part who was married to her female partner. Where participants offered ethnicity and nationality it indicated that the majority of women recruited to the study were white women from the UK and a small number of white women from the US, Australia, and other parts of Europe. Around a quarter referenced their Asian origin and identity, originating from India, Pakistan and other countries in South East Asia. The sample was recruited from a wide range of occupational sectors: 16 women were employed in large organisations in the private sector, in banking, finance and professional services, and 14 women were employed in large organisations in the public sector, in education, health, protective services, local and central government. A wide range of occupational fields were represented including solicitors, doctors, teachers and academics, management consultants, accountants, regulators, and experienced managers in the fields of human resources, finance, sales and marketing, communications, technology, and operations.

Recruitment sampling was purposively driven using my personal and professional network and mobilised via social media (e.g. Twitter and Facebook). I distributed a link to a dedicated project website and the participant recruitment questionnaire (see Appendices). The population from which to recruit participants was likely to be very small even within large employing organisations. The low likelihood that women in that population would be

transitioning to their new working arrangements within the open period of fieldwork for this project meant that it was necessary to develop multiple recruitment channels. I approached private and public sector employers as gatekeeper organisations and recruited their help to distribute an electronic link to the participant questionnaire via their internal newsletters and email distribution lists. Gatekeeper organisations included two global banks, six large professional services firms, two large public sector employers, one consumer good brands, The Timewise Foundation (UK social business promoting flexible working), Opportunity Now (the UK gender campaign promoting women's progress at work), and City Mothers (a subscription network of mothers working in City professions). Three of the professional services firms and one of the banks had supported the project with small grants. This relationship was explained to participants, and confidentiality assurances to women recruited via the sponsoring organisations that their employers would not be advised about their participation, nor would they have access to their data. These assurances were given in the participant information sheet (see Appendices).

In total around 400 completed questionnaires were received from mothers across the UK who were either currently working flexibly or whom were about to begin a new flexible working arrangement. Most of the 400 questionnaire respondents signalled their interest in taking part in the interviews. I applied criteria for balance within the sample: between public and private sectors of employment, between first-time mothers of infants and mothers of an older child or children, and aimed for a geographical spread and an occupational spread. This reduced the eligible sample to around 250 women. Undoubtedly the most challenging aspect of recruitment was the restricted timeframe in which to conduct the fieldwork and the complex scheduling of interviews around each individual transition. The narrow window for fieldwork significantly reduced the eligible sample and from this much reduced pool, the first 30 women I approached agreed to participate in the interviews.

After the first interview, the ideal schedule was that I would follow-up with a second interview within a few weeks (ideally within six weeks) of the date upon which women started their flexible working arrangement, and again with another interview up to a year later. I kept the recruitment period open for six months from May 2014 and invited women who were beginning their flexible working arrangement before the end of November 2014 to take part in three interviews. I closed the longitudinal interview period in September 2015 after 16 months. For some women the weeks before they returned to work from maternity leave or an extended absence were tense and emotional times, and very busy for reasons that will be fully explained in this thesis. It often proved challenging to schedule two hours of uninterrupted research interview in person at mutually convenient times and required several weeks advance notice to achieve. The transition to flexible working arrangement is a dynamic process that develops over time, and it became clear from my initial interviews that

the original decision about flexible working and in particular about moving to part-time working hours was made by women long before a specific arrangement was negotiated with an employer and so it seemed that anchoring the interview strategy to a start date ceased to be relevant to all the aims of the research as well as having proved to be particularly challenging to implement. I decided to flex the original requirement to capture 30 women's accounts *before* the date of their transition by including women who had *very recently* begun their new working arrangement. In total 16 women were interviewed three times, before and soon after their start-dates, and again within 12 months; eight were first-time mothers, and eight were mothers of infants and older children. Fourteen women were interviewed for the first time within six weeks of having started their new working arrangement, and then again within 12 months; four were first-time mothers, and ten were mothers of infants and older children.

3.6 Analytical strategy

This section describes the approach to analysis of data generated from 76 interviews with 30 women, their lifeline charts, and my researcher memos and field-notes. My analytical strategy was inductive and sought to combine thematic analysis with close analysis of individual cases. Thematic analysis discovers patterns and clusters of meanings across all 30 women's told experiences, and close analysis of individual cases makes visible the temporal element of transition by attending to elements of continuity and of change, of gains and of losses through time and in individual contexts.

The overarching aim of this analysis is to contribute a 'situated understanding' of women's approaches to combining work and motherhood using flexible working arrangements, and which is not currently found in the literature. Thomson *et al.* (2011) use the concept of the 'situation' as a way of capturing the unique ways in which women of the same generation within a common culture encounter motherhood, and in so doing the approach draws beneficial attention to both solidarities and differences in women's lives. McDowell *et al.* (2005) call for a more 'situated understanding' of women's negotiation of moralities and identities, that is, an understanding of how caring commitments are negotiated in specific relationships at specific times and places. I conceptualise a situated understanding as appreciating the biographical, social and cultural contexts within which women devise their care and career actions. A situated understanding must necessarily attend to the *inner* context, to matters of identity and selfhood. By melding analysis of circumstances and subjectivities this thesis offers a psychosocial account of women's lived experiences and presents rich descriptive portraits of transition intentions, influences, practices and outcomes.

Consistent with my interpretivist research approach and feminist research ethic I employed a inductive analytical strategy that allowed themes to emerge from the data and to

offer what Dey (2007 p92) describes as *"plausible interpretation rather than producing a logical conclusion"* (p92). My research design within this framework was pragmatic and took account of the aims and context of the study, and allowed for openness and flexibility as the study developed by working with design, data and theory in a dynamic way. Bryman (2012) (p387) describes this open approach as incorporating an *"oscillation between testing emergent theories and collecting data"* and as such analysis of data began with the first contact with a research participant and was continuous, extending throughout the writing process.

Analysis of qualitative longitudinal data requires the researcher to look in two directions; at the point-in-time accounts of experiences that are co-created in each separate interview encounter, and to look through time across the sequence of accounts. Thomson and Holland, (2003), describe the *"double burden of analysing data in two directions: cross-sectional (synchronic) and longitudinal (diachronic)"*, (p240) and point to the integration of both these analyses continuing to be the most challenging aspect of large-scale qualitative research design. This project is simultaneously large and small in its attention to a reasonably small number of cases (30) and generation of a large volume (100+ hours) of recorded audio data and other research material that includes lifeline charts, researcher memos, and demographic information. In formulating my analytical strategy my aim was twofold, the first was to identify themes across the 30 women's stories that were potentially resonant with the lived experiences of a wider population of mothers in professional occupations transitioning to and sustaining a flexible working arrangement. Second I was equally concerned not to lose the individual and edit out their contexts by distilling long accounts into coding units, as might be the case under an exclusively inductive thematic approach. To analyse the full corpus of oral narrative thematically would have made the temporal dimension and dynamics of change and adjustment much less visible. I was encouraged towards originating a hybrid approach to analysis by Reissman's (2008 p12) argument that what she describes as category-centred approaches to analysis, such as inductive thematic coding, grounded theory and other qualitative approaches, can *"meaningfully be combined with close analysis of individual cases and leading to different ways of knowing a phenomenon and unique insights"* (p12).

Attending to context was important in this study, in terms of the space, time, history, and cultures in which women were making and enacting decisions about work and motherhood. Purposive examination of the contexts in which lives are lived underlines the relationship between agency and structure (Brannen and Nilsen, 2011). Women's stories of their experiences, as Reissman (2008 p105) argues *"do not fall from the sky or emerge from the innermost self"* (p105); they are composed and received in multiple contexts and are co-produced in a complex choreography between teller and listener. Insights from dialogic approaches to narrative analysis, notably MacGill's (2014) study of women with long histories of part-time working encouraged me to view the research relationship as an

unfolding dialogue that includes my voice and I applied this approach in my interview practice. For example, during the second interviews I offered my interpretation of the meaning and significance of their transition into part-time and flexible working that I had reflected upon from our first interview. In this way I actively engaged participants in co-creation of the meanings derived from how they narrated their choice of flexible working arrangement and corroborates the analysis discussed in the chapter that follows.

Reismman's work on methods of narrative inquiry informed my approach to analysis although offered little guidance about fruitful methods of working with narrative data in the context of a longitudinal research design. In this my approach was influenced greatly by McLeod and Thomson's writings on researching social change. McLeod and Thomson (2009, p166) argue that there is a messiness to real-life research that involves *"collisions between data collection and analysis"* that are rarely acknowledged in methodological accounts. Some of the messiness comes from the unique challenges of timing and synchronisation of data collection and analysis presented by longitudinal research. My management of a rolling programme of interviewing that was organised around each individuals transition timetable further complicated decisions about when and how to analyse data, and which might have been simpler if data collection was organised in co-ordinated waves. Waves of data collection might not have been possible precisely because the messiness of this real-life research also comes from the lived reality of professional mothers' working lives. The day-to-day reality for me as a professional mother and my research participants was of quick changes and volleying between roles and responsibilities at work and at home. Our lives could feel messy and uncoordinated and this in turn seeped into the procedural experience of the data collection and analysis.

Necessarily analysis was cross-sectional to begin with, and intense in its focus on the first interview. This was the longest interview and it generated biographical narrative data, lifeline charts, factual information about the type of working pattern they had negotiated and their accounts of their experiences securing access to these patterns. Second and third interviews enquired about daily life in the present, the recent past and anticipated futures and sought insight into changes and continuities through time. These narratives were also analysed cross-sectionally and then thematically. This approach, whilst illuminating episode by episode, did little to support linking of participants' stories through time.

Interviews were transcribed verbatim. The first three of the first, second and third interviews were transcribed by me and the remainder by a skilled copy typist who transcribed the digital audio recordings to my template format. The computer assisted qualitative data analysis software (CAQDAS) NVivo was used to support data management and the interpretive process. NVivo and similar software packages are widely used for qualitative analysis. I found its benefits to be in the storage of all my data in one place, data

that included digital audio files, images of my fieldwork memos, images of participants hand-drawn lifeline charts, electronic versions of lifeline charts, recruitment questionnaires, and interview transcripts. The speed of access and the ability to query large volumes of data by using text searches for a key word or phrase, was particularly useful during the early stages of analysis to identify patterns. Shortcomings of using CAQDAS relate in many ways to different epistemological assumptions; the benefits that some researchers see constitute shortcomings for others. I was mindful of Coffey and Atkinson's (1996) critique of CAQDAS in general, that the speed of coding and retrieval supports thematic analysis, however the range of analytical tools is limited and less supportive of narrative analysis that necessarily gives more focus to the structure of language and how meanings are made.

I developed a thematic coding framework for the first interview and used this to code and sort the interview data, to which I later added new codes for later interviews. Codes are refereed to as nodes in NVivo and at the highest level these were a mixture of thematic codes derived from my engagement in the literature, such as managing emotions, domestic labour, and choosing part-time; themes noted in my fieldwork notes and memos that came up during the interviews, such as good and bad line managers, supportive workplaces, social networks; and descriptive case codes containing demographic information. Codes emerged through in-vivo analysis of each transcript. The theme of 'personal responsibility' emerged perhaps unsurprisingly, in relation to women's maternal roles and I also detected it in relation to how women talked about their duties, obligations and the pressures they felt to be responsible for the successful implementation of their flexible working arrangements.

Each individual participant was turned into a 'person node' in NVivo, which in addition to the demographic data captured features of their biographies and circumstances material to their transition experiences. Creating person nodes (also known as case nodes) facilitated comparisons across multiple cases using the matrix coding query function. I used some of the data gathered from the lifeline charts to build these personal participant profiles as person nodes, and included information such as prior experience of part-time flexible working, smooth or discontinuous career trajectories, and ages at personal and professional milestones (e.g. meeting current partner, births of children, bereavement, illness, qualification, and promotion). I developed analytical categories to facilitate comparative analysis. These included the context in which women made the decision to transition to part-time and flexible working that I termed the 'decision context' that was categorised as either from maternity leave or in continuous employment. The 'transition scenario' captured three distinct change scenarios: conversions, new jobs, and new employers; the 'domestic context' draws on Hochschild's framework and categorises women's relationships as egalitarian, traditional, or transitional; and 'flexible working arrangements', identifies the type of temporal, location, schedule, and structural flexibility (in the case of job-sharing) that women

accessed. The full breakdown of these analytical categories is in 3.7 and presented in tabular form in the Appendices.

The analytical process was continuous from the first contact with participants through to writing-up and preparation of this thesis. I read and re-read the verbatim transcripts and listened to the audio recordings, often whilst reviewing my fieldwork notes to remind myself of the interactive dynamics of the encounter. Managing the rolling programme of research meant that I was continuing to interview and collect new data whilst analysing what I already had. The lack of hard stop between phases of data collection and data analysis presented the problem of analytic closure, which is characteristic of qualitative longitudinal studies. The mobile subjectivity of the researcher meaning that there is always a new dimension to add (Mcleod and Thomson, 2009).

Cross-sectional analysis of the first interview expanded my initial thematic framework to feature 12 themes that held over 200 nodes. Saldana (2003) suggests that researchers often end up with between five and seven main themes under which detailed sub-themes are nested (referred to as child nodes in NVivo). I made use of the data display functionality in NVivo to review my thematic framework that had become too vast to be useful. I combined duplicate nodes and refined the higher order themes. Further reading, coding and categorisation, refined the themes to include: meaning and motivation of flexible working; influences on choice of working pattern; accessing flexible working; feelings about mothering and childcare; domestic life; managing emotions; implementing flexible working at work; and boundaries and conflict. Each theme contained nested codes derived from close reading of the verbatim transcripts and further in-vivo coding. I used the language of the participants as well as my own descriptors to label the child nodes in order to remain close to the context and to participants' meanings, for example coded under the 'influences on choice of working pattern' parent-node were: financial reasons (under which more codes were nested e.g. lifestyle, commitments), identity ("work is who I am, it's what I do"), workplace (line-managers, authority, support), mothering morality ("right thing to do", "being there"). Further themes were added to the framework with successive interviews that enabled new and old data to be displayed side by side. It was easier to see the kinds of work-life conflict women reported experiencing before their transition to part-time working, and their conflict experiences afterwards by displaying data in this way. Additional themes included: Doing part-time and flexible working, which included sub-themes of managing place, technology, prioritising, working harder; delegating); and outcomes and impacts.

A significant analytical advance was made when I categorised women's meanings and motivations for working flexibly into five transition narratives. Up to that point I had attempted to categorise women's approaches to reconciling work and family life using Crompton & Harris's (1998) typology, as either Domestic, Careerist, Satisficing, Maximising

or Undecided, and also Tomlinson's (2006b) classification of transitions through part-time work that are either Strategic, Reactive or Compromised. I felt that these often-used categorisations insufficiently reflected the layers of meaning the research participants attached to their impending transitions. I settled on the term 'transition narratives' to reflect the complexity and diversity in the stories women told about the significance of their move in context of their the evolving biographies. The transition narratives are formative and anticipatory; the five categories clustered around women's imagined outcomes and anticipated benefits of working flexibly. They offer a new perspective that stands in contrast to the summative, outcome-based reflections of past transitions that characterise most studies of women's careers.

With successive interview encounters and a growing dataset I approached the challenge of integrating individual case narratives, themes, and temporality. I had reached the limit of the utility of NVivo and returned to the individual cases to write short case summaries. I noted linkages and themes within each case through time and across cases and recorded these linkages in grid, which was my version of what Ritchie *et al.* (2014) term the central matrix, or analytical log. I visualised the linkages by drawing out the connections and mapping questions and concepts on paper. By reading each case forwards and backwards in time and looking between cases for commonalities and divergences I produced analytical insights and plausible interpretations of transitions to part-time and flexible work among professional and managerial mothers.

3.7 Definitions and identifiers used in analysis

The names and identifying features of participants have been changed throughout for reasons of confidentiality. Pseudonyms have been used for the women, for their partner and children. Job titles and professions are given in general terms for confidentiality, such as Senior Manager, Operations Director, or Law professional, and Medical professional, and their occupational sector of employment described either private sector or public sector.

For brevity I use the term 'professional mothers' consistently throughout the thesis. It describes women who are mothers and employed in managerial and professional jobs. Every extract from women's narrative interviews is attributed using a standard identifier that includes the participant number, job role, sector of employment, number and ages of children, and their new flexible working arrangement. It also includes the transition narrative that best captures the meaning and significance of the move to that woman. Each participant reference number links to a table in the Appendices that provides additional information about their domestic, employment and transition circumstances.

Chapter 4: Narrating choice of flexible working arrangements

> If it was just me making decisions about me, on my own, it would be so much simpler, but my decisions to make about my career come in the context of this incredibly complex network of logistical, emotional, practical, lifestyle, and ideological issues for each one of us
>
> *Rachel [25], Education Professional, public sector, married, mother of 3 children under 8, transitioning from full-time to part-time in the same job*

Professional working mothers are often culturally constructed as well-resourced women who have made choices, however the concept of choice is highly problematic in the context of motherhood and paid work. Studies tend to agree that there are a small proportion of women at either end of a spectrum orientating more towards career or towards family and that these women may experience less of an ideological contradiction when making decisions about combining childcare with professional work (Crompton and Harris, 1998, Hakim, 2000, Johnston and Swanson, 2007), but even so their choices and those of the majority are anything but free. They are constrained instead by economic, structural, and cultural factors (Hochschild, 1997, Blair-Loy, 2003, Duncan and Irwin, 2004, Tomlinson, 2006b, Johnston and Swanson, 2007, Gatrell, 2008), and by their own understandings of the moral and ideological balance they seek (Himmelweit and Sigala, 2004). Extant explanations for why women combine motherhood and work in the way they do emphasise the intersection of identity and circumstance. The complexity of that interplay between emotional, ideological and practical factors is powerfully illustrated in the extract from research participant Rachel's first interview, above.

This chapter examines the personal intentions and circumstances of transition to a flexible working arrangement in professional mothers' lives. Analysis centres on the stories women told in our first interview encounters about how they reached their decision to work flexibly and their individual rationales for choosing a particular flexible working arrangement. A key contribution of this analysis is to identify five transition narratives that reveal the meaning and significance of this particular transition for women becoming mothers for the first time and for mothers approaching change at a later biographic point. The five transition narratives are given epithets that reflect participants' intentions for their moves into part-time and flexible working. They are: Restorative, Expansive, Protective, Compromised and Sense-Making. Each narrative reveals the constellation of internal and external factors that interact to enable and constrain women's employment opportunities and choices, as well as the benefits and outcomes they anticipate the transition will bring.

Understanding the meaning and significance of part-time and flexible work in professional mothers' lives in this way is important to advancing our understanding of maternal subjectivities and to supporting professional mothers in the transitions and constructions they adopt both practically and ideologically.

This analysis forms a dialogue with Crompton & Harris (1998) typology of professional women's work-lifestyle approaches and Jennifer Tomlinson's (2006b) reformulation of their important work in her analysis of managerial mothers' employment transitions through part-time work, their work-life strategies and resultant work-life trajectories. I draw inspiration from these conceptualisations of women's approaches and strategies to offer a situated understanding of the different ways which women, in the same professional and managerial occupational grouping, make meaning of their flexible working opportunities and choices in their evolving life narratives. Both Crompton and Harris' typology, and Tomlinson's transition types and work-life trajectories are derived from women's accounts of past transitions that are remembered in the present. Memory may smooth or forget the meaning and significance of every employment transition; and through time, intentions and meanings of transition moments in the past may be remembered is ways that perhaps better align to the outcomes achieved. The transition narratives discussed here by contrast are formative and anticipatory. They are derived from individual stories told close to the moment and as such they expand the predominant summative and reflective approach to studying employment transitions. The five transition narratives are collective stories that are defined by their common and resonant elements across the otherwise atomised appearance of 30 unique narratives. Each transition narrative is illustrated by a single case selected for analytic interest, which is then discussed in the context of other cases that similarly align to the collective narrative.

4.1 Five transition narratives

Three of the five transition narratives reflect a clear intent behind the choice of working pattern. The *Restorative* narrative states a motivation to relieve work-life overspill and conflict and typically was heard in stories women told about their moves to reduce their weekly working hours on either a temporary or indefinite basis within their existing employment context (the 'Conversion' scenario described in 3.7). Restorative transitions were evident in 10 cases. The *Expansive* narrative signals a desire to re-boot a professional career that has stalled and re-claim a professional identity previously supressed by maternal responsibilities. This narrative was associated with an increase in working time (albeit to less than full-time), to new forms of location flexibility, and seeking new professional roles and was evident in seven cases. The *Protective* narrative reflects the adjustments that five women made to protect their professional identities and work status and defend against corrosive

public discourses that associate part-time working hours and motherhood with lower work and career commitment. Protective transitions were shaped significantly by workplace culture and facilitated by women's high work status and strong support networks providing flexible childcare. They were associated with seemingly small reductions (-10%-20%) in working hours among women occupying senior management positions. Among professional women positioned lower down the managerial hierarchy, protective transitions were associated with pre-emptive occupational moves to less intensive roles.

The fourth narrative described the *Compromised* transition and speaks to the structuring factors external to the self that determined women's working patterns and as such overpowered identity claims and work-life preferences (in eight cases). These transitions, although likely to be articulated as choices, often revealed little choice at all in working patterns. They were significantly influenced by workplace policies and practices and how care responsibilities were shared with partners. The fifth transition narrative was notably and exclusively found in the accounts of new mothers returning to work for the first time and simultaneously transitioning to part-time work. As such it is a crosscutting narrative, its elements and sentiments appearing in combination with another of the four (in five cases). The *Sense-making* narrative relates to the expressed uncertainty about the continuing salience of professional work to one's sense of self upon motherhood. It appeared in the accounts of new mothers poised to return to work at that moment, and also in the reflections of mothers of older children looking back on their own first return-to-work transition.

The stories women told of their reasons for changing the way they worked and the circumstances and influences on their options and choices revealed the meaning and the significance of the impending transition in individual lives. It was clear that the change in working pattern was as much ideological as it was practical and represented a complex settlement of competing pulls, constraints and incentives. How satisfactory the settlement is perceived to be and its anticipated impact on every-day life and sense of self is well illustrated by the five transition narratives.

4.1.1 Restorative: resolving and avoiding work-life conflict

A transition is initiated with the aim of better managing the intensity and demands of professional and maternal roles and resolving their competing time demands. Lived experience of work-life conflict marks this transition. Women whose stories formed this transition narrative talked in terms of a time-bind. They did not have enough time to do everything they were expected to do at work and to also be cognitively and emotionally present for their children in the manner that their model of mothering demanded. This transition is described as Restorative because reducing working hours is anticipated to

reduce pressure felt at work and to restore mental and physical energy. There is a pressure-relieving motivation for reducing working hours and increasing the amount of working-from-home to accommodate the circumstances of childcare.

Women narrating this intent for their transition found it easier to adjust their professional work time or locations (in the more supportive workplaces) than their maternal responsibilities. Maternal responsibilities felt fixed and immoveable and so necessarily the adjustments that women made were in the professional domain. Triggers promoting this Restorative transition are the experience of a sustained capacity challenge, or an unexpected breakdown of childcare. Central to this transition is women's pivotal role in the family and the way they perform it that demands of them significant practical, cognitive and emotional work. Stress is a factor and shows itself in diminished quality of interactions within the family, fatigue, and lack of energy for taking on new and extra work projects. The purpose of this particular transition is very definitely to relieve pressure. The competing pressure of work and responsibility for the family depletes women's capacities to fulfil their professional and maternal roles.

The restoration sought in these transition narratives can also be ideological. The first single case illustration illuminates this point and shows how practical adjustments are in part addressing deeply felt ideological tensions. The first extract is from an interview with Rachel [25] who works in education and is about to change her working pattern from full-time to part-time in the same job. Her new flexible working arrangement translates to 80% of the standard full-time contract with informal location flexibility. She has worked for the same employer for five years, which is a short 30-minute commute from her home. She was accustomed to a trusting and collegiate work culture with little pressure to perform her work in a specific location. She and her husband have been together for over 10 years and started their family when Rachel was in her mid twenties, which she reflected was *"unusual at that time"* for two newly qualified people just starting out in their careers. Finding permanent full-time employment was a priority for the young couple with their first baby. Rachel secured employment first and experienced success quickly and continued a fast ascent to promotion and the occupational level at which she is now. The couple now have three children. The couple's older two are at school and the youngest, age two, is looked after during Rachel's working days by a combination of her recently retired mother and a local nursery. Her husband has a permanent job in the same field and is currently enjoying some success with new work projects. His job takes him away from home for a block of three days each week for much of the year, during which time Rachel is parenting alone. In this passage she describes how she felt her responsibility for their children had impacted her career development. The breakdown in their childcare network she saw as an opportunity to realise

a long-felt need to reduce her working hours to legitimise rather than to continue to conceal, or deny what she called her *"two jobs"*, that of a mother and a professional.

> My career has been plateauing anyway. I do what I need to but I can't do more, and doing more is how you develop your career. So actually the nursery not having space for [my daughter on the day we needed it] was a bit of a Godsend as far as I was concerned. It enabled me to say to my husband 'there's a situation'.

Rachel attributes her career plateau to her individual failure to *"do more"* than the requirements of her role, and not to any obvious structural barriers or biased attitudes. She associates success and achievement with input of time. In the passage below she describes feeling herself cognitively let go of the notion that by being employed full-time she was actively developing her career alongside the complete responsibility she had for managing her young children's lives:

> …the day-to-day grind of family life, you know, who is where, who needs swimming kits or lunch bags. Having three small peoples' lives in my head all the time is mentally taxing… it was like someone had let the air out of the balloon…I very much felt it happen to me, consciously I thought 'I can't do this anymore'

Rachel acknowledges that she is experiencing conflict at a practical level, which is a position that she describes, as having been imposed upon her. It is a consequence of her responsibility for care of her children and her husband's partial weekly absence. Though the practical change she will make to her working hours appears small, she articulates the benefits in ideological terms where her anticipated benefit feels much greater than the absolute hours adjustment might indicate:

> …. just having that Tuesday out will bring us a little bit of, collectively, space. A bit of slack in the system… in a way this flexible working thing is also about me catching-up with a situation that has been imposed on me, it is me staking a claim on my right to be a mother

For Rachel reducing her working hours is her public statement of her maternal role and for her is acknowledgement that feels significant and over-due reflecting on the eight years she had worked continuously, full-time simultaneously being primarily responsible for her children. Rachel's interview draws attention to the considerable cognitive and emotional work of mothering that she has become better at than her husband whose essential talents, she suggests, do not lie in household administration

> … when you're hard-pressed you have to play to people's strengths I think. So, actually the home admin is my job, and I like to do it because then I know it's done and I know things won't fall through the net.

Her husband did not support her proposal to reduce her working hours initially, giving financial reasons and also that he thought, *"part-time would damage my career"*, but she persevered and challenged him to find a better solution

> I remember saying to him: 'If you want to find a nanny, if you want to sort it out and think of a solution then go ahead. This is the solution that I'm proposing we go with.' … It was a bit of a struggle convincing him … Work were brilliant about it, work were absolutely no problem at all. Most of my negotiations about flexible working have been at home to be honest.

The intersection of couples' working and caring lives is highly consequential in the Restorative narratives. The incompatibility of ideals and gender-role attitudes that translates into inaction among middle-class dual-career couples is emphasised in Rachel's case (Lyonette and Crompton, 2015). It illustrates the importance, both practically and ideologically, of the extent to which childcare is shared. The Restorative transition narrative is epitomic of the 'having it all by doing it all' characterisation of working mothers which features significantly in popular media discourses of so-called career women juggling and struggling to hold lives and selves together (Armstrong, 2006).

4.1.2 Expansive: re-claiming professional identity and re-booting career

The prime motivation that defines the Expansive narrative speaks to a woman's desire to reconnect to her professional identity and to progress a hitherto stalled organisational career or set out on a new professional path. It speaks of an eroded professional identity and represents a desire to elevate social status outside the family, and in some cases inside as well. Juliet [29] who after 12 years of sporadic self-employment that she fitted around her four children's schedules and her husband's full-time work expressed a desire to be valued *"for me, for who I am and not entirely for how I feature in someone else's life, otherwise I'm just [his] wife, just somebody's mother."*

An unexpected finding was that a quarter of research participants (seven of 30) expressed an expansive, professionally developmental motivation for pursuing a new flexible working arrangement, when the reconciliation of work-life conflict inherent in the Restorative narrative might be more typically anticipated. The Expansive narrative is associated with a move into paid employment after an extended maternity absence or following extended time spent underemployed in marginal part-time roles with limited potential for advancement. An experience participant Lara [6] reflected on:

> I spent sort of five years not really caring what job I was doing. But now I've gone back I'm like, *'this is it, I've got to do something I'm happy with now.'* I need to start thinking about it again as I'm not intending on having any more children. I need to be a bit more aware of my career and start thinking this is my life now so I need to think about what I want to do with it.

In common with other transition narratives was the theme of enduring maternal responsibility irrespective of working hours. Even if they planned to work more hours and do less day-to-day childcare, women retained responsibility for organising it. They planned to draw on an extended care network to facilitate their Expansive transition. In a small number of cases this involved fathers committing to more childcare and domestic work at the margins of their usual working weeks. What was clear in the stories of women reformulating how they combine work and motherhood with professional renewal in mind, was that they had learned from previous dissatisfying work experiences about the centrality of professional identity to their sense of self and, in some cases, of the centrality of the organisational career to their social status. In this transition narrative more than any of the other four, women's part-time work experiences in their work histories were closely connected with their choices about working hours made today and for the future. This past-present-future connection was most evident in a strong desire to disassociate from what was felt to be the professionally corrosive label of "part-time" in order to avoid the marginalisation of the part-time worker that many had personally experienced. The working pattern typically (but not always, in the case of job-sharing for example) featured increasing the hours put to paid work for example increasing from 3 to 4 days per week in combination with location flexibility. Most women had sought more conducive organisational environments in which they could reinvent and experiment with their professional selves (Ibarra, 1999).

The second transition narrative is from Andrea, a law professional poised to enter a new role in a new sector. Andrea and her husband have three children under 10 and the youngest has just started school. Her husband works full-time locally in the same field. They are home owners and live in the small town near where they grew up and both have family near by. Andrea's mother retired recently and looks after the children before and after school a few days each week, and a child-minder looks after the youngest child occasionally. Andrea has always worked in her professional field since qualifying 16 years ago. Since her first child was born she has worked part-time. After five years in a job-share leading a team she felt there was nowhere for her career to go:

> One of the things that has frustrated me about my current job is that I haven't been able to move up into a more senior role

She described the transition she was poised to make into a new role in a new sector, with a new form of flexibility, as a *"moment"* of enormous significance in her evolving biography:

> Many hopes and expectations are resting on this move for me. It's definitely a moment. My husband understands it is a moment … I haven't really said is it ok if I do this? I've just said I'm doing it. He's pretty supportive and knows this is the only option unless I stay [in my old job] for the rest of my life and wither and die inside… I'm also conscious that I've got 30 years before I retire… my mum and my mother-in-law both retired in their mid 50s and I don't want to do that, it's too young. I think

it's been difficult for them to find meaningful things to do. I want to be working and engaged for my whole working life. That might involve moving sideways and doing different types of things and hopefully in my new job that might be possible.

Andrea described the job she was moving into and the addition of a three-hour daily commute into her schedule. She was aware that she had accepted a role that had less management responsibility than her previous role and was in an unfamiliar technical area. It had taken nearly two years to find this job. She reflected on the difficulty she had convincing prospective employers of the value of her history of part-time working and of the legitimacy of her five years job-sharing in a senior management role as credible professional experience. Andrea anticipated moving into full-time work in the near future, she thought *"within a year"*, and viewed her new role as transitional rather than an end in itself; a way back on the path to a professional career and renewal of her professional identity. Andrea's maternal identity is secure. She expresses confidence in her own style of mothering central to which is *"being there"*, however not at the expense of her sense of self.

> Maybe I will feel like I should do more, you know, I know a lot of people worry about seeing their children enough. But you know then I think I've been working part-time for 10 years, they've had a lot of me. I will still be here a lot more than I will not be here. I'm only commuting 3 days a week. So I'm going to have a word with myself if I start getting too sad and guilty about it

She will retain the organising of domestic life and childcare, and has some well-established systems and process that support her e.g. a folder containing all the children's clubs/activity information, automated online weekly grocery orders, but the pressure of deadlines to be there at the right time for the right event will pass, she thinks, to her husband:

> The burden is definitely going to be shifted to James on the days I will be in [the city]… he's always worked closer to home because of the children and he pretty much takes over the parenting in the evenings, but the pressure isn't on him in the same way … it's really not a massive change for him he just needs to get back half an hour earlier than usual and not travel to London on the same days as me

Andrea's new start was anticipated with excitement and a small amount of anxiety, but largely with positivity and optimism. It was facilitated by the unusual situation of a prospective employer inviting applications for part-time and flexible working patterns from the point of hire.

4.1.3 Protective: protecting professional identity

Transition narratives described as protective reflect planned occupational adjustments that are made in order to manage intensive jobs with the aim of achieving balance and protecting professional identity and status. The balance that is sought is to benefit from the stimulation, demands and the rewards of their professional work without compromising the quality of their involvement and experience of their family lives. Akin to

Crompton and Harris's (1998) Maximiser and Satisficer types, in that goal-orientation is strong and multi-stranded, with ambitions for both work and for family.

The occupational adjustments women make are described as protective because they are well planned and carefully designed by the individual with the intention to minimise damage to and erosion of their professional status. The damage they seek to defend against is the double-hit of the motherhood penalty and of associations that may be made between part-time working hours and diminished professionalism and work commitment. Autonomy and control over working hours and locations is key to implementing this self-defensive strategy, which for some women, is conferred with their seniority within the organisation. Those who did not have that level of status at work strategically made pre-emptive, lateral job moves to less intensive roles with more predictable workflow. Women making a protective adjustment to working time, or a pre-emptive lateral move, possess insight into the challenging situation for women in the workplace. This is insight that they gained either from personal experience of marginalisation and underemployment, or by observing what happens to other women at work who go part-time. The intent driving these protective moves is to maintain one's professional status and as such they proceed with their own transitions with cautious optimism. Their strategy is to insulate themselves from the perceived challenges and failures that befall women through good planning and thoughtful management of the practicalities of childcare, travel, and the design of their jobs. This approach is epitomic of Rottenberg's (2013) new neoliberal femininity in which professional woman is self-managing, self-propelled and leading a well-planned life. The third transition narrative is illustrated by Sasha. Sasha is a senior manager in a large private sector firm. She is married with two pre-school age children and earns more than her husband in a job that often requires travel in the UK and oversees. We enter Sasha's narrative when she is discussing her approach to combining professional work and motherhood using a seemingly small but significant fractional adjustment to her full-time contract (90%) and trying not to work on Fridays.

> I knew I always enjoyed my job. But the first time, I didn't know how I would feel about being a working mum when I went back. Second time I had the best time off on maternity leave, a much better time and I enjoyed it so much … it was so rewarding spending time with both kids, I took longer off … I also realised how much I enjoyed being back at work and there was this sense of almost, the realisation of how much work was important to me … that has only happened post-children, it was unexpected, that enjoying my work would define who is me.

Sasha describes an experience of becoming a mother and growing her family as expansive professionally and defining of the self, of *"who is me"* and this appears essential in orientating her work-life preference towards balance and coherence across both domains and identities, as she describes here:

> It's also in my mind-set, the balance between working and family, I mean what's the point in having children if you're not going to be there to bring them up? But I love my job, it's my hobby … it's something that is intrinsic to me and I put my all into my work…that's why I got to 4 days at work, 3 days with the family as the right balance … If I needed to I would stop, of course I would. Although I am super career-driven and I enjoy my job, I enjoy getting a pay check as I think it gives us options to do nice things as a family, but if I thought at any point it was having a real impact on the family I'd stop tomorrow. I'd give it all up, definitely.

Sasha had been through a promotion process whilst on maternity leave with her second child. Promotion she felt had been a long time coming. She had first applied and was unsuccessful two years earlier when she had returned from her first period of maternity leave. Her decision to work Monday to Thursday operationalises the balanced involvement she seeks in both home and professional domains. She acknowledges that she feels confident now that she is in a more senior job, to announce her working pattern and to publicly claim part-time status. At the same time she is offering public reassurance to colleagues and clients that she will always be flexible in the direction of work:

> I think it gets easier as you go up the ladder. I know as I've spoken to a few people, a number of guys who I've talked to and told them I'm part-time and they've sort of rolled their eyes a bit and they're like they've worked with part-time people on projects and it just doesn't work. So I ask why doesn't it work and you get to the root cause of it and it's that the people they've worked with can't be flexible, so they're doing drop-offs and pick-ups every day and having to do 9-5 and actually in this industry that's a struggle

Her relationship with her husband she describes as *"a team",* neither have extended family near by and so do not and cannot rely on family help with childcare. They share domestic work between them and Sasha organises childcare and is the *"first call"* parent in case of emergencies.

> We try not to prioritise one career over another, we're a team, we're 50:50 on most things … I'm more career-driven than he is, but he's recently made a move into a career job that he's interested in.

Sasha demonstrates some of the qualities of Blair-Loy's (2003) *Mavericks*, women in elite occupations who orientate between two competing devotions, the work-devotion schema and the family-devotion schema. The Mavericks are forging careers whilst being family-centred, flouting the powerful work-devotion schema by reducing their hours and attempting a re-shaping of the rules of engagement with intensive jobs. Sasha's narrative speaks of seniority and influence, as well as self-confidence, financial capacity (to go to the market for flexible childcare), and an egalitarian partnership.

Where seniority and influence is lacking at work, among the middle managers for example, protective narratives were also found to describe orchestrated moves into jobs that women anticipate will be less intensive and more predictable; jobs in which they will not fail to meet the high standards of professionalism that they set for themselves and that they are

known for within their organisations. Tomlinson (2006) made analytical distinctions between three types of transition: strategic, reactive, or compromised, each one more or less enabling or restrictive in terms of personal preferences and prospects in the labour market. She proposed that strategic transitions are the most enabling, and strategic transitions into part-time work tend to be preferential, goal-oriented, forward-planned, and intentional by those who make them. Women in this study narrating strategic and professionally protective intent for their impending transition described their objectives both positively and negatively, with emphasis on success in work and family defined by absence of negative outcomes. Sasha, for example said *"I will know its working of there are no disasters, I just aim for a disaster-free week".* Most akin to Crompton & Harris' (1998) Maximiser and Satisficer work-life approaches. The difference between the two being that the Maximiser approach speaks of a refusal to compromise in achievement of goals for both work and family. The Satisficer approach speaks of compromise in attempting to achieve success in both areas without maximising either. Despite much mention in the narratives of career and professional status, women in this study narrating a Protective transition are not being Careerist in the sense of putting professional life *before* domestic life as in the traditional career-woman stereotype (Tomlinson, 2006b). They are strategically protecting their professional selves and simultaneously making room for motherhood.

4.1.4 Compromised: circumstances overpowering ideals

The Compromised transition narrative indicates an occupational move into what is perceived as a means-to-an-end situation. Compromised transitions reflect working pattern choices that are structured by external circumstances and are made in situations that are not as open or free as they could be in terms of facilitating expression of a coherent maternal and professional identity and achieving an individual's ideal way to combine work with family life. Six women identified with the choice-no-choice characteristic of this transition that emphasises the role of external structuring factors over ones perceived ideal ways of combining work with care at that moment. Many also stressed the time-limited nature of this transition that they hoped - not all were confident enough to expect - that their situations would change to something more aligned with their preferences. The future trigger events were speculated to be either securing a new job with a new employer thus enabling them to resign, or that they might become pregnant again enabling them to delay finding and designing more preferential work-life combinations.

This transition narrative does not map neatly on to Crompton & Harris (1999) and Tomlinson's (2006) typologies, approximating Crompton's Careerist-by-necessity approach, and a hybrid of Tomlinson's (2006b) reactive and compromised-choice transitions. Two

external factors are particularly salient across all compromised transition narratives, that of economic need and of cultural tolerance of flexible working in the workplace. The workplace context is foregrounded in these narratives. Four of the eight women who expressed the sub-optimal design of their new working pattern attributed that, in significant part, to structural change occurring in their employing organisations during their maternity absences. Organisational mergers and take-overs in the private sector, and cost reduction in the public sector had de-stabilized the environments to which they were returning and as a consequence policies changed and line-manager relationships were lost. Positive relationships with line managers are well documented to be vital in securing access to preferential working patterns manager(Brescoll *et al.*, 2013, Arnaud and Wasieleski, 2014, Daverth *et al.*, 2016). In this study some women felt compelled to move into roles and working arrangements that if they had a free choice, they would not have accepted.

Jenny and her account of her anticipated move into a new senior management role in the public sector illustrate this fourth transition narrative. Jenny is married and her husband works in a senior management role in the private sector. Jenny has worked in different roles in her organisation over the last eight years and has risen steadily into management in a specialist area and was leading a small team. She had her only child 12 months previously and Jenny had recently returned to work. Her daughter is looked after by a combination of a local child-minder and Jenny's parents. Their child-minder does not offer care during school holidays (12 weeks of the year), and so Jenny's parents look after her child during these periods. The couple are in the midst of a home-renovation project, which began before Jenny became pregnant. Progress has slowed down as their finances dwindled during her three month unpaid extension to nine months paid maternity leave. As well as the financial drivers of a return to work, Jenny reflected on her return-to-work in identity terms and how surprisingly fluid her work orientation had proved to be:

> …my work, it's still an element I have that's mine, that's me even, that proves I can actually operate in that adult world …if you'd have asked me what work meant to me in the early days of maternity leave you would have got a different answer … I'd have said that I just want to stay at home and bring up my daughter of course. Ridiculous!

She was returning to her old employer but in a new role that had been created as part of an organisational re-structure that happened during her maternity absence. It is not her old job and is not the job that she would ideally be doing. She was staggering her return to work by using her accumulated annual leave to work a 3-day week pattern and gradually increasing to 4 days within 3 months. Jenny wants to work and she also needs to work for financial reasons and now feels trapped in her situation at work and overwhelmed by the prospect of finding a new part-time role outside her organisation.

…it's a whole level of thinking that I hadn't really considered before having a baby because before I would have just thought, well I'm not very happy with my job, so let's find another one. Whereas now I'm thinking actually I do want another job but I definitely want that on reduced hours… how easy is that to find? It's adding an extra level of complexity to the decision. So a part of me does think, well I'll just get on with it and see it as a short-term thing and then review if or when we have a second child

The salience of her professional identity to her sense of self compels her to work, and the necessity to earn the money to pay for the home projects and to support a second pregnancy compels her to return to her previous employer. The compromise she accepts is in relation to the job to which she is returning to and the flexible working arrangement that she has managed to negotiate with her new line-manager. She feels that the organisational re-structuring and her line-manager's preference have determined what her job is and how she will do it, about which she had little choice. Although her situation is facilitated by affordable childcare by her parents and a local child-minder, her options to move jobs are constrained by the lack of an accessible jobs market for part-time and flexible roles at her occupational level. It was a level of compromise that she felt was unsustainable in the medium-term.

I'm going to have to sit down and have a conversation with my boss because I don't want to be working five days a week and I don't want to be doing compressed hours on four days a week … he said I had to be physically here in the office every day ... its ludicrous really because the [organisation] is going through this whole transformation process and part of it is getting more people to work anywhere, but this doesn't seem to have reached my boss

Compromise is a feature of <u>all</u> the women's stories of opportunity, choice and decision-making in relation to combining work with childcare and is reflected to some degree in each of the five transition narratives. What is salient about the level of compromise that characterises this particular narrative is the clear visibility of the structuring factors to the individuals and the erosion of their confidence in the likelihood of the transition being successful and sustainable. Too much compromise and distance between what is preferable and what is possible, it seems diminishes the confidence and optimism with which women approach the transition. They expect it to be difficult and unsustainable.

Women's ideal ways to combine professional work and motherhood are based in part on notions of good mothering and about what is appropriate care for children at that time (Duncan and Irwin, 2004). Scholars have demonstrated that these ideals about motherhood and mothering are as fluid and amenable to change as the circumstances within which they are formed (Himmelweit and Sigala, 2004, McDowell *et al.*, 2005). This signals that the meshing of women's professional and maternal lives and selves is dynamic. It is continuously under review as women react, protect, expand, compromise, and make-sense of their work-life opportunities and choices. Within the Compromised transition narrative, women's abilities to achieve their ideal ways to combine work and care are supressed at that moment.

Compromised transition narratives foreground the financial commitments of the family to which the women's paid work contributes significantly and leave little potential for exploring their ideal way of working and of combining work with care. There is a strong choice/no-choice narrative in the accounts of women who emphasise factors outside their control as central to their choice of jobs and the ways that they perform them.

4.1.5 Sense-making: working out how professional identity fits with new motherhood

This is a feeling transition, characterised by working out as one goes along how one feels about the compatibility and coherence of maternal and professional roles and identities. The Sense-making transition narrative was most often heard from first-time mothers returning to work following a long period of maternity leave (i.e. around 12 months) and simultaneously transitioning to a part-time working arrangement. The return-to-work transition eclipses the significance of the transition to part-time and flexible working in women's stories. As such there is a sense-making dimension that can be discerned in many of the first-time mother's return-to-work narratives, and also within the reflections of mothers of older children looking back at their own first-return experiences. The adjustment from full-time maternal presence to part-time presence is given emotional primacy, and the intricately and thoughtfully planned childcare arrangements become the fixed construct around which professional working patterns are structured. That women would return to professional and managerial work was never in doubt and full-time work was definitively not their preferred option; working part-time is understood as the right thing to do. How they would feel about their careers and their professional futures was what was unknown and assumed to be unknowable until one was returned to the workplace. The sense-making narrative embraces the potential for motherhood to have changed them and seeks to test whether their changed outlook and priorities extend to the professional 'me' they used to be.

The transition is approached as if it were a test, a test both of their maternal judgement about the right childcare, and, of the centrality of their professional identities to their sense of self. The sense-making journey that characterises this transition is a test of how transformed they are by motherhood and whether work and career will recede in importance or expand. It is as if the identity transformation on becoming a mother is not yet fully complete until they have tested how comfortably they can integrate professional work into their model of being a good mother. In this sense the anticipation of transition to a part-time working pattern among new mothers represents a best-of-both world's opportunity to *formulate* their attitudes and orientation to work.

The next interview extract is from an interview with Emma, a senior manager in the private sector. Emma is married, owns her home, and had enjoyed an 18-year career before her longed-for first pregnancy. For many years Emma was the main breadwinner and

provider for her family. Her husband had recently experienced some career success and was now earning significantly more than he had done which meant the family could be supported by his income without making major lifestyle adjustments. She loved the job she was doing before maternity leave although questioned the compatibility of its design and long-hours demands with her new life as a mother.

> It was the most amazing job, I loved it completely but obviously it's not very flexible when it comes to child-care. So they've very kindly found me a different job to do when I go back … I have zero specialism in anything to do with it … I am not entirely convinced there is a real job there ... I don't know how it's going to work but we're going to make it work somehow… I've never entertained the idea of going back full-time because we wanted to have my son for a long long time and it's taken a lot of heartache and effort to get to this stage I didn't really feel I could go back and not enjoy him for at least half the week. So that was the decision for the 3 days as well. It was massively stressful though working out whether to put him into nursery whether that was the right thing for him…

Emma traced her decision made during pregnancy to return-to-work part-time to her long, exhausting and medicalised journey to pregnancy, and also to the experience of a difficult birth. The centrality of her perception of her child's needs is clear in her decision-making about work and care. That she felt her job was unsuitable for part-time working was something *"which I had sort of thought and didn't really want to face… but when they said it, it did feel like a bit of a rejection"* although she turned her disappointment into acceptance of her new, potentially marginalised position and justified it to herself by giving primacy to her maternal goals and identity and relegating her professional goals and identity to second place.

> I did feel a bit sad and it had a bit of an end-of-an-era feeling to it. And I did worry that I am never going to get such a great job again, but then you very quickly kind of put it in perspective and you come home and think, 'well actually I wanted to be in this position to have my son, to be a mum so I had better get on with it.' Maybe you can't have it all sometimes.

Emma described the tests she will apply, or in other words, the sense that she seeks to make of her transition ideally within six months of returning to work:

> the primary thing will be if my son appears to be happy in his child-care situation…and that he seems he's having a reasonable time there and it's not confusing him spending some time with me and some time with someone else. If that looks good then that will make me happy and make me feel like it's worked. Then I guess on another level if this new job is working out; that it feels like stimulating work, it feels like I'm actually making a contribution and its valued and that kind of thing, then that's also the other big tick

She illustrates how uncertain the outcome of the transition is for her. Her old professional anchors are adrift and she is being required by her employer to re-invent herself in a new role, without some of the responsibilities she once had (of a team, of high-profile

projects) in a job they had mutually deemed more suitable for part-time working. She accepts this position it seems, as legitimate compensation for her breach of the workplace norms by her request to work part-time and have control over her own schedule. Emma appears comfortable with her new maternal identity but unsure how her old professional self will now relate to her new maternal self. Emma feels her career, or at least her *first* career, is behind her. She does however remain attached to her professional identity although she is ambivalent about her current role. Elements of this sense-making narrative appear self-fulfilling, that is if Emma feels under-valued at work and marginalised by less important work then she will have been correct to assume that she cannot *"have it all"* and her decision to reduce her hours will have been justified. These outcomes are just the ones that the Protective transition narrative is attempting to avoid.

4.2 Five transition narratives: a fluid conceptual framework

This analysis has described what the impending transition means to women, their reasons for making a change to the way they work and their expectations of the benefits this particular change will bring. Single case illustrations reveal the diversity of professional and managerial women's situations and make visible the inter-locking factors influencing the inter-linked decisions of how to work and how to care. The strength and influence of an array of factors is present in the transition narratives: of care networks, of workplace policies, practices and understandings, of complex gendered moral rationalities of care between partners, of identity and sense of self, perceived economic need, biographical life stage and journey to pregnancy, of past experiences and anticipated futures. These factors are unpicked and examined in more detail in chapter five.

Compromise is evident in all the transition narratives: between an ideal model of mothering and what is practically possible within their care resources, and between an ideal model of professionalism and what is culturally tolerated at work. Most women tacitly accepted a degree of compromise as an inevitable consequence of motherhood, but for some women compromise defined their transition in marked ways. The norms and practices of employers structured their working (and caring) patterns in ways which women felt afforded them little or no choice. For contemporary women careers and lives appear to be inextricably entwined, work and private life are interconnected and yet care and career are often in conflict. Consequently, reconfigurations in working patterns are commonly understood as a form of conflict-resolution strategy deployed in an effort to more compatibly integrate the intersecting pressures of work and care. As well as offering evidence of the continued existence of this conflict-resolution strategy within the Restorative narrative, this analysis finds greater variation in the personal intentions behind professional women's work-

life re-configurations than is suggested by the rational-choice, economic perspectives (Hakim, 2000) on women's employment transitions and career-making.

What distinguishes Restorative, Expansive, Protective, Compromised and Sense-making narratives from one another is the meaning and significance of the impending transition in practical terms and ideologically to women's sense of self. Individuals' meanings were sometimes stated explicitly in interviews and sometimes inferred by the researcher but always a co-created product of the interview encounter. There were issues and factors that women attributed as meaningful to their decision-making about transition to flexible working yet did not define it. Financial factors for example, such as obligations to meet mortgage re-payments, and to meet the lifestyle aspirations for the family, were salient in the majority of women's reflections about their general motivations to engage in paid work. Money was instrumental in the amount of paid work women did in only a few cases. It emerged as a less constraining force on the way that women worked, that is, the patterning of their paid work in a week, month or year, than the schedules of providers in care networks and the practices and attitudes of employers towards part-time and flexible working. These influences are discussed further in the chapter that follows.

One person might identify more significantly with one transition narrative or another at different transitional points, and from these shifting identifications it becomes possible to discern how individual transitions form work-life trajectories at a finer level of granularity than previously researched (Tomlinson, 2006b). The benefit of this longitudinal research methodology is to be able to demonstrate this by analysing women's changed circumstances and contrasting narratives through time. The five transition narratives describe women's situations and motivations, not a 'type of person' or a work-life orientation as is common in one-off studies. Emphasised in the narratives are the influence of factors external to the self in determining the career opportunities and work-life choices available to women. Situations and circumstances change through time, and as such so it is reasonable to expect that women's narratives will change through time and future transitions. The fast pace and the dynamism of lived reality calls for an equally fluid and dynamic set of explanations for the professional moves women make through part-time and flexible work.

The next chapter examines the structuring factors that influence and complicate women's decisions about how to work and how to care. The transition narratives are referenced throughout the analysis that follows in the identifiers that accompany each interview extract.

Chapter 5: Factors influencing choices and opportunities for flexible working

This chapter explores the economic, social, cultural and personal factors that are material to women's decisions about how they put their professional and maternal lives and selves together. Five structuring factors are identified and their relative grip on professional mother's work-life opportunities and capacity for paid work are discussed in turn. Section 5.1 discusses the influence of money, mortgages and lifestyle aspirations on women's decisions about how much to work outside the home. Section 5.2 explores the influence of women's childcare networks on their capacity for paid work. Section 5.3 describes the complex care relationships within couples, and how a partner's working pattern facilitates or constrains mothers' availability paid work. Section 5.4 discusses how women's moral views about good mothering influences how and how much paid work is in their lives. Section 5.5 describes the features of the workplace and women's positioning within it which frame the opportunities they perceive to adopt the working arrangement that they need. This chapter concludes by discussing the complex settlement of these five structuring factors.

5.1 Money, mortgages and lifestyle aspirations

> I need to work 80% to earn the minimum we need so that absolutely isn't a choice, but it is my choice to go on holiday, and drive a car, and live here and it's that and how we live that's driving how much we need to earn … we have 3 children, we have by no means a luxurious lifestyle but we have more than a lot of other people.
>
> *Eleanor [13], Senior Manager, Public sector, 3 children<7, Compromised, 4 days pw*

Women's participation in professional work was not purely driven by financial necessity. Their working hours choices were structured in part by the family's financial commitments and need to achieve a desired level of income, but the relationship between women's working hours and the financial needs of the family is not straightforward. Eleanor [13], quoted above, is aware that her lifestyle choices had constrained her ideal choice of working arrangement and described a need to earn a minimum amount for the family as determining the amount of work hours in her life.

For the year ending 5 April 2015 the median gross annual earnings for full-time employees were £27,600 (ONS, 2016). Individual and household earnings information was not requested of the participants in this study, but where offered the range appeared to be great and significantly higher than the national median. One senior manager employed in the public sector volunteered information about her £22,000 pro-rated gross annual salary. Another senior manager in the private sector said she earned in excess of £250,000 of gross salary and bonus. Lower and higher earning women alike described an obligation to service

on-going financial commitments, such as mortgage loans and other credit, and to maintain a standard of living.

Johnston and Swanson (2007) have suggested that financial need is relative and socially constructed. Whilst in practical terms women in better-off households are more able to choose not to work, their study of 98 professional women showed that middle-class women may well feel a need to contribute and not to be completely dependent on their partners, or they may describe as a need a desired standard of income or one they had been used to before children. Amanda, a senior manager and mother of two children age 4 and 6 illustrates this point in her reflection of the need she felt, and continues to feel, to be financially independent and how being at least an equal earner elevates her status and influence in her relationship with her husband:

> I didn't want to be in a situation where I wasn't earning at least close to the same amount as him because I'd just been so used to it. When I was an equal earner I felt I had more authority in our relationship. I felt very uncomfortable being financially dependent on my husband during maternity leave … I didn't like being answerable to how money was spent and I *really* didn't like having to ask him to put money in the joint account.
>
> *Amanda [10] Senior Manager, Finance sector, 2 children<6, Expansive, 4.5 days pw, 1.5 days at home*

Juliet [29], Finance Manager in the private sector and mother of four children aged between six and 17, similarly articulated her motivation to contribute financially to the family: *"when I'm contributing financially I feel more part decisions … it is kind of how I put a value on myself."* That women's perceived financial need was relative in the context of their lifestyles and earner status is not to suggest that any pressure women felt to sustain a level of income was not real. Hayley [14] recalled hard financial times for the family, and how the expenses associated with travel to work and childcare supressed her free choice of employment:

> …he lost his job when I was on maternity leave so stuff like what I really personally wanted to do with my career got pushed right down, I just needed to get back to work … I remember doing constant calculations about childcare versus commuting versus childcare vouchers versus stopping working. I just needed to know that we had 'x' amount coming in and that we wouldn't starve and then I could sleep at night.
>
> *Hayley [14] Research Manager, public sector,2 children <8, Compromised, 4 days pw, 2 from home*

Lara [6], a law professional in private practice and mother of two pre-school children was one of very few women who signalled discomfort with the burden of breadwinning. Lara dismissed the idea of not earning as *"pointless thinking about me not working because it can't happen."* She earned significantly more than her husband and her salary contributed more to the household. Lara acknowledged her breadwinner status had constrained her free choice about how to be the mother she wanted to be:

The fact that I work at all is driven by financial necessity and the way I have done it was carefully considered on a financial basis. By the time you consider tax and the cost of childcare I worked out that the difference between me working five days a week and 3 days a week was £5000, it's not a lot really. I mean obviously it is a lot of money to a lot of people but it's not a lot to me if the price is being away from my children the whole week

Lara [6], Law professional, private sector, 2 pre-school children, Compromised, 3 days pw, no location flexibility

Lara applied an accounting logic to calculating the affordability of her working pattern by off-setting costs of childcare against her income. There were no examples of this arithmetic approach being applied to household income, only to the woman's income. This signals that the costs of care are considered an extension of maternal responsibility, and was similarly found by Harkness (2008).

Security and regularity of income was important for the few women whose income contributed significantly to the household and whose partner had an irregular income profile, through self-employment for example. In these situations women felt compelled to retain jobs and achieve a minimum number of paid hours.

He is doing very well in what he does, but because it's not a salaried job, he can go through dry spell which would mean that we wouldn't have money coming in… it's a comfort that one of us has a solid monthly turn to cover times such as those

Claire [2], Law professional, private sector, 1 infant, Compromised/Sense-Making, 3 days pw, some location flexibility

Women who earned less than their partners, not even significantly less, often referred to their secondary earner status in the household. Some women referred to their income as providing for the extras that make family life nice and not for the every-day fundamentals, as Charlotte [26], Sales Manager and mother of two children under 6, explained: *"I am working so we can have better things…I'm giving us lifestyle choices"*. Gemma [8], a Strategy Manager in the public sector and mother of two pre-school children was not content with that situation and the power dynamic that plays out in her relationship:

Because he earns more than me, actually probably more than I ever could in the public sector, there is this sense that my income is secondary and it's his earnings that keep the household afloat. It feels like decisions about my work are then also relegated to second place and become all about paying for childcare and holidays

Gemma [8], Strategy Manager, public sector, 2 pre-school children, Expansive, 3 days pw in a job-share

Income inequalities within male and female couples are in part an effect of the persistence of the gender pay gap and a legacy of lower earnings for women. Gendered wage inequalities intersect with traditionally gendered assumptions of care to perpetuate domestic

inequality in couple relationships. Heterosexual couples privilege the continuity of the highest earner's income trajectory over that of the lower earner because it seems more immediately affordable to reduce women's less well remunerated working hours than men's better paid time. On going financial commitments compelled women to work. Whilst these relatively well-resourced women were in principle freer to choose not to, the affordability of work in the context of on going financial commitments and lifestyle aspirations remained an important consideration in decisions about working hours.

5.2 Who cares and how much it costs

> I couldn't do any of this without the childcare. We have quite a combination to manage over the week. Mondays, they're in all day at nursery 8 'til 6. Tuesday they're in 8 'til 3.30 and Andrew's mum picks them up and has them until one of us gets home. Wednesday they go to nursery in the morning and my husband has them in the afternoon, because he works flexible shifts and can be there most weeks. Thursday they go into nursery half a day and my mum has them in the afternoon. And Friday I'm off work so it's me all day.
>
> *Sophie [30], Communications Manager, private sector, 2 pre-school children, Expansive, 4 days pw, some schedule flexibility*

This section attends to the structuring influence of how care is organised for infants, pre-schoolers and older children, and how this impacts women's capacity and availability for work. Sophie [30], quoted above, was not unusual in combining various forms of childcare within a single day and across a week in order to increase her capacity for paid work and stretch the length of her working day. Sophie was in an unusual position within this particular group of women because her husband regularly looked after their children, for at least half a day during a typical working week. Most women in this study had found solutions to childcare that did not depend on the routine involvement of fathers.

The childcare networks in these women's lives involved many actors: partners, nannies, child-minders, au-pairs, grandparents, and institutions e.g. nurseries, schools and sports/activity clubs. Tomlinson (2006b) defined care networks as the:

> formal and informal, paid and unpaid, care arrangements, networks and institutions that provide women with the opportunity to work. These resources include care and support by partners, friends and extended family members along with more formal facilities and services such as nurseries, schools and after school clubs (Tomlinson, 2006b p370)

Tomlinson views care networks as resources that facilitate women's lives in a similar vein to Bourdieu's notion of social capital (Bordieu, 1986), whereby effective social networks facilitate mothers in their attempts to reconcile work and family life. When these networks breakdown or are insufficient women face constraints in their attempts to reconcile work and family life.

In this study it was clear that care networks are an essential part of the scaffolding around women's lives and structure women's decisions about part-time and flexible work. The least flexible and most constraining forms of care in terms of working time were provided by institutions at premises outside the home e.g. nurseries, pre-schools, schools, colleges, and child-minders providing care in their own homes. Opening and closing times structured the time women had available for work. Commuting distance between home and location of the childcare facility further constrained women's work schedules. Care provided by grandparents now retired from paid work was valued highly by women who were able to benefit from a regular arrangement. Grandparent care was valued for a number of perceived benefits: for keeping care in the family, for maintaining continuity of care as children grow-up, and for the financial benefit of reduced household expenditure on private childcare. Six women received regular childcare support from their own or their partner's parents, or a combination of both.

> It's a necessity really that our mums have stepped in. It's very difficult to get from and to London from here between 9 and five so that's why we asked for their help two afternoons a week, it just means that it's only on one day I need to leave work at 4.30 to pick the children up from nursery at 6
>
> *Sophie [30], Communications Manager, private sector, 2 pre-school children, Expansive, 4 days pw, some schedule flexibility*

Workers who had migrated to the UK from other countries felt the absence of family networks particularly acutely. One participant originally from India who was reducing her working hours and going part-time described her restricted childcare options:

> We really struggled not having any family here… I mean in India it is cultural that parents want to help parents… there's not very much part-time work but there are so many female CEOs in India and I think if we lived there I could be, I really strongly believe that. But anyway we don't have family here so whatever childcare solution we need we have to buy it. We have to go to the market.
>
> *Meera[7], Operations Director, private sector, 2 children age 2 and 5, Compromised, 3 days pw, schedule and location flexibility*

A key finding is that women's decisions about childcare are linked to their decisions about their working hours, schedules and locations. Women's childcare solutions were highly individualised, just as their flexible working arrangements were, and there were discernable patterns in the types of childcare that were most and least constraining on professional mother's schedules. The options that offered the women most flexibility were also the most expensive. For women without extended family networks locally or the financial resources to pay the market rate, nannies or child-minders (including live-in au-pairs) were felt to offer the most flexibility. As Sasha [5] indicates below, holding on to an effective childcare

arrangement is so highly prized that it becomes a structuring feature of other decisions about the family's future:

> We actually want to move out of the city but we have a perfect childcare situation here and until the kids are older I'm not going anywhere. Our child-minder lives on our street and I drop the kids off at 8am and she walks my daughter to school, and then takes my son to pre-school. She picks them up and feeds them and then they play at her house with another 3 kids until one of us can get there about 6.30. The brilliant things is that there is no extra commute and she can be flexible and has them for extra time here and there
>
> *Sasha [5] Senior Manager, private sector, 2 pre-school children, Protective, 90% of full-time working hours, some schedule and location flexibility*

In a small number of cases (five) women paid for significantly more hours of childcare than their own contracted work hours in order to secure the flexibility they felt they needed to successfully operate a part-time working pattern in their occupations:

> Our nanny comes to the house at 7 in the morning she leaves at 7 at the very earliest. She is totally flexible so I agreed with her that even though she doesn't work on Fridays, on Fridays I might need her for the whole day or part of the day. To be honest, at the beginning we looked at nursery but it would not have worked for us. I do not know how we would do it without her. She's amazing and I feel very dependent … it's very expensive and clearly between us we are very high income-earners and at £32,000 a year we still think it's expensive
>
> *Jessica [23] Senior Manager, private sector, 1 infant, Protective, 4 days pw, full schedule and location flexibility*

Women frequently mentioned the high cost of childcare for infants and toddlers and the impact on their working hours choices. For some women in managerial roles, the cost of institutional childcare eclipsed her earned income. Avoiding this expense by using grandparents made professional work possible:

> I suppose if we had childcare costs to bear in mind it might have been more of a weigh-up about whether I went back to work at all but because we know that we don't have to pay for that, I mean we might pay our parents something to look after him for food and outings but it's not the same as paying fifty or sixty pounds a day for a nursery
>
> *Nina [16], Research Manager, private sector, 1 infant, Compromised/Sense-Making, 4 days pw*

When care networks break down, women's plans are thrown. Gemma [8] described a breakdown in her care network that compelled her to reappraise her childcare solution. Gemma's reflection illustrates the interrelated nature of decisions about childcare and decisions about working patterns:

Our childcare arrangement fell through for our youngest daughter the child-minder announced that she was going to term time only. We tried to think about whether we could make it work but we just need more hours all year round. I found a nanny-share with someone locally and I met up with her and liked her and met with the nanny and I just decided that if I was going to go into what was a new and challenging job and he was going to continue to be away with work, then we needed childcare that was just a bit more wrapped around and was at home …it is prohibitively expensive really, I mean it pretty much wipes out my salary but at least it is working well so far.

Gemma [8], Strategy Manager, public sector, 2 pre-school children, Expansive, 3 days pw in a job-share

The often commented upon high costs of formal childcare is a reflection of policy context in the UK at the time women were making their transitions into part-time and flexible work. They were doing so in the context of no universal state support for childcare for under twos. At the time of this research funded childcare places were restricted to three months after the child's third birthday and capped at 14 hours per week. The cost of care for infants and toddlers was borne by the family and necessarily introduced a significant financial consideration into decisions about care and work.

Mothers of infants and pre-schoolers had access to more continuous and year round hours of childcare in institutional settings than mothers of school age children. Mothers of children in state schools spoke of the changing temporal pattern of institutional care in the progression from private nurseries and preschools to school at age four. This was described as a trigger for commensurate change in their own working patterns:

When Jack was in Year 2 I switched from 4 days a week in the office to spreading my 4 days work across five. This meant that I could be there for the end of the school day and he didn't need to go to after-school club. This year it's got easier still now he's in Year 4 and walks himself the really short distance to school so I can be in the office by 9.15 which is great

Cathy [4], Senior Manager, public sector, 2 teenage children, Restorative, 80% of full-time, schedule flexibility

Different types of formal and informal childcare support are available as children grow up. Many of the mothers of school age children found it necessary to patch together a full day of care by combining breakfast clubs and after-school clubs to book-end an 8.30am-3.30pm school day. It was usual to use their own annual leave and an assortment of holiday clubs to cover the 12 weeks of school holidays per year. Mothers of school age and older children remarked that not only did consistent formal childcare become harder to access; it also became the subject of negotiation between parent and child. Older children were less biddable than infants and toddlers and expressed their preferences for the care environments they did and did not wish to attend.

The kids go to breakfast club at half past 7, then school and then they're with the child-minder until half past six. That's the longest day, that's 11 hours for them in child-care. I've tried different things and we'd settled on afterschool club for quite a while as they both liked it but then they started to complain about it and say they didn't want to go. I get that. They're bored, they're tired, they want to be at home or doing other things like swimming but there is no one to take them.

> *Jane [12], Project Manager, public sector, 2 children under 8, Restorative, Part-time 4.5 days, 2 days from home*

Noticeably absent from most women's accounts of the structuring influence of childcare on their own patterns of work was a reliance on networks of friends for informal childcare. This is potentially a reflection of women's class position since it has been shown that informal childcare and local friendship networks feature more prominently in the care networks around working class women's lives (Walkerdine *et al.*, 2001, Crompton and Lyonette, 2007a). Professional mothers relied upon local friends only in emergencies when problems on the commute for example, delayed them picking up their children from childcare, but not for regular care. As such informal care was a weaker influence on the strength and resilience of a woman's care networks than formal childcare, and certainly weaker than partners' working patterns, which are now discussed.

5.3 Partners and their working patterns

Often when male partners worked long hours or long distance and stayed away from home during the week, women's employment was adjusted to different ways of combining work with childcare. The unreliability of male partners' working patterns was a significant structuring influence on women's capacity for paid work, about which they had a lot to say:

> He's not here for a couple of days each week and he can't seem to predict when those days are. If he's going to continue to work like that it means that I have got not choice really. I have to count him out of all the logistics and choose childcare that I know I can get to. I mean it is just epically complicated when he is not here to get two children to two different places and then turn up at work on time and ready to go
>
> *Gemma [8], Strategy Manager, public sector, 2 pre-school children, Expansive, 3 days pw in a job-share*

How amenable male partners are to adjusting their working patterns reflects something of a couple's gender role ideology. Arlie Hochschild (1989) identified three types of gender role ideology in heterosexual married couples: traditional, transitional, and egalitarian. She identified that mismatches in gender role ideology between partners, or between individual ideology and lived reality causes conflict in relationships. The majority of women in this study who expressed egalitarian ideals described a lived experience that was transitional (in 18 of 25 cases) whereby the women retained responsibility for home and childcare. Only four of the 29 partnered women in this study described a lived reality that

was egalitarian and involved a sharing of power within the partnership as well as the demands and rewards of work and childcare. Rachel's [25] experience offers sharp insight into the mismatch of the egalitarian ideology that she shared with her husband with her experience of daily life. She recognises how her husband's working pattern has structured her own and rendered an ideal impossible to achieve:

> My husband is a feminist so doesn't think that we should do different things in relation to our work and our kids. And because he wants to work full-time he also wants me to work full-time because that kind of fits his ideological model. I have enormous respect for that. But he works away 3 days a week for most of the year so de facto when he's away from home he's not there. He's out of the picture. So the reality of the way we live week-by-week doesn't actually make the ideological ideal possible.
>
> *Rachel [25], Education Professional, public sector, 3 children<8, Restorative, 80% of full-time, schedule and location flexibility*

This observation chimes with the findings of Beagan *et al* (2008). Their study of diverse couples' negotiations of work and family life demonstrated that culturally traditional beliefs about gender roles *"unspoken gender expectations"* (p667), appeared to be operating just under the surface in many families across many socio-cultural groups. These unspoken gender expectations operate under the surface because prevalent egalitarian discourses acknowledge women's economic potential and the inappropriateness of confining women to the home, but not yet the potential of men to do mothering. Mothering is defined by Doucet (2006) as taking responsibility for children at emotional, community, and moral levels.

It appeared that male partners support for female partner's employment manifested itself in words of encouragement rather than deeds. Meera [7] illustrates:

> In his heart he's very supportive of me having a career. He's very proud of all that I have achieved professionally so far but I don't think - and I don't think it's unique to him - I don't think that leap of: *'I have to change what I do in order for her to be able to achieve what she needs to achieve'*. I don't think the leap has been made, so it is like he is saying, you go off and do it and I will never stop you, but I will not enable you by doing things differently.
>
> *Meera[7], Operations Director, private sector, 2 children age 2 and 5, Compromised, 3 days pw, schedule and location flexibility*

Very few women reported that a male partner had made parallel adjustments to his working hours or changed his weekly working pattern such that he provided regular and reliable childcare. Sarah was one of the few and described what this arrangement looked like in practice:

> It just made everything a bit easier because he was there to take up the slack. He does all the drop offs and pick-ups for nursery so normally I don't work on a Monday and I am with the baby then, then it's 3 days in a row coming up to London and she goes to nursery on Tuesday and Wednesday, Thursday she's with her dad and then Friday she's with her dad as well but I'm there and can help with

lunch and you know breakfast and all that sort of stuff. I flex as well, so last week I changed my days off because there was an important meeting on a Monday, so I had Friday off instead.

Sarah [1], Human Resources Manager, private sector, 1 infant, Protective, 4 days pw, 1 day from home

Sarah describes a regular weekly arrangement and what amounts to a strong care network of which her husband is an essential component. His working time and location flexibility enabled her own. More typical across the 30 cases was fathers' un-involvement in regular aspects of Monday to Friday childcare. There involvement was more ad hoc, and for example, involved occasional drop-offs at school or nursery on their way to work.

The persistence of domestic inequalities in the division of household labour and childcare in male and female couple relationships is in focus here. The literature tends to concur that over many decades little has changed regarding division of labour within the family. Men are doing more domestic tasks than in previous generations (Sullivan and Gershuny, 2011, 2013), however both men and women generally continue to prioritise the male partner's work and place primary responsibility for the home on the female partner when partners become parents. This seems to be the case even when the relationship begins on more egalitarian terms (Ely *et al.*, 2014). The language women in this study used to describe how *"fortunate", "blessed"* and *"lucky"* they felt to be able to share domestic chores and childcare tasks with their partners implies that perhaps women did not feel entitled or deserving to do so.

I'm very fortunate in that my husband does more of the domestic chores than I do. He can't sit still. We have a clean-up once a week but he does most of the cooking so he's very much busy about the house. I don't have to worry about being the main person who is doing that.

Victoria [21], Health Professional, public sector, 2 pre-school children, Protective, 4.5 days per week

Domestic and childcare tasks might be shared between male and female partners, but mothers universally retained overall responsibility for their children and for organising childcare when they did not provide it themselves. What this responsibility means in Eleanor's life, is that she can never be late:

I guess as a mother you don't have a choice, do you? And a father doesn't either I suppose, but the responsibility for the children is mine even though I am working almost full-time. He will do things like read them a story every night and if he's back in time we will do baths together, so he's not completely removed, it's not that they don't see him Monday to Friday. But at the heart of it really is that I could never be late for them but he could be

Eleanor [13], Senior Manager, Public sector, 3 children<7, Compromised, 4 days pw

Eleanor's account illustrates an important theme that sets the scene in which women's working hours choices are made. It illustrates the gendered nature of the moral requirements relating to parental care for children and the hold it has over mothers. That childcare was the mother's responsibility was implicit in the majority of women's accounts of their decision to combine work and care through use of part-time and flexible working patterns. Studies have demonstrated that male and female partners undertake qualitatively different tasks and practices of day-to-day caring even within egalitarian partnerships that share responsibility for childcare. The conditions of childcare appear to be harder for mothers: *"mothering involves more double activity, more physical labour, a more rigid timetable, and more overall responsibility than fathering"* (Craig, 2006, p276). Doucet (2006) argues that even when fathers are the primary care-giver, the dominant paternal practices of care emphasise physical outdoor play, independence, and risk-taking. This suggests that mothers typically retain control of social and community activities and emotional well-being.

Women often accounted for a lack of father involvement in routine aspects of care by referencing the fixed and unaccommodating nature of their men's jobs. Women held views about the working hours and working patterns that were reasonable and feasible for fathers to adopt in certain workplace contexts and at particular career stages. Cutting hours and going part-time was not usually considered a feasible or reasonable option for men. This was the case even when mothers and fathers worked in the same sectors, and in two cases, for the same employer.

> He's pretty close to being promoted so there's quite a lot of pressure on him to do all the hours and entertain in the evenings, and travel to wherever, and in some ways that has driven how I work
>
> *Erin [3], Senior Manager, private sector, 1 infant, Protective, 4 days pw*

> We've not said *'your career is more important'* or anything like that. I think just at the moment he's got a real opportunity to make director where he is now, we've kind of made a bit of a decision that he guns for it now I suppose and me kind of be a bit more of the available parent. That might change in the future as I do want a career but I think at the moment it's quite hard for us to both be that way and he earns a lot more money than I do so again it's kind of practical you know?
>
> *Joanne [15] Human Resources Manager, private sector, 1 infant, Compromised/Sense-making, 4 days pw*

Two women described what amounted to an exchange of care resources within the couple that followed a different temporal pattern, not days or weeks, but months and years. Sophie [30] reflected on her two year career-break that was brought about by her husband's overseas work assignment and also her own ambivalence about returning to a workplace that had restructured during her maternity absence and downgraded her role. Esther [11] reflected on her husband's one-year career break to care full-time for their infant twins and how this arrangement had supported her return to her fast-track career and meant that the

couple could manage childcare around employment shift patterns. Her reflection signals an explicit political motivation to live the egalitarianism in which she believed:

> I'd start at 7am and go on until 7pm, or maybe later and he would have been working shifts as well which just wouldn't have worked, so he took the year out with [the children] … I really believe quite strongly in equality and thought, yeah, why shouldn't he? His career is not more important than mine.
>
> *Esther [11], Senior Manager, public sector, 2 pre-school children, Expansive, 3 days pw in a job-share*

Meera [7] described a failed attempt to regulate her husband's working pattern on one day each week to afford her the opportunity to make work engagements and do the networking that she felt she missed out on.

> There is very little flexibility in his hours because he's on the senior management team, like last night he was home at ten and between 8 o'clock or 10 o'clock is pretty standard. We've tried fixing one day for him to come home by 6.30, I said to him *'once a week come home by 6:30 and you can put the kids to bed at 7'*. Just one day when I don't have to run home from work, so I said if you commit to doing that then I have one evening I know I can actually put something in my diary to meet a colleague or a client. I mean it hardly worked it was so rare. Something always seemed to come up for him.
>
> *Meera[7], Operations Director, private sector, 2 children age 2 and 5, Compromised, 3 days pw, schedule and location flexibility*

The reliability and predictability of childcare is a vital enabler of mother's participation in paid work. Partners featured as part of that care network although failed to provide the reliability and predictability upon which women depended. Most fathers were counted out of regular childcare because of their demanding or irregular working patterns. Fathers were also excused making parallel adjustments to their working hours to protect their breadwinner status and maintain their career trajectories. It seems egalitarian ideals give way to more traditional realities unless couples make and explicit political point to live them. The section that follows considers the structuring influence of women's ideas about the right way to mother on their working patterns, and how they accounted for where those ideas had come from.

5.4 Moralities of good mothering

As well as an economic rationale, in women's accounts there was an implicit moral rationale for combining employment and care using part-time and flexible work. Reducing working hours upon motherhood felt like the 'right thing to do' and women wanted to do it.

It is well established in the literature that women make decisions about combining family care and work within a set of competing discourses of appropriate forms of mothering (Hays, 1996, Baraitser, 2008, Christopher, 2012) that form a moral framework of

understanding about the right thing to do regarding employment and childcare (Duncan, 1999, Duncan and Irwin, 2004).

It was very clear that for the majority of mothers interviewed for this study, the amount of time they put to paid work was intricately tied with their moral claims on mothering. It was what they felt was the right thing to do in their circumstances. Charlotte [26] reflected on her decision to reduce her working hours six years previously when she became a mother. She recalled the social expectation that she felt to go part-time and to spend most of her time caring for her children herself:

> I wanted to go back part-time, 3 days a week, I thought that was the 'right thing to do', she says with inverted commas [laughs]. People always say you don't have kids for other people to bring them up. I feel like you feel pressurised that if you're going to be a good mum you should be at home more than you should be at work, so 4 days at home, 3 days at work. I felt like that was what I was supposed to do.
>
> *Charlotte [26], Sales Manager, private sector, 2 children<6, Restorative, 80% of full-time working from home*

Charlotte's conceptualisation of being a *"good mother"* and what *"people say"* about good mothering accords with one of the central tenets of intensive mothering ideology defined by Hays (1996), that children should be cared for by their mothers. Johnson & Swanson (2007) found that women who work part-time necessarily re-frame the omnipresent accessibility demands of the intensive mothering model and re-construct maternal accessibility in terms of quality time and not quantity of time being what matters most to children.

Some women in this study referenced the way their own mothers had combined work with care as formative of their own notions of good mothering. Frances [19] provides an illustration:

> My mum was a stay-at-home mum and she went back to doing part-time work when I was a teenager and more independent. My husband came from a single parent family so his mum had to work pretty much all the time and he was looked after by different people. But I think for both of us, for different reasons, it is important that we are there and available for Alex at the start and the end of the day and the other decisions we're making about work stem from that.
>
> *Frances [19], Health Professional, public sector, 1 infant, Restorative/Sense-making, 2 days pw*

In *Making Modern Mothers* Thomson and collaborators (2011) illustrate how changing times and cultural contexts between generations simultaneously connect and distance mothers and daughters through their mothering ideologies. Few women in this study recalled their mothers' having been employed in professional and managerial work and even fewer were recalled to have worked at all when children were young. The urge to replicate something of what as daughters they felt they benefited from was powerful. It was also

confronting for women, and elevated practical decisions about working hours into moral dilemmas. Victoria [21], for example, wanted her children to feel that she was at home for them just as her mother had been for her, but she was confronted by her own acknowledgment that she found continuous childcare very hard work and often boring:

> The reality of the situation is it's very hard to look after young children. So part of me was thinking actually do I necessarily *want* to be at home for those extra 2 days? Going back to work is much easier than being at home. But then my Mum was a stay at home mum so all the time I was growing up she was at home so I think I really valued that. So that was an internal conflict, I was thinking I wanted to give my children that feeling of their mum being at home.
>
> *Victoria [21], Health Professional, public sector, 2 pre-school children, Protective, 4.5 days pw*

For some women the long and difficult path to a successful pregnancy and birth or adoption influenced their preference for working less by going part-time. A significant minority of women (seven) talked about their experiences of difficulty and delays getting pregnant. The long, physically invasive, emotionally and financially draining medical pathway to pregnancy shaped women's thoughts about the amount of time they felt they could and should put to their paid work and about who should be trusted with care for their longed-for children.

> I've been trying for a long time to have children and then 7 years later it finally happened. So I'm like what's the point in me having children if I'm not going to be around to bring them up? So mentally I'm going through that dilemma of really working out how many days do I want to work.
>
> *Sasha [5] Senior Manager, private sector, 2 pre-school children, Protective, 90% of full-time working hours, some schedule and location flexibility*

The birth of the first child was of enormous significance in individual biographies. Its timing was relevant in the context of women's professional careers in terms of whether they felt they were on the ascent, at a satisfactory point, or had reached an unsatisfactory plateau. Frances [19], a first time mother in her forties reflected on her three year journey to motherhood in the context of her 17-year medical career and her attainment of the most senior position she had sought to reach. We met when she was on maternity leave. Her complete focus was on her young son and the domestic sphere, which she felt was a welcome hiatus and beneficial opportunity to consider the direction of her future years in her profession. Tomlinson (2006) identified a similar 'Career-behind-me' work-life trajectory among older women working part-time in management roles that she describes as an emergent trajectory with potential to arise in greater numbers as a consequence of women starting families later in life.

Social expectations play a significant part in mother's moral dilemmas about work. Holloway (1998) developed the notion of moral geographies of mothering, which become

dominant within localities over time in interaction with the local organisation of childcare provision. These moral geographies consist of institutions and social networks through which notions of good mothering are circulated. Andrea [27], reflected on her experience of returning to work part-time after the birth of her first child, and remembered the pressure she was under not to work full-time:

> I do remember there being a lot of social pressure to work part-time … I probably wouldn't have wanted to work full-time anyway but I think it would have been socially unacceptable. Nobody I knew went back full-time. We've all just had this thing that we have to go back part-time. It's not quite acceptable to not go back at all but you can't go back full-time either.
>
> *Andrea [27], Law Professional, public sector, 3 children<10, 4 days pw, some location flexibility*

Andrea's local friendship group of new mothers were influential in her push towards part-time working. They were other mothers and fathers-to-be who she met through antenatal classes and parenting networks e.g. The National Childbirth Trust. It seemed that within this social network, for Andrea and for many others, individual's notions of the right way to combine work with mothering are aired, shared, cemented and adjusted. This happens in advance of any formal dialogue with employers about working hours and what a part-time working arrangement might look like in practice.

Women less able to put their finger on where their desire to reduce their working hours had come from, indicated in their accounts that the transition to part-time working simply *"felt like the right thing to do"* and which illustrate the inaccessibility of all the influences on individual thinking and judgements. Discourses that link part-time working with work-life balance appear to have penetrated an unconscious acceptance of the importance of balance to good mothering and of being the best mother you can be, which Sophie [30] illustrates:

> I don't believe in dropping your own life and identity because in some ways my mother did that and I don't feel that's healthy. I think you need to find a balance, you know, I think the mother's happiness contributes to the overall family happiness and that's how I feel. I can't do it all and I will just be the best mother I can be. I can only do my best.
>
> *Sophie [30], Communications Manager, private sector, 2 pre-school children, Expansive, 4 days pw, some schedule flexibility*

In talking about the dilemmas they faced making childcare and work decisions, the 30 women on whose lives this study is based demonstrated awareness of the numerous different work-life strategies employed by mothers and fathers in their social network and beyond. First-time mothers who lacked personal experience of combining work with care necessarily drew on observations of other women at work, of their friends and family

members of a similar age to themselves. Everyone observed with interest what other women did. They were equally attuned to the social judgement about women's capabilities, capacities, and commitments to both care and career. How a week divides in to how many working days and non-working days had symbolic meaning as well as ideological significance. Women were acutely aware that their working hours choices sent a message to the social world about their dedication to their families and to their careers. There was little consistency across the 30 cases on a magic number of working days as this selection of extracts illustrates:

> It just tilts the balance in the direction of the children doesn't it, 3 days at work and 4 days at home?

> Four days work and 3 days home is about right I think, I mean 3 days at work is probably ideal, but I don't know, I think 4 days is fine, sort of equal, kind of fair

> You've got to have your head in the game haven't you, it really needs to be 4 days if you want to do a proper job, 3 days *really is* part-time

It was clear that most new mothers felt social pressure not to work full-time five days per week whilst children were young. The feeling that one *should* work part-time translated into either three or four days at work. If it was mathematically possible for a seven-day week to be divided into an even number of whole days, many women's dilemmas about how much to work outside the home might have been more easily resolved. The powerful grip of a widely held notion that the number of working days is an indictor of good mothering seemed to ease with experience. Far fewer mothers of older children in this study made explicit mention of social judgment being attached to their working hours choices.

Most women expressed opinions about their own mothering that indicated an underlying pragmatism. An understanding that what mattered most was finding *their right way* to combine work with childcare in their circumstances. The point of this discussion about working hours choices is not to argue there is an optimal number of working or non-working days, it is to illustrate that mothers working hours choices are morally potent, socially informed, and internally justified as their right way to do things. The felt need to be there for children regardless of children's ages and developmental stages, was an ever present theme in women's rationalisations of their working hours and flexibility decisions. Deciding on the right way to combine care and work at particular points in time was informed by a range of observations and personal experiences. These included the normative discourses within local social networks, within families, and broader cultural influences and understandings about the lives of professional and balanced women.

This section has considered how mothering ideology and the space within it for professional work, frames the opportunities women perceive and structures the choices they make. Working hours choices are not implemented in a vacuum, they are mediated by

women's understandings of what is permitted, tolerated, and actively encouraged in their workplaces. It is to this final influential structuring factor on women's work-life choices that attention now turns.

5.5 Work status and line-managers

The socio-cultural context in which women are mothering has been discussed in relation to its formative influence on attitudes to full-time and to part-time working. The employment context is now considered and the resources women have within it to access preferential flexible working patterns.

The availability of flexible working policies at organisational level shapes choices and decisions about hours of work (Macrae, 1989, Dick, 2006). Not everybody uses the policy to access the flexible working arrangement they need. Research has shown that high status and senior positions in organisations offer women greater latitude for adjustment of their working time and timing, and greater ability to negotiate with employers to access preferential arrangements (Tomlinson, 2006a).

Most women in this study felt a strong sense of entitlement to be able to access the flexible working policy when they needed to. They perceived themselves to be the intended and deserving beneficiaries of policies both as mothers and primary carers, and as loyal, compliant and previously undemanding workers. This understanding is seemingly shared across public and private employment contexts and signals widespread interpretation of work-life balance and flexible working policies as really family-friendly policies aimed at women despite their gender-neutral framing (Lewis and Campbell, 2008).

Women found however, that accessing the policy was not as enhanced by their status as mothers as some had assumed that it might be. Many stories were told about refused requests and reluctant compromises relating to this transition and others in the past.

> I know when they first turned me down going back on 3 days while I was still on maternity leave, when they said no, I mean, I just, well it was panic really… Not working wasn't an option. Finding another job seemed terrifying at the time, you know, as I don't think there could be one anywhere that I could work part-time and earn a decent wage. It was absolutely horrible
>
> *Gail [20], Finance Manager, private sector, 1 infant, Restorative, 2.5 days pw in a job-share*

Refusals, which employers are within their legislative right to make for one of seven business reasons (ACAS, 2014), prompted women to speculate about just how welcome women, mothers, and flexible working might be in their workplaces. There were common understandings across the 30 cases about the desirability of certain types of flexible working arrangement from the perspective of employers. It seems some arrangements and practices are culturally 'ok' in managerial and professional work and others are understood to present

more of a problem to employers. Working from home on Fridays is ok for example, three days *"really is part-time"* and not really ok in a responsible job; and four days is ok if you are an efficient worker.

Women's access to the flexible working policy was facilitated by other organisational campaigns and strategies. Women employed in the public sector benefited from organisational strategies to downsize premises and reduce overheads:

> It helps I think that there is a big push right now around flexible working. It's all about saving money and cutting desk numbers so having more people at home costs the public less … everyone is getting shifted down into a lot less space so there's going to have to be a lot more home working anyway. It's going to be a different situation and I think that's given me some weight behind my argument as initially [my line manager] was saying, *'well you can't possibly manage a team unless you're here 5 days a week in the office.'* And actually, nobody is going to be working like that anymore because there isn't physically the space for all the people to be in the office every day all day
>
> *Jenny [18], Programme Manager, public sector, 1 infant, Compromised, 4 days pw*

Some women, like Erin [3], felt able to benefit from organisational gender-retention initiatives aimed at them, *"…there's a big focus on retaining talented women at the moment and that has helped me I think."*

Work status can be conferred by grade or rank and also value to the organisation in terms of specialist skills and expertise and valuable relationships. All the women in this study were in the occupational category of manager and professional although by their descriptions of the chains of line-management above and below them, some women occupied positions higher up their organisational hierarchies than others. Few women in the more senior positions used their organisation's flexible working policy and the Right to Request legislation to initiate their request. Instead they verbally proposed a working pattern to their line-manager and latterly formalised an adjustment to their contractual terms and conditions through relevant approving committees, and which accords with Tomlinson's findings (2006b).

> I guess as senior manager I kind of decide my own destiny to some extent, so I just let my [workgroup] leader know that that's what I'm doing…eventually it will need to be approved by the executive board, but I think it's just a formality to be honest.
>
> *Jessica [23] Senior Manager, private sector, 1 infant, Protective, 4 days pw, full schedule and location flexibility*

It was clear that the mediator in the relationship between employer and employee is the line-manager. Line managers are the gatekeepers of employee access to flexible working opportunities (Smithson and Stokoe, 2005, Himmelweit, 2007). As Den Dulk *et al.* (2012) highlight, *"managers support for work-life policies is crucial for shaping employees capabilities to use them."*. The impact of managerial discretion in employee access to idiosyncratic work

arrangements has been well researched (Rousseau *et al.*, 2016), and scholars have found that employees whose line manages are supportive of their need to adjust their working pattern to support their responsibilities outside of work tend to express greater job-satisfaction, experience less work-life conflict, and report lower turnover intentions (Kelly *et al.*, 2011, Masuda *et al.*, 2012). Daverth *et al.* (2016) found that the mostly male line-managers perceived parents, and specifically women, the intended targets of work-life balance policies. Although gender-neutrally framed and now universally accessible by employees irrespective of parental status, the 'life' element was constructed by line-managers within a hetero-normative framework, which both reflects and helps sustain gendered assumptions that underpin organisational cultures. Gatrell *et al.* (2014) similarly found that notions that motherhood enhanced access to flexible working policies appeared to be misconceived because despite line managers' associations of maternity with childcare and, rightly or wrongly, with stronger domestic orientation than work orientation, women still experienced limited support for their need or desire to work flexibly.

Four women in this study had achieved occupational management positions that conferred them greater autonomy and control over their working pattern. Most women in this study did not have such advantages. Their access to part-time and flexible working opportunities was determined by line managers' interpretations of organisational policy. Localised discretion of this type has been found in many organisational studies and explains why it is that employees can experience implementation of organisational policy quite differently across different workgroups in the same organisation (Dick, 2010). Nina [16] described an access process in her organisation that to her seemed ill-defined and contradictory; about which she felt she lacked guidance and did not know how to make a strong supporting case for her application to work flexibly.

> I sent in a letter to say that I wanted to work 3 days a week because I was looking after my daughter … I had to put what they called a 'business case' and basically say how me reducing to 3 days a week was not going to affect my work… actually, it is really difficult to write that letter, to make it sound like working three days isn't going to affect your work, of course it is, I'm not going to be able to do as much in 3 days as I would in 5 days. I can't manage a team every day, I mean, it's impossible really, it's like I gave them all the reasons to turn it down
>
> *Nina [16], Research Manager, private sector, 1 infant, Compromised/Sense-Making, 4 days pw*

Nina's request was turned down and she accepted a compromise offer to work four days per week, she said, *"for the sake of keeping my job"*. A good relationship with a line manager helps retain professional roles and secure access to preferential working patterns. How well women can match work with childcare depends on the power of the line manager in mediating their access to flexible working. Where a line manager relationship is missing, as

it was in four cases due to organisational restructuring or the line manager moving on during women's maternity absences, women had no option but to fill in forms and negotiate with their employer via a paper process. None of the four women achieved their ideal working pattern in these circumstances.

Women thought seriously about the cultural norms of time and professionalism in their workplaces. Always on, long-hours workplace cultures shaped women's perceptions about whether they will be able to choose to work to their contracted hours or if it is simply expected to work more. Some women envisioned difficulties resisting dominant cultural time norms and pre-emptively applied for alternative jobs. The roles to which women were drawn were those that offered autonomy and control over workflow and work schedule, and typically were anticipated to be less intensive and more predictable.

> I deliberately removed myself from a client-facing HR role as I didn't want that pressure. I wanted to be able to manage my own time and work from home more and so by not having such a reactive role that was a very conscious decision that I made
>
> *Sarah [1], Humans Resources Manager, private sector, 1 infant, Protective, 4 days pw, 1 day from home*

> I was 3 months into my maternity and I think when I made the decision to move into this support role I probably was not really thinking clearly with a 3 month old baby I probably just thought there is no way I can go back into a client role, you know, fire-fighting all the time… there is no way I can do it. This seems the best option really I get to work more or less 9-5 and 4 days a week
>
> *Joanne [15] Human Resources Manager, private sector, 1 infant, Compromised/Sense-making, 4 days pw*

Two women who were employed in quite different employment contexts, one in banking and one in the public sector anticipated marginalisation in ancillary roles if they requested a part-time working pattern in their old jobs. They used their social networks within their organisations to find other women willing to job-share a new full-time role. In both cases they applied with their job-share partners together and were successful.

> I knew they would say no to 3 days because you just can't do part-time in banking … the flexible working policy isn't really that flexible really… we did originally want to apply for a three day week each but that was just a non-starter in terms of finances at work, so they said no, it's a 50/50 job and that's that… so I'm actually working less than I wanted but that's ok, it's an interesting job and it's working out really well
>
> *Gail [20], Finance Manager, private sector, 1 infant, Restorative, 2.5 days pw in a job-share*

The public sector workers were more likely than the women working in private sector to describe workplace cultures accustomed and supportive to different working patterns. Although there appeared to be little difference between public and private sectors

in terms of women's experiences of tolerant individual line managers support for flexible working patterns in practice. Victoria [21] explained what a supportive culture feels like:

> Quite a lot of people I work with are used to other people not working full-time. So I suppose there is a lot of general understanding, as you might expect, when lots of people don't work on Fridays, that kind of thing. You don't feel as if people are valuing you any less because you don't work five days or there isn't much trying to encroach on non-working days, or make things difficult like making meetings on a Friday. There's quite an acceptance generally that most people don't work five days a week.
>
> *Victoria [21], Health Professional, public sector, 2 pre-school children, Protective, 4.5 days per week*

5.6 A complex settlement

The decision about how to combine work and childcare is a complex settlement of competing practical and ideological pulls, constraints and incentives. Care networks are the scaffolding around women's lives. Women's decisions about *how* to work are linked to their decisions about *how* to provide care for infants, toddlers, and teenagers, and are morally potent, socially informed, and internally justified as the right thing to do at the time.

On-going financial commitments and lifestyle aspirations motivate women's continued participation in paid work although are not the single driver. Cost, reliability and timing of childcare structure women's capacity for paid work. Keeping care of infants within the family is preferred although rarely involves husbands or male partners in a regular weekday care commitment. Grandmothers are called upon in many cases and the market is the most significant provider.

A strong moral association of part-time work with good mothering is hard to resist, and the dominant discourses of 'balance' and of 'being there' for children urges professional women to retain one foot in the family and the other in career yet offers no blueprint about what balance looks like on a weekly basis. Women are not living their ideal relationship models; egalitarian ideals give way to more traditional lived realities in dual-earner couples, that were attributed both to male choice, that is men's perceived reluctance to disrupt careers and breadwinning trajectories for childcare, and to gendered workplace attitudes that assume mothers, and not fathers are involved carers and less interested in their careers. Women highly aware of the career penalties associated with part-time and flexible working make tactical choices to avoid marginalisation and exclusion in their workplaces. Tactical choices are rebranded as preferences, *"it is what I want to do"* yet the structuring influence of workplace norms and line manager tolerances is not far from the surface of their rationalisations of their choices.

Accessing a preferential working pattern is significantly enhanced by women's work status and supportive line manager relationships. No one achieved access to their ideal

flexible working arrangements and few even asked, their idealism tempered by what they felt was acceptable within their workplace cultures before they broached the question. The deeply contextually embedded way women make decisions about reconciling paid work with care is evident. Their choices informed and shaped by their interactions with partners, friends and family, and employers. The relatedness of women's work decisions to the perceived needs of their children and their partners have been observed in other studies. Further evidence is provided in this one about the pivotal influence of decisions about childcare as it is shared between partners, within the wider family and provided by the market, on women's capacity for paid work. That these women's moves into flexible work were voluntary is defined simply by the fact of their individual actions to initiate the change and not their employers. It should not be assumed to reflect their preference. Choice is more complicated than that. The notion that their specific adjustments to reduce working hours, control their schedules, or alter the responsibilities of their jobs, reflects their ideal preference and signals a 'weaker' work orientation as Hakim suggests (2000), is immediately disrupted. Most women were clear that at that point the flexible working arrangement that they had initiated was not their ideal; it reflected a pragmatic and negotiated settlement.

At the beginning of this chapter Rachel [25] was quoted. She described the *"logistical, emotional, practical, lifestyle, and ideological issues"* that made up the complex web of decisions she had to make about her career. These issues, interactions and influences have been described in this chapter and taken together, represent the opportunity framework within which professional mothers are making decisions about combining professional work and childcare.

Chapters six and seven shift the discussion from women's real and perceived work-life opportunities and choices to the lived experience of enacting the choices they make. The analysis moves between women's accounts of their daily family lives and of their daily work lives and illuminates how they interpret and execute their responsibilities for and within both.

Chapter 6: Experiencing transition to flexible work arrangements

This chapter and the next shift focus from women's opportunities, choices and decision-making in respect of combining care and career, to how women implement and sustain the flexible working choices they make. The aim is to make visible and explicit the labours and practices of mothers to implement and sustain flexible working arrangements in contemporary professional and managerial work.

In highlighting these aspects of lived experience this analysis contributes to what Thomson *et al.* (2011 p175) propose is a *"missing sense of the kinds of emotional, psychic, and creative work involved in being a good enough parent and a worker"* in debates about what activities constitute work. The concept of work is central to this analysis of women's labours and is informed by the relational and inclusive framework developed by scholars promoting the 'new sociology of work' (Pettinger, 2005). Paid and unpaid labour in the market and at home is included in the definition of 'work'. In the tradition of feminist scholarship the definition of work extends to include both the work of the body in reproduction, and the cognitive and physical activities of mothering and caring as 'work' (Oakley, 1974, Gatrell, 2013, Phipps, 2014). It further extends to the intense and expanding repertoire of emotional work mothers do to manage their own and others' feelings (Garey, 1999, Hochschild, 2012), and to the identity work (Miller, 2005, Bataille, 2014, Hollway, 2015) in which mothers engage to make sense of who they are at this point in their lives.

Women's interactions with organisational structures, processes and cultures are described, and how these interactions influence their understandings of the mutual responsibilities of employer and employee for the 'doing' of flexible working. Feminist critique of the contemporary phenomena of responsibility and practices of 'responsibilisation' thought endemic within neoliberal ideology illuminates this analysis and assists in interpreting why women experience the pressure that they do to take responsibility and determine their own successes irrespective of their familiarity with the transition situation in which they find themselves (Gill and Scharff, 2013, Tronto, 2013, McLeod, 2015, Rubery, 2015).

Analysis benefits from a longitudinal perspective and draws on follow-up interviews that were conducted within weeks of women beginning their flexible working arrangements and between 3 and 12 months later. The domestic work, professional work, emotional work, body work, and identity work involved in implementing flexible working arrangements are discussed in the sections that follow.

6.1 Systematising household management

By their own accounts most women in relationships with men organised and managed family life before they changed their working arrangements and continued to do so afterwards. Most women had found solutions to support their post-maternity transitions that neither depended nor required the involvement in their partners in routine ways (see 5.2 and 5.3). As the originators of childcare and domestic practices, women continued to be responsible for their administration irrespective of their own paid working hours. It was typical that male partners were delegated certain parenting tasks, or periods of time within which to be responsible for children, but it was unusual if this sharing of domestic labours extended to men taking on more of the traditionally feminine domestic duties of laundry or meal planning and preparation. This observation reflects the classed social position of these women's households and echoes the findings of Lyonette and Crompton (2015 p37) who identified the phenomena of *"spoken egalitarianism"* (p 37) rife amongst middle-class couples where male partners intellectual engagement in the values and opportunities of gender equality was not matched by practical action. Fiona [9] now, six months into her new paid work role reflected that what she called her *"three jobs"* as wife, mother and worker had endured even when her working hours increased compared to the preceding period of maternity leave:

> Even though my husband and I both work now, and I keep telling him *'I am back working by the way'*, I do all the thinking on a Friday, that's normally my day off when [our nanny] and I plan for the week ahead. But I still plan for my husband too, so like, what are we going to eat … he just hasn't started to think about these things … I feel like you do your day job and then you have your mother job and then you have, you know, your wife job too. I mean you don't lose any of those things on your year off … If I don't have even just a day to think about that kind of thing, then it all starts to get on top of me.
>
> *Fiona [9], Human Resources Manager, private sector, 1 pre-school child, Restorative, 4 days pw*

Whether women's transitions involved working less (in 24 cases) or working more (in six cases) compared to the immediate preceding period of employment, the consistent theme was that women continued to be responsible for children and their care. Women used a variety of tools and techniques to manage their responsibilities, and concurring with Thomson *et al.* (2011), these experienced professionals and managers applied considerable management skill, ingenuity and creativity to methods of organising family life. The language of management permeated women's descriptions of their approaches to their domestic lives: *"planning", "task differentiation", "delegation",* and *"co-ordination"* were words used by women to describe their tactics. This indicates a transposition of their professional skills and competencies on to the management and organisation of domestic life.

I am still doing the lion's share of organising for sure. I don't do it all but I'm still the planner …I still want it done properly but I now delegate better. So I'm still doing all the co-ordinating but it's stressing me out less because I have a bit more time to do it.

Meera[7], Operations Director, private sector, 2 children age 2 and 5, Compromised, 3 days pw, schedule and location flexibility

I set it all up on Monday ... I write him a list of what meals to give them on what day and like I said to him yesterday, 'you can't deviate from that because things are in the freezer or in the fridge according to what day I've told you you're supposed to eat them.' So yeah I'm still kind of in control but actually I'm quite relaxed about it as I'm not here to worry about it

Andrea [27], Law Professional, public sector, 3 children<10, 4 days pw, some location flexibility

The *"mental organizing"* (Rachel [25]) of family life was constant and tiring for many women, particularly mothers of more than one child who were managing a family with a span of age ranges, needs, and interests. Rachel described her state of mental exhaustion that, over time, had diminished her capacity to *"put my foot on the gas and get new projects underway at work."*

Not physically being at home as much as they were previously, emancipated women from habitually seeing and doing domestic chores *"just because I'm here and it needs doing"* (Sadie 17]), although has implications for women who work from home who may feel they should do the tasks because they can see what needs doing. It seemed that the partner in the couple who was at home more, whether engaged in paid work or not, was expected to do more domestic work. Changing this alters the bargaining position between couples as Victoria [21] explains:

I feel a bit more equal now that I am going out to work so I feel in a way a little bit on an even keel with my husband and seems easier to split the domestic chores now than when I was on maternity leave because obviously I was the one who was at home so picked up more … it has been a bit easier to differentiate and split things

Victoria [21], Health Professional, public sector, 2 pre-school children, Protective, 4.5 days per week

Successful combining of professional work with the responsibilities of motherhood demanded greater systematisation of household management. Some of my interviews took place in women's homes and they shared with me some of their tools and processes. Esther [11] displayed the whiteboard in her kitchen marked with daily menu plans for her two pre-schoolers that was planned at least a week in advance. Andrea [27] flicked through her lever-arch file that was sub-divided with a section for each child and filled with bulging plastic pockets containing timetables for clubs and activities, school information and health and medical details. Amanda [10] pointed out her *"control centre",* a chalkboard on her kitchen wall marked with days, locations, and travel plans for each member of family to ensure that *"everyone knows who needs what and when and who is picking and dropping who where."* Online grocery

orders delivered to the home were part of this systemisation. In some cases, once orders were automated and scheduled to arrive at the same time each week, the responsibility to activate the order each week was delegated to partners, *"it's his thing now … I started it up and now he clicks the order and gets the time slot… he has a reminder in his calendar to it"* (Meera [7]). Many women employed the services of a domestic cleaner, or resolved to do so having found that domestic chores were not being accomplished in their absence in a way that made home life as nice as they wanted it, as Sadie explained:

> I think we need a cleaner every week. I don't care if we can't afford it; we need it … I come home from work at 4.40 and I tidy the kitchen and tidy the house with my 20 minutes before I go and get [my daughter] at 5.15 …I definitely think it's my choice to spend those 20 minutes tidying but I do it only because I think it's nice to start fresh when everyone comes home, it's just nice for the place to be ready

> *Sadie [17], Education Professional, public sector, 1 infant, Restorative, Compressed full-time in fewer days, schedule and location flexibility*

6.2 Extended emotional labour

The effort and time for emotional work in families has often been overlooked not typically featuring as a measurable parenting practice in domestic time-use surveys (Erikson, 2011). Women reported retaining responsibility for the social aspects of family life. For managing and sustaining relationships with friends and extended family members, as Sophie recounts *"remembering birthdays, getting gifts, replying to invites, yes that's all me"*. This tilted emotional load on mothers is evidenced in other studies of family practices (Seery and Crowley, 2000, Gabb and Fink, 2015). Women forged solutions to their capacity problems by engaging the services and support of other women, notably grandmothers providing care for young children and the feminised markets for outsourced family services.

Zelizer (2007 p28) refers to the *"purchase of intimacy"* (p28) to draw attention to the affective dimensions of the economic exchanges of family care. Although framed and regulated as monetary transactions these exchanges are profoundly social transactions that are given meaning and become part of the web of mutual obligations within the family. In employing the services and support of other women, most professional mothers in this study found that their emotional workload had increased with their expanded network of childcare. Already largely invisible yet labour intensive, extra emotional work was necessary to sustain new and expanded care relationships, and epitomising Hochschild's (2003) definition of emotional labour within families. Jenny [18] talked movingly of how she pre-prepared meals and tried to keep on top of the housework to make things easy and pleasant for her parents when they looked after child each week. Esther [11] recounted frequent experiences comforting a home-sick Au-pair, consoling her, helping her with her English language tuition, and accompanying her to social events to help her settle and make friends. For many women the additional work to support and sustain these relationships was unanticipated and

yet vital if their lives were to function in the way they hoped and planned. Amanda [10], on starting a new job on 4 days per week in a new location, recruited an au-pair to live in the family home and perform some of the childcare and domestic duties that she would have otherwise done, such as preparing children's meals, children's laundry, and cleaning. It had not been the solution that she had hoped, and the effort required of Amanda to direct, coach, and make that relationship work was unanticipated:

> I think the Au-pair plan has not been the solution I'd hoped it would be ... just because you have a teenager, even a lovely, willing, enthusiastic teenager, she's still a teenager and needs telling and a lot of management to get her to do the things you want her to do. They're not going to look around and see a table full of crumbs or a wet towel on the floor and think, 'oh I should sort that' … what I hadn't quite expected was how exhausted I was going to be from commuting and then having to come home every night and sort of do a second management shift with her and how sort of tedious that can get

> *Amanda [10] Senior Manager, Finance sector, 2 children<6, Expansive, 4.5 days pw, 1.5 days at home*

In all situations where families employed private nannies or au-pairs, or worked with child-minders, and formal childcare settings, including schools, in all cases women reported that they were responsible for managing the relationships and interactions with these institutions and individuals. For mothers of pre-schoolers, the quality of these relationships was felt to be essential both in facilitating their capacities for paid work, and also, importantly, their levels of comfort with the continued execution of their maternal responsibilities to the standard of good mothering that they had set:

> Let's face it we are bringing my daughter up together, her and me. I need her to be happy and settled or the whole thing doesn't work…she's amazing and I feel utterly dependent … she gets on fine with my husband, but the relationship is definitely stronger between the two of us

> *Jessica [23] Senior Manager, private sector, 1 infant, Protective, 4 days pw, full schedule and location flexibility*

That these specific responsibilities, the practices of which were established by mothers, were retained by mothers irrespective of their working hours indicates that the second shift (Hochschild, 1989) has not been eradicated; its practices have changed but maternal responsibility endures.

6.3 Body work and emotions

The prospect of making room for paid work and adjusting emergent practices of mothering felt overwhelming for many new mothers who were approaching the transition to working motherhood from maternity leave:

> I remember getting to the 9-month point of my maternity and thinking I'm so focused looking after the baby that I couldn't really envisage how I would fit work into that. It almost seemed like you'd get to the end of the day and if you'd managed to get dressed or out of the house, you know, that was quite an achievement and so the thought of then having to go to work and manage a whole extra life on top of that seemed just massively overwhelming at points.
>
> *Jenny [18], Programme Manager, public sector, 1 infant, Compromised, 4 days pw*

Evocative and intense, there was physicality in the language women used to describe their experience of the early weeks of their return-to-work post maternity leave. This placed the maternal body firmly at the centre of the experience. Hormones *"raged"*, bodies *"leaked"* and *"ached"* and energy lagged in the fug and fatigue of the first few days and weeks testing new routines and practices of mothering in altered contexts. For mothers of pre-schoolers there was similarly much body talk in our interview encounters about the physical and psychological effects of repeated broken nights. Lack of sleep featured in many women's accounts of their experiences starting and sustaining their new working arrangements whilst their children were young, as these examples illustrate:

> The most difficult thing has been after 9 months of being a brilliant sleeper James is being a bit of a nightmare. I'd say five or 6 times a week I've been having 4 hours sleep, maybe five hours sleep, and that is hard … but going to a new place when you don't really know the subject matter, you don't know the clients and you're so dog tired that you can barely even function, that's been quite upsetting.
>
> *Sasha [5] Senior Manager, private sector, 2 pre-school children, Protective, 90% of full-time working hours, some schedule and location flexibility*

> I've had moments where I feel good and I feel confident … I've definitely had more moments where I just couldn't handle it and it was all too much. I get tired, I do a lot of work and then I feel like I'm having to work beyond exhaustion. I'm exhausted but I've got to work the next day. My daughter has been teething a lot so there's been a bunch of nights where we've just been up with her and that adds to it you know, and I reach that point where I go 'I can't handle it, it's too much and I'm overwhelmed.
>
> *Sadie [17], Education Professional, public sector, 1 infant, Restorative, Compressed full-time in fewer days, schedule and location flexibility*

The motifs of hard-work and fatigue in body, mind and spirit were ever present. Often women thought they were not functioning at their best and yet felt compelled to perform as if they were. The maternal body was present in new mothers' accounts in specific ways. Some women associated their continued breast-feeding with hormonal disruption and a sense of not quite feeling *"back to normal"* (Gail [20]). For others the practical and bodily challenges of sustaining breast-feeding on employers premises dominated their early weeks, and in some cases, months back at work. How to express and transport breast-milk privately, hygienically, and quickly is an intrusive aspect of the maternal experience at work that the male body never need navigate. The professional and managerial women in this study had

greater autonomy to open their schedules to be able feed or express for the time it takes, but unless mothers had access to personal office space they needed to use the lavatories or leave the premises to find conducive space. The reported lack of facilities and suitable spaces to support continuation of breast-feeding signals employer antipathy towards this aspect of women's daily work experience and has been implicated in early cessation of breast-feeding (Boswell-Penc and Boyer, 2007). Gatrell (2007) argues that the maternal labour of infant feeding is discounted and not articulated as work, obscured within the narrative of good and natural mothering. She argues that pressure to breastfeed as best for children, yet also to conceal feeding from the public gaze renders it hidden labour in the most literal sense, and contributes to women's experiences of their maternal bodies being unwelcome at work. For the women in this study the end of breast-feeding, whether welcomed or reluctantly accepted, appeared to be pivotal in their stories, telling of re-gained physical autonomy, schedule control and of a continuity of self:

> The biggest change that has happened is that I've stopped breast-feeding … before I'd always been the one to put her to bed and feed her in the morning before going to work and then I would dash home to feed her, now I am more free and I don't feel so time-constrained … I'm much more relaxed about my work schedule now.
>
> *Jenny [18], Programme Manager, public sector, 1 infant, Compromised, 4 days pw*

> With the breast-feeding you don't realise how much it drains you and then you stop breast-feeding and suddenly it's like you have your energy back and then the hormones aren't as bad as you're not as emotionally tired.
>
> *Claire [2], Law professional, private sector, 1 infant, Compromised/Sense-Making, 3 days pw, some location flexibility*

The effects of difficult pregnancies and births, of post-natal mental health issues, infant feeding practices and routines, and broken nights that in most cases were not routinely shared with partners, had lasting impacts on the female body. Impacts that women continued to manage, privately, well into the first and often the second year of each child's life.

Fatigue was not exclusively the preserve of the mothers of infants; sleep and rest were highly prized and not routinely achieved among women with two, three or four children. The intensely physical aspects of mothering intensified for women when children were unwell. Administering medicine, attending hospital appointments, and emergency stays in hospital were some of the unpredictable circumstances that pulled mothers' time and energy away from almost everything else. Health emergencies were rare occurrences in women's stories, however stories such as Sasha's [5] below illustrate the intensity and exhaustion associated with mothering and its reconciliation with professional work during these times:

It was my first work project since coming back part-time and then my daughter was sick, and she got sicker and sicker and ended up in hospital. She was in hospital for 3 nights. I was so worried about having to run out of work like that as soon as she got better I went back into work the next day … I shouldn't have done it. I was completely exhausted because I had spent 3 nights sleeping on a hard floor in hospital

> *Sasha [5] Senior Manager, private sector, 2 pre-school children, Protective, 90% of full-time working hours, some schedule and location flexibility*

Arlie Hochschild (1993) considers emotions the sixth biological sense. Guilt is the emotion often associated with working mothers, which Hochschild defines as an emotional response to feeling that their child or children are enduring a less than perfect experience for which they associate their own actions as cause. Feeling guilty was a continuous background 'hum' in women's lives, although few women said they experienced guilt as debilitating. Certain situations surfaced maternal guilt more readily than others and the background hum became noisier. The early weeks and months spent settling children into new childcare settings invoked guilt when women felt their children were distressed by maternal separation. Women whose infants transitioned well to childcare settings were enormously relieved that they did not experience the distress and the guilt they anticipated would arise from that situation. Feelings of guilt were often supressed by distraction with work tasks, as Nina [16] illustrates:

> I feel guilty when I first leave him and when I first get to work … but I think because it's been straight away really, really busy, I think that, in a way, that has helped because I don't have as much time to think about [my son] really as if I was just sat here with not much to do. I think I'd feel worse and I'd probably miss him more and think about it more if I was in that situation.

> *Nina [16], Research Manager, private sector, 1 infant, Compromised/Sense-Making, 4 days pw*

Charlotte [26] related her generalised feelings of guilt to working part-time and not caring for her children full-time herself, which is a central tenet of intensive mothering ideology (Hayes, 1996). She carries these feelings, seemingly accepting them as a legitimate consequence for her breach of the social norms of good mothering, although, she adds that she does not feel *"bad enough"* to change her approach:

> I still have that constant feeling of guilt about the fact that I'm working all of those hours and I've got my mother-in-law looking after the girls, afterschool club, and the little one stays late at nursery … I have that feeling of guilt, like I'm not really doing what I should be from a parenting perspective… I think I just have to accept that I'm going to feel like that because there aren't any options for me to do anything different. Well there are. I could change my job. I could say I'm not going to do this anymore and I'm going to go back to doing something 3-days a week and all that, but I don't, and this sounds awful, but I don't feel bad enough that I want to do that.

Charlotte [26], Sales Manager, private sector, 2 children<6, Restorative, 80% of full-time working from home

When I asked women how they managed feelings of guilt, most described being distracted from them, their minds being taken away from worries by daily practicalities, as Nina illustrated above. Sophie [30] defended against guilt by cognitively re-framing (Johnston and Swanson, 2007) good mothering in relation to her work-life choices in terms of looking after her health and happiness making her a better mother. Armstrong (2015) also found this kind of cognitive re-framing within the narratives of professional mothers justifying their working hours choices.

> I've always thought that the most important thing in my life is my children. And that's bollocks isn't it, because the most important thing in your life is you! In everyday life it has to be you, doesn't it? You have to be here to support and do what they need…if you get to the point where you break you're no good to them.
>
> *Sophie [30], Communications Manager, private sector, 2 pre-school children, Expansive, 4 days pw, some schedule flexibility*

Women were conscious not to pass on their feelings to their children. They avoided expressing their own regret, sadness and anxiety in situations that their children too found distressing. Fixing a smile to soothe an infant's distress was part of the emotional work of working motherhood; mothers were managing their own emotions to influence their children's and help the children approach the experience of childcare outside the home as normal and fun. The emotional labour of settling an infant in a new care situation is simultaneously experienced with women's own re-settlement back into the workplace and their adaptation to new flexible working arrangements. This was overwhelming to most women in this situation, as Jenny [18] illustrates:

> When I was doing three days a week, always on the Tuesday, which was the first day back in the office, for the first maybe month or so, I'd be coming back home in tears, I'd just be like I can't do it, there's too much to do, I can't do it, it's completely unmanageable
>
> *Jenny [18], Programme Manager, public sector, 1 infant, Compromised, 4 days pw*

Jenny reflected what many other women said. Undoubtedly difficult, emotional and tiring, the return-to-work transition was, in reality, not as catastrophic as their worst imaginings had prepared them for. Many women reported returning to a *"new normal"* (Victoria [21]) within one or two months.

> …having been back two months now, and although, yes it is really difficult and not how I had imagined, the thought of it was much worse than the actual reality of it … I thought I would just work the same and make everything else fit around me but actually it doesn't work like that, it is much more the other way round
>
> *Jenny [18], Programme Manager, public sector, 1 infant, Compromised, 4 days pw*

6.4 Interactions with employers

Attention now turns to women's interactions with employing organisations as they began their part-time and flexible working arrangements. The diverse context and circumstances of women's transitions are relevant to this discussion and merit some explanation here. Twelve new mothers were approached the transition to part-time and flexible working simultaneously with the return-to-work transition after their first experience of maternity leave. Eighteen women approached the transition at a later biographical moment, when children were older and with more experience at combining work with motherhood.

Connolly and Gregory's (2008) longitudinal quantitative analysis of women's moves through part-time and full-time work suggests that there are two tracks at least for part-time workers, serving as short-term support to a full-time career and a trap, or dead-end. It appears fairly consistent in the empirical literature that the most advantageous part-time positions are with same employer; reduce hours but not use of skills; and endure for a relatively short period of time. The definition of a short period of time however, is ambiguous in the literature (Lambert *et al.*, 2012). Twenty five women participating in this study were in what Connolly & Gregory (2008) suggest may be an advantageous position of remaining with their present employer, and five women were in the unusual position of approaching the transition to part-time and flexible working in a new job with a new employer. Women's experiences therefore, span all types of interactions with employers: joining and re-joining organisations in new and old roles, and, in continuous employment and following an absence for maternity. Where there are distinctive patterns, commonalities and exceptions that relate to the types of interaction and the circumstances of women's transitions, these are described in the discussion that follows. The discussion is organised thematically around core themes that emerged across women's narrative accounts and relate to feeling unwelcome, responsible, being unsupported, and to their experiences of redesigning their jobs for flexibility as they did them.

6.4.1 Feeling (un)welcome at work

> I just felt that it was perfectly clear that no one knew what to do about me
>
> *Amanda [10] Senior Manager, Finance sector, 2 children<6, Expansive, 4.5 days pw, 1.5 days at home*

Some return-to-work transitions after maternity leave were more challenging than others. Many were marked by poor quality dialogue with line managers about return dates and working patterns and bungled induction processes. Some women, returning from a second or third period of maternity leave to the same employer, noted that each time their

experiences were poor in different ways. They recalled security passes failing to grant them access to the office building because they were *"no longer on the system"* (Meera [7]); not being notified of an office relocation and going to the wrong place on the first day; and not having an allocated desk or chair, or essential IT equipment. In a few cases women arrived without a job to do or a line-manager to report to. This was an experience that Emma [24], whose case illustrated the Sense-Making transition narrative (4.1.5) and had approached her return-to-work with cautious optimism, felt diminished by:

> I didn't have a very good experience because it appeared they weren't expecting me back when I got there. I didn't have a boss, I didn't have a computer, I didn't have any work for about six weeks … I'm very self-sufficient so I found myself a computer and things to read and catch up. But basically that's all I did for six weeks. It was soul-destroying … I wish I had more positive things to say about it but I really don't
>
> *Emma [24], Project Manager, private sector, 1 infant, Restorative/Sense-Making, 3 days pw*

Emma's resourcefulness and professionalism helped her manage that experience at work, but describing the experience as *"soul destroying"* evidences an undermining of her sense of self as a professional. Transition experiences such as these were not uncommon and caused some women to speculate that they might not be as welcome back into the workplace as their pre-pregnancy full-time selves once were.

It is well established in motherhood literature that women are prone to stress and uncertainty during the liminal period returning to work, more so than fathers during the same transition (Ladge and Greenberg, 2015). For a very small number of women in this study pregnancy and maternity had offered an opportunity to escape from an unsatisfactory career identity and had excused them from addressing the ambivalence they had previously felt towards their professional work (Bailey, 1999). A more typical experience amongst this relatively socially privileged group of women was to extend maternity absence and delay learning how to combine motherhood with paid work for between 36 weeks and a full year facilitated by their financial situations and generous maternity packages.

The few women in this research who were in the situation of starting new roles with new employers on a flexible working arrangement from day one (five cases) and experienced similar challenges joining organisations on a flexible basis to women re-joining their organisations, indicating that inducting managerial and professional employees is potentially problematic in a range of workplace settings. Andrea [27], for example, an experienced professional and flexible worker having had previous experience of both part-time and job-sharing reflected that joining her new organisation felt *"a bit daunting, a bit scary … quite overwhelming for the first few weeks"*, and she recalled a catalogue of practical frustrations that impacted her ability to implement her agreed working pattern from day one:

I didn't have a security pass for the building which didn't make me feel very welcome, I had to be accompanied everywhere, honestly, they've known I was coming for five months why didn't they check I had a security tag? … Initially I couldn't work from home on Thursdays as I didn't have a laptop for probably six weeks … that was annoying because it affects more people than just me. My husband couldn't travel for work on a Thursday like we had planned because he instead of me had to pick the kids up

Andrea [27], Law Professional, public sector, 3 children<10, 4 days pw, some location flexibility

Andrea and four other women participating in this study had joined new organisations on a flexible working arrangement; 12 other women had changed jobs within the same organisation and so similarly experienced a hard stop to one role and a period of induction into a new one. Quickly and effectively crossing the inclusion boundaries of the new work unit or organisation, and transitioning from outsider to insider status is important for work performance and self-confidence (Ladge and Greenberg, 2015). I would argue that working time norms form a significant part of the many inclusion boundaries new joiners need to navigate. Ambiguity about the acceptability of individual working patterns causes anxiety in the early weeks whilst individuals work out what is 'ok'. The information that women would have like to have had that was missing from their induction processes was advice and guidance about working hours and how to integrate a flexible working arrangement into organisational processes. This included information about setting individual objectives, agreeing targets, and planning workflow. These are the things that women were unsure about and felt that they would have benefited from knowing from their first day, or preferably, in advance of their first day. Not everyone was confident to ask questions directly of senior leaders in their new employing organisations about how to manage their personal working arrangements. Those who asked, in most cases, received positive and supportive responses:

I wasn't actually sure how to work my flexibility, actually doing it is quite another thing … but they have been brilliant, it's not only that they are accepting of the fact that I have to be more flexible than other people, they are positive about it, it's absolutely fine, it's not in any way an issue, they just said, 'mark it in your diary so we know when you're coming in later so no one books meetings for you at that time.'

Sophie [30], Communications Manager, private sector, 2 pre-school children, Expansive, 4 days pw, some schedule flexibility

I was very anxious at first as I realised I basically needed to leave at 5 o'clock if I was going to see Grace awake and I didn't know if that was ok … it turned out that the head of department works really flexibly and picks her kids up at 3 most days but my immediate manager hadn't communicated that … so after about 3 weeks I just asked the head of department directly if it was ok, she was fine about it. After that I felt much better

Andrea [27], Law Professional, public sector, 3 children<10, 4 days pw, some location flexibility

Andrea was reassured by her conversation with the head of her work group about her working pattern after having endured an uncomfortable three weeks of ambiguity. This ambiguity arises in part from disconnects between corporate statements of support for flexible working, and local line managers interpretation and communication of the practicalities.

6.4.2 Feeling responsible

The every-day language of personal responsibility (Hage and Eckersley, 2012) filled women's accounts of their transition into flexible working arrangements. The personal responsibility women felt for the successful implementation of their new working arrangements surfaced in talk of *"duty", "obligation", "blame", "fault",* and *"guilt"*. This point is well illustrated in Sally's [28] concise explanation of the origins of the responsibility she felt:

> Well because in a way, nobody asked me to and in a way I feel I have a responsibility … I mean I chose to do this, to work part-time, so I feel that it's my responsibility
>
> *Sally [28], Education Professional, public sector, 3 children<16, Expansive, 3 days pw*

The ideology of neoliberalism frames women's experiences in the emphasis on choice and opportunity, which simultaneously confers responsibility for the choices made on to the individual making them (Tronto, 2013). When I asked women who was responsible for 'making it work', referring specifically to the implementation of their flexible working pattern at work, universally women answered "I" and "me". Political theorist Joan Tronto (2013) looks at responsibility from the perspective of the care needs of modern societies and argues persuasively that an ethics of care is missing from neoliberal ideology. Tronto sees that over-emphasis on self-responsibility in neoliberal times disappears the importance of caring for others, and in the way modern democratic societies are organised it allows some people to effectively 'pass' on being responsible for others and for the work of care to be differentially distributed along gender, class, and ethnic lines. This in turn allows some groups to live in a state of 'privileged irresponsibility' (p 52), in which they both depend on and fail or refuse to acknowledge the systems of care and support that make possible their life – domestic labour, cleaning, childcare, whilst those who do the care work of society are necessarily highly aware of the labour of their responsibilities.

Framing responsibilities as practices and interactions Walker (2008 p16) proposes, *"in the ways we assign, accept, or deflect responsibilities, we express our understandings of our own and others' identities, relationships and values"*. Practices of responsibility, she proposes, implement commonly shared understandings about *"who gets to do what to whom and who is supposed to do what for whom"*. Applying Walker's conceptualisation to this analysis illuminates the collective

understandings of women, and by association, their employers, of part-time and flexible working as a private issue and not a matter of organisational resourcing requiring practical support.

In many cases women felt organisational human resource management (HRM) processes were not sophisticated enough to integrate shorter working hours or restricted work schedules, and were implicated in women's experiences of inequitable access to work projects and even to financial reward. Claire [2], a law professional in private practice reflected on the fuzzy logic that she and her employer had applied to pro-rating her annual output target to her input of weekly working hours, which she felt had served to increase her work effort in order to achieve a lower target that had disadvantaged her financially:

> It seems ridiculous now when I look back at this, I mean I accepted a lower sales target because that was roughly in line with my working hours but it takes just the same amount of effort and luck to land a £75k deal as it does a £100k deal. It's harder actually because you need to go looking for lots of smaller clients because you don't get a look in on those big pitch teams because they know you're not there all the time
>
> *Claire [2], Law professional, private sector, 1 infant, Compromised/Sense-Making, 3 days pw, some location flexibility*

By contrast a few employing organisations were described as having systems and processes that were able to integrate a greater range of working time patters, locations, and schedules, for example Kate felt her achievement of a workload commensurate with her capacity would be facilitated by her organisation's new HRM tool:

> There is a new resource planning spread-sheet that's got all our projects with the number of days needed for each one over the months and then people are assigned to projects on a certain number of days … it factors in your maximum days a week and the other things you do. So that has all been quite good and does mean that actually I feel more confident in saying I can work 4 days a week and I will actually have to have less work than someone who is working five days a week
>
> *Jane [12], Project Manager, public sector, 2 children under 8, Restorative, Part-time 4.5 days, 2 days from home*

The responsibility women felt for implementing their working arrangement was felt in two directions, for their own benefit, and in some cases symbolically towards the collective category of mothers:

> There are lots of women coming through the ranks they're looking up and thinking, ok I'm about to get married, I'm thinking about starting a family at some stage … if she can do it, maybe I can too
>
> *Erin [3], Senior Manager, private sector, 1 infant, Protective, 4 days pw*

Most of these women were breaking new ground in their organisations originating new ways of working in professional and managerial roles. Being the first and the only

people to work part-time, flexibly from home, or in a job-share added an additional pressure on their performance of both their job and their flexible working pattern:

> …and also I think because my peers, well they're all men, and there are no examples of flexible working at my level … so in management teams meetings I do feel very unconfident, it's hard being the only one … I don't know, I suppose it's that is part of why its taken me a long time to get up to speed, longer than I expected
>
> *Jenny [18], Programme Manager, public sector, 1 infant, Compromised, 4 days pw*

The professional stakes are already high for taking the career risk that is so clearly established in the literature, and reducing working hours and increasing absence from the workplace by home working. The stakes are raised considerably higher with the added responsibility to role model a successful arrangement and symbolise the possibilities for the working lives and futures of others, as Gemma [8] illustrates:

> I feel that this is a privilege hard-earned … if our job-share fails because of the way we have managed it, I would feel like I have let the side down a little bit … you have the responsibility to make it work so that other women get the opportunity to do it.
>
> *Gemma [8], Strategy Manager, public sector, 2 pre-school children, Expansive, 3 days pw in a job-share*

As well as the collective responsibility, there was a relational dimension to the responsibility women felt in the sense that they cared about how their individual working arrangement impacted upon others at work. Specifically to their co-workers and their clients and customers inside and outside the organisation. The solidarity some women clearly felt with their colleagues evoked a sense of responsibility to be working at all times and feelings of guilt when they were not:

> I do feel that I'm not contributing as much as I used to, I am really conscious of that and sometimes there is a tiny bit of guilt as well because I used to do a lot more … they definitely get a lot less of me … it's not just the fact that it's a four days a week and not five, but I'm just focusing on one element of my job whereas I used to do all sorts of extra things
>
> *Sarah [1], Humans Resources Manager, private sector, 1 infant, Protective, 4 days pw, 1 day from home*

Guilt of this kind was managed by women making themselves available or at least to appear available, by responding to emails or phone calls on non-work days, and in effect concealing their absence from collective workspaces due to their part-time hours or home working arrangement. Professional mothers occupying positions in what many described as high pressured, always-on work environments felt the pressure to present what I term the 'façade of full-time' and minimise disruption to colleagues' usual ways of doing things. This situation has resonances with Blair-Loy's (Blair-Loy, 2009, Blair-Loy and Wharton, 2004)

studies of schedule-flexibility in the US that found the benefits of being able to vary the start and finish times of work were felt least amongst workers in high-commitment, elite client-service occupations in financial services due to the constant on-demand requirement of workers. Women in this study who operated in contexts such as these often dismissed the pressure they felt to keep things moving during their absence as *"just part of the job"* (Erin [3]) or *"the nature of the work"* (Jessica [23]). This signals a deep understanding of their managerial and professional jobs as fixed and immoveable constructs around which individual working patterns and practices must orientate and flex and not the other way round. The 'ideal worker' norms (Acker, 1990) of constant availability and of responsiveness to the organisation's requirements, and the intensity of contemporary professional and managerial work (Sennett, 1998, Gascoigne *et al.*, 2016) can be heard in these accounts. I will argue in chapter seven that unyielding organisational demands compel women to operate permeable boundaries between work and home and urge women towards individual solutions to what are in effect organisational problems.

6.4.3 Being (un)supported

Women approached their transitions with different levels of experience of part-time and flexible working in their work histories. First-time part-timers and job-sharers had little insight into what was involved in converting full-time into part-time jobs or designing a job such that its responsibilities could be shared with another person. Very few women referred to meetings with line managers or Human Resources representatives that could be considered to be about job design, that is, a discussion about job scope, responsibilities, workflow and workload and how it should be adjusted to facilitate the flexibility that has been agreed. Victoria [21] was an exception and felt that she had benefited from a job-design discussion with her line manager in advance of her first day back at work. Nina's [16] experience was more typical, whereby a part-time arrangement had been approved yet little direction or guidance had been offered about how to adjust the job in practice:

> We sat down and worked out which bits of my job were the most important for the service, obviously that's patient case load … of the other projects that I was doing there was one placement on a Friday that wasn't so critical so it made sense to just sort of chop that bit off … lots of people work part-time here and I never got the sense that it was a problem
>
> > *Victoria [21], Health Professional, public sector, 2 pre-school children, Protective, 4.5 days per week*
>
> I mean, it's really tricky, what am I supposed to do? A bit less of everything and disappoint on all fronts? That feels a bit career-limiting. But where does the rest of the work go?
>
> > *Nina [16], Research Manager, private sector, 1 infant, Compromised/Sense-Making, 4 days pw*

In the manner of the self-responsible neoliberal subject, women felt responsible for the successful implementation of their working patterns. They also felt uninformed about how to do this within the boundaries of their authorisation, which served to heighten anxiety and uncertainty.

> … it has taken me quite a while to get my head around the actual flexible working pattern and just try and work out how to do it. I went through a long period of feeling very unsure about how to do it
>
> *Joanne [15] Human Resources Manager, private sector, 1 infant, Compromised/Sense-making, 4 days pw*

Ladge & Greenberg (2015) found that women in the US returning from the standard 12-week period of maternity leave into their previous professional roles employed a range of adjustment tactics in order to manage the different types of uncertainty that they experienced. Uncertainty was felt to be both practical in relation to one's work environment, role and responsibilities and also related to an uncertain identity position, that is uncertainty about ones self as a mother and a professional in that particular workplace context.

Feeling uncertain, and in the absence of employer guidance about redesigning jobs and managing a flexible working arrangement in practice, women employed the adjustment tactic of seeking the advice and experience of other mothers at work. Claire [2] provides an example:

> My intermediate boss has been great, she started part-time and now is back to full-time. She calls them tricks, you know, ways of dealing with things. Like if you see an email that demands a response by 5pm you say *'I'm not in today but I will call you first thing tomorrow'*, that takes five minutes of your time compared to the hour to compose a response. I am still learning that
>
> *Claire [2], Law professional, private sector, 1 infant, Compromised/Sense-Making, 3 days pw, some location flexibility*

When the transition to flexible working arrangement was contemporaneous with the transition to working motherhood (in 12 cases), women reflected that their personal transition to working motherhood benefited from more practical support from employers, than their simultaneous adjustment to a new working pattern. Employer practices that women found helpful were maternity coaching and Keeping in Touch days i.e. paid work days during maternity leave to be used to re-connect with the workplace. Most employing organisations provided policy documentation and written guidance about workplace supports for working parents, for example information about how to access parental leave and emergency childcare services.

Given the dearth of part-time and flexible working in professional and managerial roles, it is perhaps unsurprising that there is little collective knowledge within organisations about how to redesign jobs and processes so that flexible workers are supported and avoid

'flexibility stigma' (Stone and Hernandez, 2013a). The apparent inattention of employing organisations to how line managers interpreted employer and employee rights and entitlements came as a surprise to some women, who having been encouraged by organisational campaigns promoting flexible working had assumed that business processes and line managers' attitudes would reflect positive corporate messages. The reality was more inconsistent and disconnected, as Jane [12] found:

> Part of me doesn't really understand why I can't just say look I just want to work 30 hours a week. It's not really good enough to say what my manager said 'I'm not going to give you less work so you'll end up working more than that and not getting paid for it', because actually if I'm only working 80% and getting paid 80% then I need 80% of the work don't I?
>
> *Jane [12], Project Manager, public sector, 2 children under 8, Restorative, Part-time 4.5 days, 2 days from home*

This situation led some women to speculate that their employers really should do more, and that employers have more to learn about how to facilitate and manage flexible working:

> There is a strong sense of individual responsibility for their own work … if more people start to work flexibly I think it will increase the sense that some people are responsible for organising it and making it happen, and that it actually requires much more management to get it right
>
> *Rachel [25], Education Professional, public sector, 3 children<8, Restorative, 80% of full-time, schedule and location flexibility*

6.4.4 Re-designing the job

The experience of going part-time by converting a full-time job into a part-time job was largely a self-directed activity and felt to many women like trial-and-error. Women devised tactical approaches to making their jobs manageable and given the authority to do so, the intuitive approach of most was to be strategic by prioritising the task elements of their jobs that were most incentivised and aligned to organisational objectives. The elements of the job thought to matter most were not always the elements that women found most interesting or satisfying. Extra projects once taken on to expansively craft interesting and stretching roles and build a case for advancement (Wrzesniewski and Dutton, 2001), were now dropped, regretfully in some cases: *"it's a shame really as that was one thing that I really enjoyed doing …I am a bit sad to lose it"* (Victoria [21]). Many women reported shedding specific activities from their work schedules they felt they could no longer fit it, aware of their restricted capacities:

> It's really difficult to sit back and go, yeah, I really should go and do that course, or I really should go and, I don't know, it's the time…having the time to do it.

> *Sarah [1], Human Resources Manager, private sector, 1 infant, Protective, 4 days pw, 1 day from home*

> I've got to do some sort of training course starting in September so that's kind of one more thing on top of what I'm doing. They let me postpone it as I was like I don't think I can, I would have had a meltdown if I did that as well

> *Sadie [17], Education Professional, public sector, 1 infant, Restorative, Compressed full-time in fewer days, schedule and location flexibility*

Finding time for personal development and training, attendance at corporate events, networking and socialising with colleagues was difficult, which echoes the findings of (Hoque and Kirkpatrick, 2003, Durbin and Tomlinson, 2010), that part-time workers struggle to find time for these activities, and which Gatrell (2005) proposes is potentially detrimental to their future prospects.

Managing other people's professional development and career progression was mentioned specifically as a responsibility that women looked to relinquish or reduce. Where that responsibility had temporarily passed to someone else during maternity absence, like in Meera [7] and in Gail's [20] situations described below, they were in no rush to take it on again. The additional emotional work involved with managing others work lives and professional performance is, it appears, an emotional labour too far in the context of their own retained and expanded emotional labours within the family.

> In the past I did much more of the hands-on management of the team, recruiting people, dealing with performance issues, annual reviews, and actually quite a large proportion of my time was dealing with managing the team. That has changed because I've been away [on maternity leave] and handed over the reins to someone else...I won't be taking it on again

> *Meera[7], Operations Director, private sector, 2 children age 2 and 5, Compromised, 3 days pw, schedule and location flexibility*

> Oh yes it's a huge relief not to have the people responsibility, much easier just having the projects to worry about and not how everyone else is feeling about their futures… I don't have the energy for it

> *Gail [20], Finance Manager, private sector, 1 infant, Restorative, 2.5 days pw in a job-share*

It was ambiguous to many women whether their employers' agreements to their going part-time also granted them authority to re-allocate some responsibilities across a team and to delegate specific tasks. Often women's output targets were pro-rated in line with their proportion of standard weekly working hours, with no clear agreement reached about which responsibilities would be re-allocated across a work group and to whom tasks would be delegated. Ambiguity twinned with anxiety about being perceived to be burdening colleagues by delegating work typically led to women intensifying their work effort in order to compress largely unadjusted full-time workloads into fewer days and restricted schedules:

The first month I was attempting to work part-time but was basically working very long days, cramming it all into 3. Now I have somebody working with me however the tasks she's ended up taking are not really the things I needed to lose, so in reality I am still not working part-time. Officially I am, but really I'm not.

Sally [28], Education Professional, public sector, 3 children<16, Expansive, 3 days pw

Women routinely worked more hours than their part-time contract. Lack of people to delegate work to was often mentioned as determining why they worked the additional hours that many said they did. An unwillingness to delegate for fear of being seen to be shirking their responsibilities also featured significantly in women's accounts:

I probably do more than my 3 days ... but it's not like I've got certain roles and bits of it can be taken away and done by somebody else it's just a matter of resources at the moment and not having anybody below me to delegate to.

Lara [6], Law professional, private sector, 2 pre-school children, Compromised, 3 days pw, no location flexibility

Women may be right to assume the ambivalence or animosity of colleagues to their working arrangements. Golden (2006) found evidence of co-worker satisfaction being negatively associated with the prevalence of home-workers, and surmised that flexible workers, aware of a negative perceptions of co-workers may feel the need to increase their work effort in an attempt to ameliorate such reactions.

Even when they had control of their workload and led teams of staff, women were caught between needing to reduce and control their workload to something commensurate with their available working hours, and a felt need to retain it by way of defence against perceptions of unprofessionalism and discourses of divided attention and low commitment that circulate around mothers working part-time:

I'm in control of my own workload but then it's really hard to just sort of shave off a percentage as I can't give my work to anyone… and if I do that it doesn't mean I'm doing a good job. I think that's the other thing

Sasha [5] Senior Manager, private sector, 2 pre-school children, Protective, 90% of full-time working hours, some schedule and location flexibility

In one of the very few studies of transitions to part-time and flexible working among male and female professionals, Gascoigne (2014) found the conversion of a full-time job into a part-time job the most problematic transition to make. She found that professionals who were supported by their organisations in practical ways to re-allocate work at the team or work-group level fared much better in achieving a predictable and uninterrupted pattern of time-off compared to professionals relying on their own efficiency and influence to be able to manage and delegate work. The intensity of managing a weekly absence of one or two days whilst retaining almost full scope and responsibilities was brought into sharp focus by Hayley [14], whose experience draws attention to the additional effort of the part-time and home-

working professional to actively manage a routine *absence* from workplace cultures that place value on employee *presence* and visibility as indicators of productivity:

> Every week, you know, every week I'm packing work into a shorter deadline, I pull it forward because I'm not going be there … every week I have to find free people to farm out my work to, I have to arrange a handover to someone and ask whoever to keep an eye on it, put the out of office on… when I was full-time I used to do that the week before I went on holiday and that was bad enough. Now I'm doing it every single week.
>
> *Hayley [14], Research Manager, 2 children<7, Compromised, 4 days pw, 2 from home*

No women in this study enjoyed complete freedom to adjust their scope and workload, yet it was clear that some had achieved positions of seniority that afforded them greater latitude for adjustment about how their role is performed and the mix between the formal and informal flexibility they could use to meet their own needs within the wider context of the temporal needs of colleagues. Some women were able to direct the working time patterns and locations of subordinates so that the whole team's working pattern became more compatible with theirs. Two participants Sasha [5] and Jessica [23] illustrate the affordances of their senior accountable positions within their organisations:

> We didn't all need to go into the office just for that so I changed the team meeting to a conference call and moved it to Friday … that's my non-working day usually but this is only once a month and it works better like that for everyone I think
>
> *Sasha [5] Senior Manager, private sector, 2 pre-school children, Protective, 90% of full-time working hours, some schedule and location flexibility*

> My team doesn't need to see me there is a senior manager between them and me who is more hands-on. I am accountable for their work but I don't need to be there every minute of every day … it means that I can control my schedule and where I need to be so much better … my job is not about outputs its about accountability
>
> *Jessica [23] Senior Manager, private sector, 1 infant, Protective, 4 days pw, full schedule and location flexibility*

Calendar-driven deadlines were problematic when women were the named accountable person, for example the signatory to a contract and completion falls on one of their non-working days. This accountability was viewed as impossible to be shared or re-allocated to another member of the team indicating that low individual substitutability of accountable professionals and senior managers is a barrier to successful re-distribution of responsibilities. No one reported ever missing these deadlines. They made alternative childcare arrangements to cover them. In so doing they successfully present the façade of full-time, and demonstrate their continuing responsiveness to the needs of their work clients and colleagues.

Many managers were in positions that afforded them less discretion and latitude for adjustment, some often described a typical working week as comprising a rolling 'to-do' list.

Women whose actions contributed to an organisational process upon which other members depended felt particularly vulnerable by their routine weekly absence due to part-time hours that left a resource gap unfilled by the organisation. Women who regarded themselves as capable and high-performing found this situation uncomfortable and discordant with their view of themselves as professionals. Charlotte [26] illustrates the felt pressure of perform full-time availability and productivity in a part-time working arrangement and the emotional management that goes into that performance:

> It feels like I'm having to cram everything in to a shorter space of time which I am just about managing to do but it feels sometimes like I'm rushing something or I'm not able to keep on top of it … nobody would know because what everybody else sees is that I'm doing everything that I was before. I hide it that I'm feeling more pressured or stressed than I ever have.
>
> *Charlotte [26], Sales Manager, private sector, 2 children<6, Restorative, 80% of full-time working from home*

This chapter has discussed women's actions and feelings about beginning their new flexible working arrangement. The experience of transition, whilst welcomed and anticipated to be enabling of their work-life preferences and circumstances, was a largely a self-directed activity that felt to most women like trial-and-error. The practical, physical, cognitive, and emotional demands of women's labours to do their jobs extended to working out *how* to do their jobs in less and restricted time and in different places. The next chapter continues this discussion and gives attention to the individual strategies women use to achieve this. Chapter seven discusses how women manage time and space and the boundaries between their professional and domestic worlds. Analysis benefits from a longitudinal perspective and draws on interviews with women up to 12 months after their transition to a flexible working arrangement. Chapter seven concludes with women's subjective assessments of the successes and failures of working flexibly and relates their views and experiences back to their expectations articulated in their transition narratives.

Chapter 7: Time, boundaries and outcomes

> What it does is it gives me a buffer. It means I definitely don't have to go into the office on a Friday. They get 120% of me Monday to Thursday and I work some of the weekend to fit in what I need to do, but I don't mind losing 10% pay because it means I have most of my Fridays here and I can drop the kids of at school and pick them up and I definitely don't have be in an office, people know that and they don't expect it, that's the buffer.
>
> *Sasha [5] Senior Manager, private sector, 2 pre-school children, Protective, 90% of full-time working hours, some schedule and location flexibility*

This chapter explores the ways in which women combined and separated their maternal and professional worlds and the impact of their strategies on their lives and relationships. In focus in this chapter are the everyday experiences of professional mothers and their routine actions to sustain their working and caring arrangements.

The concept of time is central in this analysis. Sasha's [5] quote above illustrates that personal strategies for managing time are linked to managing place. Both are deeply anchored in workplace cultures and family practices (Jacobs and Gerson, 2004, Morgan, 2013). This analysis contributes an examination of women's experiences and negotiations of time at work and within the family. In the context of a sociology of work, a sociology of time extends scholarly discussion of the problems of time in relation to achieving work-life-balance to examining how workers experience time in organisational settings and how they accomplish what Flaherty (2003) terms 'time-work' that is, the manipulation of how fast, slow, full and empty time feels. In the context of the family, Hochschild (1997; 2012) has been studying families and their time experiences for years and the meanings that become attached to time. An example is Hochschild's work with dual-career families that links the outsourcing of intimate caring work and domestic labour to couples striving for 'down time' with the family, protected private time that she argues has become idealised in the context of increasingly intense and competitive paid work. In *Making Modern Mothers* Thomson *et al.* (2011) attends to the everyday temporalities of new motherhood in the UK and gives emphasis to temporal practices and interpretations; the routine and repetitious aspects of infant care, for example, and how uninterrupted hours and days of round-the-clock childcare can feel slow to pass. In families time can also feel like it is passing very quickly, marked by development milestones and birthdays. This feeling was evocatively illustrated in the reflection of one participant in this study *"the days can feel really, really long, but the months and years fly by"* (Amanda [10]).

Professional time-norms determine what work schedules and patterns are culturally appropriate and evidence suggests these norms override the influence of employment contracts in setting expectations for the amount of hours worked and the formulation of the

work schedule. Work schedules can be used and experienced as an oppressive mechanism of control. They can also be protective and supportive of workers' achievement of what Zerubavel (1989) termed niches of inaccessibility, protected private time. In the context of intensified 24/7 global economies time becomes non-spatial territory. Work time is no longer zoned in offices and public spaces and schedules become more open, facilitated by technology that provides anytime, anywhere access.

The key contribution of this discussion is insight into how women achieved professional work in different places and spaces and how they combined, breached and separated their work and family worlds. Women identified as mothers *and* professionals not one or the other. By metering the time they spent involved in their professional work they attempted to carve-out a niche of protected time. The extent to which women felt that they had achieved this outcome is discussed. This chapter concludes with discussion of the impact of women's experiences in a year of working flexibly on their lives and their relationships.

7.1 Maximising time, space and technology

Women often report maximising the time they have available and being more productive and efficient at work upon becoming mothers. In studies of male and female part-time workers, most report sharper focus and greater task efficiency with less and limited working time (Gatrell, 2008, Opportunity Now, 2014). Women in this research similarly reported their time spent in the office as being well used and task-focused, efficient and productive, and many rarely took time for lunch or rest breaks:

> … and I take a maximum half hour lunch break you know, and if I talk to somebody socially for a half hour then I just don't take a lunch break so I can get all of my work done and I don't feel I have skimped on any of the time
>
> *Sadie [17], Education Professional, public sector, 1 infant, Restorative, Compressed full-time in fewer days, schedule and location flexibility*

> … any spare time, down time, is used up doing all the other things. I don't take anyone for lunch anymore, I rarely get to eat myself
>
> *Sarah [1], Human Resources Manager, private sector, 1 infant, Protective, 4 days pw, 1 day from home*

Without exception women described working intensely and feeling a need to maximise every productive moment. This time pressure most acutely felt when women were compelled to leave the office at a set time to be somewhere for their children.

I just found I'm probably 10 times more efficient that I ever was … my days are pretty organised and I'm normally in for half 7 and I leave at half five and those 3 or 4 days a week are busy … I don't want to have to lift my Blackberry on either a Monday or a Friday and I tend not to as if I start straying into that kind of working on a non-working day, it's a path then of no return as people then expect you to pick up, and I don't want that.

> *Fiona [9], Human Resources Manager, private sector, 1 pre-school child, Restorative, 4 days pw*

What I will say is that I've found I use every spare minute of the day much more productively than I used to … whereas before say you get to half an hour before you are going to leave work and think, *'oh well I've only got half an hour left, I can't really do anything so I'll just fiddle about with some emails or whatever'*, now you think, *'well I've got half an hour, I can at least write an introduction to a document',* or I hammer away at something until literally a minute before I have to leave.

> *Emma [24], Project Manager, private sector, 1 infant, Restorative/Sense-Making, 3 days pw*

Strategies for managing time were linked to managing space and place in these women's lives. In 18 cases women combined part-time working hours with location flexibility. It was clear that location flexibility facilitated their participation in more weekly hours of paid work than they would have committed to without it. Working four days or four-and-a-half day each week was felt much more manageable if at least one day and ideally two days could be spent working from home. This was described as the ideal arrangement by some, Gemma [8], for example: *"I think what I'd like to get to is 4 days Monday to Thursday with the Thursday at home, that would be pretty much ideal"*.

Most women with location flexibility were also able to be selective and choose the locations of work that best suited the task. Individual intellectual tasks, such as analysis reading or report writing, were felt best achieved outside of busy offices. Ideas generation and team tasks were felt better achieved in collaborative work-spaces. Southerton (2005) describes how workers create 'hot spots' which condense activities in order to create 'cold spots' which provide time for interaction. There was much evidence of this kind of time-work in women's accounts.

Women under continual time pressure at work became keenly aware of what they perceived to be time wasting, and the unproductive habits and rituals of organisational life. Amanda [10] described her new perspective on work meetings:

I mean it sort of feels like when I'm in the office I'm just in meetings. You know, a typical day I'd have half an hour when I'm not sitting in meetings with people and it feels like it's both utterly exhausting, and really unproductive and it means I'm just not getting round to the things I need to do. So actually removing myself from the office just is a way of carving out some time to be a bit more productive on the more substantive stuff.

> *Amanda [10] Senior Manager, Finance sector, 2 children<6, Expansive, 4.5 days pw, 1.5 days at home*

Not all women had schedule autonomy or worked in work cultures that encouraged them to find their own hot and cold spots and make best use of private and public spaces to accomplish their work. Instead they made use of culturally sanctioned practices, such as what appeared to be a widespread normative practice across many knowledge-driven service organisations of working from home on a Friday. Taking Friday to work from home or as a non-working day was mentioned frequently and affirms the findings of Gatrell *et al.* (2014) about the symbolic significance of Fridays in British office culture as a slightly more relaxed workday and gateway to the weekend. By choosing Friday as their one day to work at home, I would argue that women did not disrupt the professional norms of place: *"...because nobody works in the office on Fridays anyway."* (Sasha [5]). Where Friday was designated one of the official non-working days in a part-time fixed schedule arrangement, this was usually a planned tactical action. It was women's intentions to minimise the potential detrimental impact of their absence on colleagues and organisational processes. The effect, I would argue, is also to disappear their non-standard working arrangement from view of clients and co-workers.

Minimising commuting time was an important time-maximisation strategy. One woman was permanently home-based, and all others had commuting times of between 30 minutes and five hours on days that they travelled to employers' premises. Longest journey times were to and from London. The longer the commute, the greater appetite there seemed to be to work from home and save that time. In some cases women actively avoided work projects that required extensive domestic or international travel: *"I probably should have gone after that project but I sort of pretended I didn't hear about it because I didn't want to travel"* (Jessica [23]). This was especially pertinent to nursing mothers and also to mothers of older children who were solely responsible for dropping-off and collecting their children from school and clubs at fixed times. There were a very small number of exceptions, including Erin [3], who eight months into her part-time working arrangement took on an international project that relocated her and her infant daughter four days per week for 3 months, a situation which she reflected on that was a moment-in-time opportunity that she felt had worked out well:

> I know that it seems like the craziest thing to do, and I can't imagine being able to do it when she's older or if we have another … it can only really happen because at the moment she is kind of moveable so its fine
>
> *Erin [3], Senior Manager, private sector, 1 infant, Protective, 4 days pw*

A key finding in this analysis is the interdependency of managing time and managing place of work. Section 7.2 turns to how women work across time and place.

7.2 Managing boundaries, creating buffers

Technology has facilitated blurring of the spatial boundaries of work. Carlson (2010) found flexible working may allow job demands to penetrate further into the home domain, particularly through technological change that means individuals can work almost anywhere and anytime. Although there is little agreement from empirical studies of the relative benefits or detrimental effects on health, well being and relationships (Voydanoff, 2005a, Mills and Täht, 2010).

Women in this study achieved being at work without physically being on employer's premises by using the technology that was made available to them. They used video calls and virtual conferencing to collaborate with colleagues in dispersed locations and across time zones. Reflecting on the difference between their approach prior to working flexibly, many women described working increasingly fluidly across their domestic and professional worlds. For many their professional work was no longer zoned to take place entirely between rigid working hours. When it came to managing workload, boundaries in all senses – cognitive, temporal, and spatial - had become more permeable, which was also found by Cahusac and Kanji (2014) analysing the work-life reconciliation experiences among professional women in London. Jenny [18] contrasted her old and new approaches to her work since become a mother and returning to paid work part-time:

> One thing that has changed particularly is it is a bit more fluid, the work/home situation. Even on the days I'm not in the office I'll still be answering emails and I'll still check it and if I need to do a bit of stuff over the weekend I will do. Before I would leave work and be like, 'that's it, done now, I don't have to think about that all weekend until I go in'. Whereas now it's very much thinking about both and actually if I need to get something done by Monday and I haven't managed it by the time I leave on Thursday then I will do it over the weekend
>
> *Jenny [18], Programme Manager, public sector, 1 infant, Compromised, 4 days pw*

Women valued having the schedule autonomy and the technology to facilitate free movement between work time and personal and family time in a variety of spaces. It was more common for women to describe this fluidity as essential and enabling, than as oppressive or intrusive. Sarah [1] provides an example:

> I'm totally flexible about when I work, I actually prefer early mornings in the office and leaving early and then logging back on at night which is kind of what I do.
>
> *Sarah [1], Humans Resources Manager, private sector, 1 infant, Protective, 4 days pw, 1 day from home*

Adopting such a fluid approach was often articulated as a personal choice or preference, yet it was a choice that women also signalled that they had no choice but to make. Their *preference* was to feel less stressed and overwhelmed by work and so they *chose* to

ameliorate these effects by using their unpaid 'down time' to keep on top of their work, a point well illustrated by Victoria [21]:

> I mean I do actually choose to do emails and things and even things like reports in the evenings and it means I feel I can relax and do it. That was something I worried about, that I'd sort of see it very much as a chore but actually I choose to do it because it means then my days at work can be sort of less pressured. I could choose not to and then have much busier and more stressful days but I choose to spread it out a bit and it's working out fine
>
> *Victoria [21], Health Professional, public sector, 2 pre-school children, Protective, 4.5 days per week*

This contradictory choice position I would argue draws women further in to privately solving problems arising from employers' inattention to how professional and managerial jobs are designed and how people perform them. A combination of reciprocity and workload justified the additional work in the evenings that Andrea [27] routinely did at home. Reciprocity arises from the social construction of a part-time and flexible working arrangement as an employee benefit; an idiosyncratic arrangement around which it is not perceived necessary to re-orientate organisational processes and collective working practices.

> I guess I sort of volley between the two. Like last night I sent two emails that took quite a bit of composing so I worked from about six to about half 9 … I feel like because I leave at 5 o'clock I have to make it up a bit at other times and I wouldn't be able to do the work in 9 to 5 there's too much, and quick-turnaround requests come in at all hours
>
> *Andrea [27], Law Professional, public sector, 3 children<10, 4 days pw, some location flexibility*

The ability to work at home in the early mornings and in the evenings when children had gone to bed was felt by most women who worked in this way as an effective way of keeping on top of workloads. Eleanor's [13] description of her typical Monday working from home provides a relatively extreme illustration of what volleying between domestic and professional work can look like:

> I get up at five and work until 7am when the kids are up, then do breakfast and get them ready. My husband can take them to school and nursery, so I just have the youngest here who usually naps around nine, so that's another hour I can jump on my laptop before I take him to nursery. Then I come back and carry on with work until three. I might stick some washing on prep something for a meal later but that's it really until I get the girls from school. If I have anything left at all I'll log on again after we've put them to bed. Sometimes I just haven't got the energy though.
>
> *Eleanor [13], Senior Manager, Health, 3 children<7, Compromised, 4 days pw*

That women pick up work again in the evenings is significant. This is usually after the time that young children have gone to bed and is when women felt their attention is not divided. Occasions when women found themselves simultaneously working and looking after

children were problematic and a lot of thought and planning went in avoiding these situations if at all possible. There were times when it was unavoidable. Claire [2] recalled a distressing occasion that made her question everything about her professional and maternal life:

> I've ended up having to have telephone conversations with a client to try and keep a deal moving and you know, quite complex things to be talking about, not just, 'can you send me this? Great, thanks,' in detail conversations and you know, at the same time I've got my daughter at my feet and she's fine for 10 minutes doing whatever she wants to do but then she wants your attention and at one point I remember very clearly, she was not quite 2 then, she started howling because she'd stuck a pencil in her ear. So I let her hurt herself and it could have been really nasty. She could have damaged her ear drum but I was on the telephone trying to have an in-depth conversation about work which wasn't the deal, you know, it wasn't the deal. Actually having *to do* the job on the day you're supposed to be doing another job has been very difficult. Very difficult.
>
> *Claire [2], Law professional, private sector, 1 infant, Compromised/Sense-Making, 3 days pw, some location flexibility*

Crisis situations such as Claire's were pivotal and shone a light on the reciprocity problem: the imbalance in the efforts of the individual to implement and sustain a part-time and flexible working arrangement and those of the organisation to facilitate it. This led Claire to conclude that on the part of her employer, *"there is not much buy-in to this three-day week arrangement, not really no, not at all."* There were other mini-crises that punctuated women's experiences of combining their paid work with motherhood that placed a strain on them and the family. These two examples of missed holidays and shifting work deadlines illustrate these occasional intense pressures:

> I was supposed to have 2 weeks in July, but now it looks like a real crunch point for the project so I'm going to have to cancel that. But it just means that I haven't had any holiday since I've been back and although I work 4 days so, it might look like a holiday, but, we haven't actually had a week break as a family, ever, and we could all do with it
>
> *Sarah [1], Human Resources Manager, private sector, 1 infant, Protective, 4 days pw, 1 day from home*

> It was a disaster, they changed the date of the meeting and my husband was away so I had no choice but to get an agency to find an emergency nanny … it cost £200 for the day to get me to that meeting and the kids were miserable because they didn't know her … that was a low point
>
> *Sasha [5] Senior Manager, private sector, 2 pre-school children, Protective, 90% of full-time working hours, some schedule and location flexibility*

Women obliged to monitor their jobs almost constantly by checking emails and answering work calls on their non-working days typically dismissed the possibility of not doing so: *"It would be great if I could just leave on a Wednesday and not have to be half working when I am off but it is just not possible" (Fiona [9])*. The more well-resourced women in this research, in

terms of having achieved occupational positions of sufficient status and seniority to afford them greater schedule autonomy, may well have been better placed to the manage the practical demands of crises such as these, by affording to buy additional flexible childcare for example, however, they were not immune to the cumulative effect of working intensively in largely un-adjusted jobs, and which caused them to doubt the sustainability of their current arrangement:

> I feel like my 80% doesn't really equate to every Friday being off however because of various dinners during the week etc. So I've been back probably about six Fridays, been on holiday for 1 of them, and on 2 occasions, well actually on 3 occasions I've had a client meeting which I couldn't get out of because this person can only have meetings on a Friday at this point in her life and she's a client. Last week we were in the midst of trying to sign a new client so whilst I was completely off I had numerous phone calls. And this week I again have a client event on Friday morning so I guess I'm mentioning all that because what I'm doing is I'm testing this at the moment this whole four days part-time thing.
>
> *Jessica [23] Senior Manager, private sector, 1 infant, Protective, 4 days pw, full schedule and location flexibility*

There were periods when arrangements worked ok and there were crisis points. Gascoigne's (2014) model of boundary management describes how flexible workers typically provide either predictable or adaptable responses in two directions, towards work and towards family. Gascoigne (2014) proposes that problems occur when the adaptability is too much in one direction, or there is mismatch when a consistent response is offered in the direction of work, for example by fixing a work schedule on set days, when a flexible response is required or vice versa.

Women in this study who experienced work overspill into non-work time as intrusion felt they had failed, either to keep on top of their workload or to police the boundaries between their worlds. Blaming oneself for one's own stretched resources personalises failure and signals the deep personal responsibility which women feel for the successful implementation of their working arrangements.

> I am quite upset with myself for not being able to create these boundaries and manage my time better… on my annual review last year it was one of my priorities to become much more structured in the way I manage my time and I'm completely failing on that front … I'm really struggling making this happen basically
>
> *Sally [28], Education Professional, public sector, 3 children<16, Expansive, 3 days pw*

Sally made a comment later in our interview that revealed how she defended herself against feeling a failure with self-talk, she said *"I have to keep telling myself maybe its not my fault and maybe it just can't work in this way."* With this comment Sally demonstrates that she does have some insight that her employer had done little to facilitate her accomplishment of a three-day working week. Sasha [5] felt similarly, which was in striking contrast to our first interview encounter during which she had been emphatic about her career and how

wonderfully accommodating her employer had been about her request to work four days. In our interview around six months into her part-time working arrangement, she was feeling disillusioned:

> As we speak I'm probably feeling a bit under pressure at the moment, yes, I am really struggling to work out how I actually, how can anyone really be part-time … to be honest I am feeling a bit 'we'll see' about staying here
>
> *Sasha [5] Senior Manager, private sector, 2 pre-school children, Protective, 90% of full-time working hours, some schedule and location flexibility*

Disheartening and exhausting experiences such as these triggered a range of responses. The most common response was to make further adjustments to working hours and schedules, and which is discussed further in 7.6. Another response was to quit. Within the 12month period of study, two women had quit and a further five were looking to leave:

> I'm thinking about leaving actually … my dilemma is should I stay in this slightly flexible but not very well-paid job with a few issues, or do I go and I'll probably need to go full-time for a bit somewhere else? … It's tough as I feel like if I don't do it now and I wait it will only be so much harder the older I get
>
> *Hayley [14] Research Manager, public sector, 2 children <8, Compromised, 4 days pw, 2 from home*

It was not the intention to exit paid work altogether and become stay-at-home mothers. The intention was to find positions commensurate with their skills and experience that afforded them greater autonomy and control over their working hours. The women who were most resolved to change jobs were those who had found their skills and their experience underutilised in marginal roles. Much empirical work has drawn attention to marginalisation, and to exclusion from vital work networks and fewer opportunities for progression as outcomes of the transition to part-time work (see 2.1). This research contributes further evidence of the marginalisation that occurs when professional women are moved or move themselves into jobs deemed more suitable for part-time working. Within weeks, and certainly within six months of starting these jobs, most women spoke of being bored, underutilised and felt undervalued:

> When I was working 3 days a week in the job they found me I was completely miserable. My job was absolutely rubbish and I felt like I literally in the space of 3 months I'd gone back about six years … I was doing the kind of work that I had done six years ago when I qualified and was like, *'oh my God, how did this happen?'*
>
> *Esther [11], Senior Manager, public sector, 2 pre-school children, Expansive, 3 days pw in a job-share*

> The work thing has been so frustratingly boring. It's just so dull. You feel your brain cells rotting away, it's just one of those like *'Really, really? Is this what you need me to do?'* … I'm starting to feel frustrated that I'm not progressing and also frustrated that home life seems to be compromised because I'm in this stagnant role. I'm losing out on the time with my daughter - she probably hasn't noticed that much - but it's having an impact on me. I think well where's my stretch, what's my next step in all of this?
>
> *Sarah [1], Humans Resources Manager, private sector, 1 infant, Protective, 4 days pw, 1 day from home*

Boredom and frustration were typical expressions of the marginalisation that women felt they were experiencing.

> I had not quite appreciated how much I needed to be mentally stimulated outside of the house. I kept telling myself all I needed was a job, that's fine but I still need the job to hit a threshold of challenging and this is not hitting that. I just think the number of days of the week you work, or can work, is linked to the types of jobs that they will give you, and they gave me a bad one
>
> *Meera[7], Operations Director, private sector, 2 children age 2 and 5, Compromised, 3 days pw, schedule and location flexibility*

> It is frustrating as I'm probably in a job which is for someone with 10 years' less experience than me and could be done by someone with 10 years' less experience than me… in a year's time, you know, I want something to change
>
> *Andrea [27], Law Professional, public sector, 3 children<10, 4 days pw, some location flexibility*

In her analysis of identity transformation upon motherhood and the renegotiation of professional accounting work, Haynes (2008) found that when women experienced moves into marginal roles, there was a strong sense of retrogression in their oral histories that reflected feelings of despair. Despair is tangible in Emma's account:

> I wish I had more positive things to say about it really but it has been really disappointing … I am capable of a lot more. I am doing the kind of work I did years ago… I promised myself not to make any knee-jerk decisions about leaving so I am making myself stay for six months and see if it gets better
>
> *Emma [24], Project Manager, private sector, 1 infant, Restorative/Sense-Making, 3 days pw*

Cahusac and Kanji's (2014) research with London-based professional mothers who worked part-time showed that over a relatively short period of time, women worked out whether their work situations were tolerable and sustainable. The inference from their findings in the context of my own is that the difficulties women had in imagining their short and long-term futures with their current employers might more meaningfully be attributed to their experiences of marginalisation on the 'mummy track', and to a mismatch of expected flexibilities between employer and employee, than to their diminished professional ambition upon motherhood. The serious consequences of these experiences for individuals and for employing organisations are discussed further in chapter eight. Before that discussion,

attention now turns to the sub group of women who appeared to be insulated from excessive work demands, the job-sharers.

7.3 (Job) Sharing the load

The three job-sharers in this study were the only sub group of research participants able to provide a consistent response in the direction of work (Gascoigne, 2014). They managed to maintain a reasonably hard boundary between their work and family worlds because when one job-sharing partner was not working the other was. In these three cases, job-sharing had also avoided marginalisation and facilitated women's access to professional roles commensurate with their skills and experience, and in one case, to a more senior position than the one previously held.

> It is great, it is working out *so* well and we've had some really great feedback. People are loving the work we're doing, we're finding it really interesting. We haven't had any blips or things like that
>
> *Esther [11], Senior Manager, public sector, 2 pre-school children, Expansive, 3 days pw in a job-share*

A job share is defined in this study as sharing the tasks and responsibilities of a single full-time role between two people who work part-time. Job-sharing can also be 'teamed' between more than two people, however there were no examples of this model in this study. Job-sharing is most often found in transactional and administrative roles lower down the occupational hierarchy, and is rarely found in management and senior roles (Daniels, 2012). Most often job-sharing is a type of flexible working arrangement performed by two women working collaboratively.

Data discussed here is drawn from the reflections of two women with previous experience of job-sharing in their work histories, and three women whose transitions into job-sharing this study followed. Two of the women entering job shares for the first time had found their own partners from within the organisation and then they proposed the model to their employer, and with a particular job in mind. The third case was unusual because the woman had applied as an external candidate to be recruited to join an incumbent job-sharer in a public sector organisation. The two women with job-sharing in their work histories had worked in the public sector. Their collected reflections on the practicalities of job-sharing in a range of organisational contexts (two private sector, three pubic sector) and their experiences of the enabling or constraining structures, processes and workplace attitudes provides insight into the lived experiences of this distinctive and collaborative way of working. The potential of job-sharing to emancipate the part-time professional from a challenging five-days-in-three workload is discussed.

The main benefit expressed by job-sharers of working in this way is the achievement of predictable, uninterrupted time off and hence relief from a felt pressure to be always-on and available to clients and co-workers on non-working days. Gail [20] provides an example of this benefit in her reflection about how she worked before the job-share:

> When I was working Tuesday-Friday I would always feel on a Monday that I ought to have a quick look [at my smart phone] at lunchtime if there was something going on. And I'd look again in the evening. So I wasn't really ever switched off from work. It was still there. But now, Wednesday afternoon I do still keep an eye on it to help Sarah take-over so if needs to ask me a question I will answer it for her. But Thursday and Friday, I don't even turn the thing on.
>
> *Gail [20], Finance Manager, private sector, 1 infant, Restorative, 2.5 days pw in a job-share*

The lack of organisational support for job-sharing was evident in the told stories of women finding each other and subsequently pitching their model of collaboration to their managers. Gatrell (2008) found that job-sharing worked well in practice yet job-sharers had to organise it and establish themselves. Women in private sector were typically the first and only job-sharers in their work contexts at senior levels. Systems and processes did not exist to support two people doing one job. The key challenge for job-sharers operating in elite and competitive contexts is that it is a collaborative model in an environment characterised by individualism. The processes and systems of work organisation, recognition and reward, are aligned to a resourcing model that expects one job to be fulfilled by one person. Seemingly simple things like getting a joint business card, proved difficult to arrange and necessitated more explanation and more persuasion than a full-time or even a part-time colleague might have been expected to do.

> It's the things you think are really simple that are actually really time-consuming to sort out, like business cards. There was a policy about one name on one card and that seemed to cause a lot of bother to sort out, and the email account, we wanted one mailbox to share between us … that still hasn't been set-up properly.
>
> *Gail [20], Finance Manager, private sector, 1 infant, Restorative, 2.5 days pw in a job-share*

All job-sharers reported a level of introspection about their personal approach to work, before they embarked on the job-share and during its early weeks and months. They thought deeply about how they would feel about sharing the limelight with someone else and about how exposing of individual weaknesses such an intimate form of team working could be. Esther [11] captured this when reflecting on why her relationship with her job-share partner worked so well:

I think it definitely makes me more effective and accountable in terms of what I actually do at work as I have to 'fess up to times when I have not managed to get something done when I said I would … yeah I definitely waste a lot less time … we've got quite good at making new work habits and breaking old habits that have annoyed me for years anyway but have never seemed to manage to stop doing … I think we're both really comfortable with other people knowing a lot about what we're doing, what we're thinking about stuff and how we're performing … we're both self-assured enough that we're not too worried about what the other person will think about all that and also we've known each other quite a while too, we're similar ability levels and very different but complementary styles. That works really well as well.

Esther [11], Senior Manager, public sector, 2 pre-school children, Expansive, 3 days pw in a job-share

In these women's experiences a blueprint for job-sharing in management and professional jobs did not exist. They needed to work it out for themselves. In this respect job-sharing is little different from any other part-time and flexible arrangement in that the heavy-lifting is undertaken by the employee (Corwin *et al.*, 2001). The practices of job-sharing that job-sharers identified as essential to the effective implementation included: agreeing the time split across the week, for example dividing the week in half with or without an overlapping day. Agreeing privately between the parties an expected life span of the job-share was felt important as well. Being clear about a commitment to one year or two years as a partnership was advised. No job-sharers anticipated that their partnership would last forever and all felt that it was better to be up front about a fixed time commit to working together before reviewing the arrangement.

The design of the job-share needs to be appropriate to the nature of the job. There were a few different models being developed. Jobs that manage a business process and require continuity across a week split five work days into two blocks such that a process managed by one partner at the start of the week could be continued seamlessly by the other at the end of the week with a handover in the middle. Job-shares that were designed around project work or case work were more likely to involve a complete sharing of a portfolio by partners working on different days. It also proved possible to divide projects between the partners according to specialist skill and expertise, thus retaining an element of individuality and avoiding total substitutability. Job-sharers agreed plans for hand-over, which usually happened outside of working hours. They protected each other's private time by establishing rules about getting in touch on non-working days. They reported the importance of being united on decisions and of backing each other up. Competition within the job-share partnership was viewed as unhealthy and likely to lead to failure of the arrangement.

Accounts in this study emphasise the positives of job-sharing, which were felt to be primarily in terms of enabling the individual to be completely absent from work when she is not contracted to be working. It is a flexible working arrangement that if it works well, offers

respite from a felt need to *"always being open to the whole organisation all the time"* (Gemma [8]), in that a confident and close relationship with a job-share partner appeared to reduce the need to check emails or take calls on non-work days. Many women who were not currently job-sharing spoke in wishful ways about how they imagined this type of arrangement to be the solution to their in-work challenges. They emphasised the welcome relief from pressure to be continuously available to work across five weekdays, and in some cases saw benefits in job-sharing in more senior roles as an interim step towards full-time employment higher up the ladder when children are older. Juliet [29], for example, was actively seeking a job-share partner although she had little positive response from prospective employers about the idea:

> It is clear from the conversations I have been having that asking for part-time fixed hours is pretty toxic…and they don't know how to do job-shares, there's definitely an education process to go through on that … at the moment it's very much a case of you fitting in with us, not us with you
>
> *Juliet [29] Finance Manager, private sector, 4 children <17, Expansive, 3 days pw from home*

Job-sharing was mention specifically as a solution to the perceived 3-day-week problem, as Sophie [30] concluded, *"three days is impossible without a job-share, it just can't be done"*, again emphasising the idea that jobs are designed full-time by default.

Little mention of limitations of job-sharing was made by the three women whose transition into job-shares this study analysed. Drawing from women's reflections of their previous experiences of job-sharing offers insight into some of the potential challenges. When one job-share partner quits, only in one public sector organisation did a mechanism exist for recruiting a new partner. Another challenge was negotiating for two within systems that negotiate for one. Ambiguity about pay led to inaction in Andrea's case [27]:

> My job share partner and I were thinking why didn't we ask for a pay rise. We'd been on the same salary since 2008. I think it was because we had children during that time we felt we couldn't ask for a pay rise and also because we were a job share I didn't feel I could just ask for a pay rise just for me, I'd need to be asking for her as well but I didn't know if the organisation could give one of us a pay rise without the other, but actually, neither of asked the question so I don't know.
>
> *Andrea [27], Law Professional, public sector, 3 children<10, 4 days pw, some location flexibility*

Job-sharing facilitates job performance in ways that do not fundamentally challenge the 'nature of the job' or radically challenge the full-time present and responsive professional time norms that dominate the majority of work cultures within which these women were employed. The way that women described implementing their job-shares did not seem to demand too much of their employers. The adjustment required on the part of the organisation was minimal, for example facilitating joint-business cards, shared telephone numbers, and colleagues are not tested to remember which days are non-working days

because one or other of partners will be there. It requires an intense and revealing form of team-work and trust between the partners, and a consistent message about the model needs to be given to internal and external clients. The women who do it in managerial and professional work regard job-sharing positively. Women spoke of the extra relationship work that comes with being part of a job-share. The effort it takes to manage the relationship within the partnership and between the partners and the organisation. Effort that is considerable within organisations that are unfamiliar and often sceptical about the expansive impact of two sets of complementary skills and working styles in one professional role. As pioneers and pathfinders in their own organisations innovating with flexible working practices, the job-sharers encountered bias even from seemingly the most supportive of sources, as Esther [11] recalled:

> After a few weeks our boss sat us down and said *'please stop telling everyone you're a job-share as they'll think you're a bit rubbish'*, and things like *'I might be a dinosaur but...'* We just said, no, and that we were going to carry on telling people that we are a job-share. We are doing this important job with loads of visibility and we're good at it, people need to know that there are two of us and that is why we are so good.
>
> *Esther [11], Senior Manager, public sector, 2 pre-school children, Expansive, 3 days pw in a job-share*

Job-sharers have a difficult time convincing managers that their collective approach works to the organisation's benefit. It is also difficult to fit a collective model into progression structures premised on individual success and advancement. The skills and styles of working that make job-sharing effective, women felt, were under valued by employers, and even viewed with suspicion. Andrea [27] provides an example of how she felt that a recruiter's favourable bias towards full-time and continuous employment locked her out of a new opportunity:

> What I think went against me in some of the interviews was being a job share … in the final interview, they were basically saying, at one point they seemed to be suggesting I might have been lying about doing all these amazing things and it might have been my job share partner who'd done them. That was difficult and I felt that because I had been a job share I couldn't be seen as the safe option…I was pretty cross, yeah it was pretty hard to take.
>
> *Andrea [27], Law Professional, public sector, 3 children<10, 4 days pw, some location flexibility*

Job-sharing in managerial and professional work is an opportunity for individuals to better manage time and space and to access more heavy-weight roles working three days per week or less than they might have otherwise been able to access with a part-time role. Women spoke enthusiastically about this type of flexible working arrangement, whilst acknowledging the effort that it took, and continues to take, to design and implement their approach. Maintaining a professional role of desired stretch helped women imagine their

future selves in professional positions of at least equal or more responsibility. Their achievement of that vision depends on more favourable disposition of employers to the benefits and job-sharing for individuals and organisations.

7.4 Sharing the load at home?

A rich seam of data emerged about women's relationships with husbands and partners and which revealed their satisfactions with the continuities and discontinuities in divisions of domestic labour and childcare. The inter-dependent nature of women's lives and the intricate web of relationships that are spun around them are made plain in their accounts. Many women spoke of simmering tensions and predictable flash points in their relationships. One participant memorably re-told a long-running argument that she had with her husband:

"…and I said, you do know, I didn't got to Harvard to do your laundry?"

This was one of many conflict stories told by women that related to laundry. Wives laundering husband's work wear was an issue between couples, holding symbolic significance, epitomising wifework (Maushart, 2002) and exposing the power relationship within couples. In couple interviews Gatrell (2005) found similar frustrations in relation to ironing men's shirts which was a form of wifework too far for many women she interviewed who took a stand against it, about which their husbands felt a little hard done by.

In early motherhood women often report feeling that it is only 'fair' that they take on the bulk of childcare and domestic work because they are the ones with more time available at home (Lupton and Schmied, 2002, Miller, 2012). The time-availability rationale ceases to be meaningful when women return to work and increase the amount of paid work they do in a day, but the continued unequal division of domestic labour may still be rationalised as fair. Rationalising a fair distribution of earning and housework does not mean that women are content with it. Much research has shown that uneven distribution of housework is a source of conflict and tension within relationships (Alger and Crowley, 2012, Chambers, 2012, Lyonette and Crompton, 2015). Rachel [25] described a recurring row with her husband about his apparent inability to execute his fairly narrow set of allocated childcare tasks without her background organisation:

> I just flew off the handle. I cannot understand why he cannot hold that information in his mind. They have been at school for 3 years and he still can't remember they finish at 3.15 not 3.30. I genuinely think he doesn't see it, doesn't see the correlation between the two things, my relatively lack-lustre career at the moment, the sense that I can't get any new projects underway because I just don't have the head space. And that I am constantly thinking about lunchboxes and who is picking up who and the fact that he is always forgetting where he is supposed to be. His career is on a roll and he doesn't see his impact on mine
>
> *Rachel [25], Education Professional, public sector, 3 children<8, Restorative, 80% of full-time, schedule and location flexibility*

In the heat of the moment during a busy morning preparing all five family members for their school and work days, Rachel held her husband responsible for the daily pressure she was under. The responsibility she had to remember everything for everyone, she felt, had facilitated his career at the expense of her own. Rachel felt diminished professionally by her enduring domestic and childcare responsibilities. Rachel was not alone.

Gail [20] exemplified the feelings that many new mothers expressed, that their individual wants and needs had receded in importance in the family. This was fertile territory for conflict:

> I really resent that everything I ever wanted to do went right to the bottom of the list … I kept saying to him and it's still something I say to him now is that time to myself does not mean the 2 hours when [our daughter] has a nap. That's not 'me time'. I'm still responsible for her in that time. It's not free time. Even though I can sit down and watch something on telly, what I need is to hand over responsibility… I've had to completely reinvent everything that I do and he hasn't changed his life hardly at all.
>
> *Gail [20], Finance Manager, private sector, 1 infant, Restorative, 2.5 days pw in a job-share*

Most women lived transitional relationships when their espoused relationship ideology was egalitarian. Amanda [10] described her mounting dissatisfaction with living with contradiction between her relationship ideals and reality, the inequalities in which she found physically and emotionally debilitating:

> It's quite a miserable existence doing four hours commuting a day for a job that I'm not finding particularly interesting or fulfilling then come the weekend having to pick up all of the lapsed housework and just really not having the energy to manage that… I've just found myself not having patience at home as I'm feeling really squeezed and really exhausted…I snap at the children and my husband and quite honestly I just don't want to be around them sometimes
>
> *Amanda [10] Senior Manager, Finance sector, 2 children<6, Expansive, 4.5 days pw, 1.5 days at home*

For two women in this research, simmering tensions had become more sustained and serious in the twelve months since our first interview encounter and they were in the process of negotiating formal separations from their husbands. In our final interview their concerns about their relationship eclipsed their concerns for the effectiveness or otherwise of their flexible working arrangement, although as Hayley explained, her relationship problems were not completely unrelated to her frustrated professional ambition:

> It sometimes feels like we're running a business, a project, you know? I'd rather have a problem like he doesn't do enough housework to be honest. I think that's at least something you can work with. You can accept it or you can change it. But I think ours is an issue you can't just agree to change… it relates to what I want to get out of my job and career, that stimulation that has been missing for years. I want to get more out of my life and I don't think that we do that for each other. To be honest that

is the major drain, strain, whatever you want to call it that has been overwhelming my head these last months

Hayley [14] Research Manager, public sector,2 children <8, Compromised, 4 days pw, 2 from home

Relationships were under pressure in ways not only related to the inequalities in domestic labour. Their relationship was often relegated below the other time-absorbing priorities of professional work and childcare. Sadie [17] expressed sadness and surprise at the pressure she felt her relationship was under:

I didn't expect the main impact to be on my relationship… the thing that's the hardest to deal with is not prioritising our relationship as you think you can push that aside and it'll be fine, that's probably been the hardest thing and the most surprising as I thought it would just be stress associated with work or something like that that affected me.

Sadie [17], Education Professional, public sector, 1 infant, Restorative, Compressed full-time in fewer days, schedule and location flexibility

Despite much mention of dissatisfaction with the disconnection between egalitarian ideals and life as they were living it, there was little evidence of intended radicalisation of the couple relationships and disruption of traditional gendered relationships.

The tensions that women reported in their relationships resonate with Beagan *et al.'s* (2008) conclusion that traditional gender roles reinvent themselves in new guises. It is no longer acceptable to view cooking or cleaning as inherently women's work, yet the same gender expectations persist in more complex forms couched in terms of individual choices, standards and preferences. Most women in this study recognised that a solution to the problem of *un-lived* egalitarianism could be found in the synchronised actions of their male partners to take more responsibility for childcare and their own actions to step back. This option was often discounted, couched in terms of his perceived preference: *"he doesn't want to do it"* (Meera [7]); ability: *"it's just not his skill set, I'm better at it"* (Rachel [25]); affordability: *"he earns more than me… its more affordable for me to be here"* (Cathy [4]); timing in careers: *"he's on promotion track, he needs to focus"* (Erin [3]); and her personal standards: *"I worry things will fall through the net, it's easier if I do it"* (Amanda [10]).

There were some exceptions. In two cases heterosexual dual-earning couples had re-drawn and reversed the traditional breadwinning-caregiving gendered order. One husband took just over one year out of employment to look after the couple's toddler twins full-time; another husband regularly worked from home and took responsibility for care of their infant daughter for three days every week. In both cases the practical arrangements were felt to have worked out very well and had facilitated women's return to their career jobs. Esther, her husband having since returned to full-time work and she to a job-share, spoke of how

their egalitarian approach to combining parenting with career development involved turn-taking and his turn was next:

> He took last year to be at home with the kids … this year we have cordoned off time for him to go through the promotion round that he's reasonably well-placed for, so I definitely think it's his turn next…I will wait and apply for promotion later in the year
>
> *Esther [11], Senior Manager, public sector, 2 pre-school children, Expansive, 3 days pw in a job-share*

Both women recalled moments of doubt about their arrangements. In Sarah's case it was her daughter demonstrating a preference for comfort from her father that triggered deep reflection:

> I've had some difficulties recently as my daughter has started to talk and she just wants daddy all the time and that's been something that's been really difficult for me to deal with. I know they all go through stages and it will pass, but a few weeks ago it was becoming really hard for me and I was really questioning if I'd made the right decision you know, two voices in my head one side of me still this ambitious person that's worked really hard for a long time and wants to progress, and then there's the other side of me that's a mum saying 'why are you letting this happen, it's you she's supposed to want?' I've had that real battle going on.
>
> *Sarah [1], Humans Resources Manager, private sector, 1 infant, Protective, 4 days pw, 1 day from home*

Moments of doubt were indeed moments; episodes that women did not let endure. In these moments they looked to their professional lives to convince them beyond doubt that they had made the right choices about work. If professional work was not rewarding, materially or otherwise, and a vision of their professional futures was hard to see, then the emotional effort required to defend the self against moments of doubt became much greater. In these moments women needed to mount a robust psychic defence against the idea of the natural, omnipresent mother as providing the best care for children.

In two further cases women were combining breadwinning with caregiving in different family forms that are increasingly prevalent and becoming more visible: as lesbian parents and as a lone-parent. Maya [22] described how she and her wife were aiming for *"full flexibility for both of us"* such that both of them could work part-time and share the care of their children. Both partners anticipated that self-employment would afford them greater freedoms in this respect than permanent employment. When it came to the domestic division of labour, Maya spoke at length about how the lack of what she called a *"gender default"* meant that every aspect of living together and raising their family had to be negotiated between them. At times this had caused conflict that she felt was *"coming from a different place"* to the tensions played out in public that she had observed in heterosexual couples:

Because we're two women I find that the sort of designated roles are not as clear-cut. I don't mean to sound stereotypical but I've seen other friends and even family members have a little fight in public where they'll go, *'who is going to change his or her nappy, you're the mum you change the nappy,'* and there's some tension. Whereas we've had to work out our own rules because of the non-gender issues … Usually, I've seen in other relationships the man will do the handy stuff, and take the garbage out. If I'm free and she's at work I'll obviously deal with it. So what I'm saying I think is that we can't draw on the gender stereotypes to say you do it, I'll do it; we just take care of it.

Maya [22], Project Manager, private sector, I infant, Restorative, 4 days pw

Giddens (1992) called people in same-sex relationships *"prime everyday experimenters"* (p135), because visible and out same-sex partners making families are at the forefront of changes to the notion of the conventional family. Another unconventional and increasingly prevalent family form is the lone parent family. Jane [12], lone parent of two children in primary school, found that she *"couldn't work 50 hours a week and look after the kids"* and by slightly reducing her working hours, compressing her workload into fewer days and working from home more she made room for the responsibilities that she could not routinely share with a partner. Her children spent one or sometimes two nights each week with their father. Often the children returned with dirty laundry but on the whole, gendered tensions over the division of domestic labour were replaced with tensions about access and money.

7.5 A successful transition?

Jane's transition narrative was *Restorative* (see 4.1.2) in that her aim with her transition into a new flexible working arrangement was to reduce the stress and overload in her life that she had experienced working full-time. Her reflections about her move to compress her working hours and increase home working were largely positive:

One of the original drivers was that I felt kind of so overloaded and stressed out that it wasn't just my work-life balance that wasn't working, it was the fact that being overloaded was leading me to being so stressed that when I was with the kids I wasn't really able to be fully present or the sort of parent that I wanted to be. It was almost like they were being doubly short-changed in a way, and that has definitely changed since I've been working compressed hours. I've felt much more like when I'm with the kids I'm focusing on them.

Jane [12], Project Manager, public sector, 2 children under 8, Restorative, Part-time 4.5 days, 2 days from home

Yet in the same interview Jane also said that the part-time working hours arrangement to which she had transitioned *"had not worked at all"* and she went on to explain,

I think basically what I've achieved by trying to not work on a Friday afternoon is not working at the weekend, which is something, so instead of finishing at lunchtime on Friday I've stopped working at the weekend but I have been working until the end of the day on Friday…. so I've reduced my working hours but I haven't managed to ever fit it into four and a half days

No one was unequivocal about the effectiveness of their individual flexible working arrangement. This I would argue is because the transition holds much greater meaning and significance in women's lives than is suggested by a transactional adjustment in the employment contract between employer and employee. Discussion of women's narrative accounts in chapter four emphasises the diverse circumstances and motivations to go part-time, compress hours, work from home or job-share in professional and managerial roles. Some women caught in a time-bind - and others aiming to avoid it - sought to alleviate the pressures they felt by metering the amount of time they gave their professional work (the *Restorative* transition narrative, 4.1.1). For others, first-time mothers in particular, reducing their working hours expressed their newly acquired maternal identities in ways that they felt were consistent with their emerging moralities of mothering (the *Sense-Making* transition narrative 4.1.5). For women who were increasing paid working hours after years of working less or not at all, their moves into new part-time and flexible roles were optimistic steps towards new professional futures (the *Expansive* transition narrative 4.1.2). *Protective* transition narratives (4.1.3) were associated with seemingly small, tactical reductions in working hours to avoid professional marginalisation, and with pre-emptive moves into less intensive jobs to protect professional reputations.

Compromise is evident in all 30 transition narratives, in two directions: between ones ideal model of mothering and what is practically possible within care networks and relationships, and between personal ideal models of work and what is culturally tolerated in organisations. For some women compromise defined their transition in marked ways (the Compromised transition narrative 4.1.4), factors external to the self overpowered identity claims and working pattern preferences. Although likely to be articulated as choices, these Compromised narratives often revealed little choice at all in working patterns and were structured entirely by factors external to the self such as workplace policies, childcare arrangements and partners' working patterns.

At a purely practical level what women aimed to achieve with a reduction or compression of working hours were predictable periods of time away from professional work. Few women achieved these outcomes to their satisfaction without further adjustments to their working hours, schedules or locations of work.

The most typical subsequent adjustment was to *increase* the amount of weekly paid working hours. Eleanor [13] explains:

> The whole idea was I'd pick the boys up at lunchtime and have them for the afternoon. I had essentially 2 ½ hours in the morning when they were at nursery or pre-school where I could do household chores, whatever needs doing that isn't work. So that worked for the first week and then the workload was too much at work so I then started working the mornings and made the decision 2 weeks ago that I just had to work on a Monday. So I've now gone back to working on a Monday.
>
> *Eleanor [13], Senior Manager, Public sector, 3 children<7, Compromised, 4 days pw (later increased to full-time)*

The burden of domestic chores twinned with a professional workload that did not reduced when paid working hours did features in Eleanor's account and those of many others. The most problematic transition scenario was converting the full-time job women had had previously held into a part-time job. Thirteen women attempted to convert their full-time jobs into part-time jobs on between three and four and a half days per week, or around 20 and 33 hours per week. Seven women increased their paid working hours on a permanent basis within the 12 month period of study, including Charlotte [26] who went up to full-time:

> What I've ended up doing is pretty much going back to normal full-time working… from a working perspective it's easier as you're around when everybody else is around and things don't get missed
>
> *Charlotte [26], Sales Manager, private sector, 2 children<6, Restorative, 80% of full-time working from home (later increased to full-time working from home)*

Three days was a particularly difficult conversion to sustain. Five of the six women who embarked on a three-day week increased to four days. They justified their decisions as a need to keep on top of largely unadjusted full-time workloads and a desire to get paid for the extra work they were doing anyway. Only one of the women who had embarked on a three day week conversion of her previous full-time job continued to work in that way within the 12-month period of study. Having agreed a proportionate reduction in her case load, dropped her interest projects, and secured resources to delegate to and to monitor work in her absence, she found her job was *"just about manageable"* (Lara [6]) on these terms. More typical however, was Nina's [16] situation:

> It didn't take long to work out that I just could get through everything I needed to in 3 days, I didn't have any cover…going up to 4 days has made it all a bit more manageable
>
> *Nina [16], Research Manager, private sector, 1 infant, Compromised/Sense-Making, 4 days pw*

Increasing her paid working days from three to four made Nina's workload manageable and she feels more secure about the sustainability of the arrangement. It does, however, raise an ethical question about the inequality in pay and reward that arises because the efficient four-day worker is executing their unadjusted full-time responsibilities in less

time and for less pay than the fully compensated five-day worker. This and other invisible inequalities are discussed further in chapter eight.

There were benefits and there were challenges to working flexibly. There were periods of effectiveness and moments of crises and it all cases there was a lot of hard work. Rachel [25] was one of the few participants who described her arrangement as *"more good than bad"* and *"working well"*, and having achieved her Restorative aim, for now:

> For me the way I try to think about it is in terms of 0.8 of my normal job rather than working 4 days a week. Generally speaking, I don't work on a Tuesday but sometimes I do and that's fine because very often I have to trim the end of somewhere or go in late or whatever. I don't feel racks of guilt doing that. That is what genuine flexible working is, and that is the key for me, it has been really good, really good
>
> *Rachel [25], Education Professional, public sector, 3 children<8, Restorative, 80% of full-time, schedule and location flexibility*

More typical across the 30 cases was a mixed evaluation of the experience and of the benefits of transitioning into a flexible working arrangement:

> Mixed it has been, mixed. Overall it's probably been more good than bad… going 3 days as proved that I cannot quit, that would not work for me and actually I just need one day off to keep on top of things at home … that situation is not going to change and I think I accept that now … I have learned that if I don't hold back a bit on controlling everything at home I just become his glorified home secretary and not be the kind of mother I want to be which is actually spending time with my kids not just doing their admin, and having some kind of life for me
>
> *Meera[7], Operations Director, private sector, 2 children age 2 and 5, Compromised, 3 days pw, schedule and location flexibility*

> It did feel really good to be back in a working environment and to be managing people again and to have that sense of having a bit of forward momentum, a sense of 'I'm back, I'm in, I'm at a reasonably senior level, I can do this.' That was a big thing and it has been great as a way back in but on the other hand, the job is not good at all and home, home gets more dysfunctional by the day
>
> *Amanda [10] Senior Manager, Finance sector, 2 children<6, Expansive, 4.5 days pw, 1.5 days at home*

Women who had made well-planned and protective adjustments to their ways of working talked of giving the arrangement a full business-year before being able to properly evaluate whether their personal strategies had been effective. Jessica [23] suggested she needed *"get my results to see whether this has really worked"*, and Sasha whose individual case illustrated the Protective transition narrative (4.1.3) said, *"I'm just hanging on for my annual appraisal, then I'll know"*. Lara [6] similarly anticipated more time being necessary to help her work out whether the additional effort she was making by working extra hours in the

evenings to stretch her working day and retain her access to *"the better quality work",* had positioned her well on a career ladder:

> … I need to know if I'm going anywhere. I'm giving it maybe a year longer, seeing where I'm going and then considering if it's not something I can go anywhere with maybe reconsider my career and look at changing it.
>
> *Lara [6], Law professional, private sector, 2 pre-school children, Compromised, 3 days pw, no location flexibility*

The rewards were not yet clearly out-weighing the challenges of working in the way women were. Whilst it seemed that some women were awaiting their organisation's judgement of the success of the arrangement, others had already worked out whether the situation was tolerable and had made firm plans to stay or to quit. In the 12month period of study period all but four of 30 women had made further adjustments to either the time, timing, or location of paid work and/or parallel adjustments to childcare and 12 were content for now. Four women had changed jobs and moved to a new employer and one moved oversees. Two women had quit and were looking for other jobs, and four more expressed ambivalence towards staying in their current positions. Seven women had become pregnant again and sought to remain in the same employment for the duration of their pregnancies and maternity leave. What happened after the birth of another child was an open question.

The level and frequency of further adjustments to working hours, schedules and locations indicate that the complex settlement of competing ideological and practical pulls that women make is only fleeting. Combining work and care is a dynamic process requiring nimble and frequent adjustments to working practices and to family practices. Yet flexible working policy at the national level permits employees to make only one flexible working request in a 12-month period. Chapter eight draws conclusions from this analysis and discusses the risks and impacts for individuals, families and organisations from persistence of these themes. The chapter concludes with discussion about the transformational opportunities for flexible working policy and practice in the future.

Chapter 8: Conclusions

This is a study of professional women's experiences navigating transition into a flexible working arrangement when they become mothers and continue to craft a life that combines paid work with family care. Women's relationships to work and family life are at its heart. Multiple interview encounters over the course of one year generated rich qualitative insights, which illuminate the complex relationships between policies, normative and gendered societal expectations, and individual intentions and practices. This analysis advances understanding of maternal subjectivities during periods of personal and professional change. Its contribution to feminist and sociological scholarship is through close examination of framing structures and social influences on the fine-grained detail of women's lives and engagement with practises of resistance and their transformative potential.

8.1 Choosing part-time and flexible work

Whilst it is clear from this analysis that it is perfectly possible for women to desire success in both family and professional domains, this study finds that the opportunities and resources available to professional women to do so are not as open and enabling as they might be. Women continue to be positioned as responsible for the emotional and physical well being of their children and for the domestic sphere. Certain domestic and childcare tasks are shared with partners-in-parenting, and all women in couple relationships describe taking the big decisions about their children's lives together. They however simultaneously acknowledge that their maternal and domestic responsibilities endure, irrespective of their working time, schedule or the intensity of their jobs. This was unexpected to many, who found their egalitarian ideals faced with more traditional realities. Only four women in this study describe their partners making parallel adjustments to their working lives in ways which might constitute genuinely lived egalitarianism. That is, a sharing of power in the couple relationship as well as the demands and rewards of professional work and family care. It seems little has changed in many years of gender progress in employment.

Women can and do make choices about their paid work, in this way they exercise agency. Their agency however, is *boundaried*, neither open nor as unfettered as choice-based explanations for women's employment participation and outcomes (e.g. Hakim, 2000) would suggest. I use the word boundaried deliberately, to relate to the concept of the boundaryless career (Arthur and Rousseau, 1996), which when viewed in the light of this analysis offers limited potential for women as an actionable alternative to the organisational career. This is because women's choices about employment are boundaried, or structured by the gendered relationships to childcare within couples, household financial commitments and lifestyle aspirations, women's workplace status and strength of line-manager relationships, availability

of childcare that is flexible and affordable, and women's own moral understandings about the *"right thing to do"*.

These structuring influences and their relative grip on women's opportunities are reflected in how women narrate their intentions with their move into part-time and flexible work. An original contribution of this study is a new typology of women's work-life adjustments expressed as five transition narratives: Restorative, Expansive, Protective, Compromised and Sense-making, extending the work-life scholarship of Crompton and Harris (2007; 1998) and Tomlinson (2006), and McRae (2003) that emphasise institutional and societal processes in determining the ways in which women participate in paid work and combine it with care work rather than personal preference and choice. The identification of five narratives, one of which signals professionally expansive intentions, offers a challenge to the dominant conflict-resolution narrative that is often used to explain employees voluntary adjustments to reduce working hours and restrict schedules.

There is a strong temporal dimension to women's narratives. Professional careers pre-existed women's maternity by between 10 and 20 years, firmly establishing a professional identity. Family formation is described as a welcome pivot in women's evolving life biographies, however returning from maternity to familiar workplaces in newly unfamiliar part-time and flexible jobs tested women's resilience at a time of profound personal change. For women who have completed their family size, this latest reformulation of the temporal and spatial dynamics of their professional work offered a way back, an opportunity to reclaim a professional identity that had been suppressed by the maternal and its responsibilities.

Women's narratives reveal that transitions into part-time and flexible work arrangements are tactical responses, made with intentions to restore or seek a sense of work-life balance, to protect careers, or to expand professional opportunities. In all cases employment transitions in the context of motherhood are morally potent, socially informed and often a compromise. The transformational promise of flexible working arrangements to facilitate women's lives appeals to women who see themselves as professionals and mothers and not one or the other. The meshing of women's professional and maternal lives and selves is dynamic. It is continuously under review as women react, protect, expand, compromise, and make-sense of their work-life opportunities and choices through time.

Access to preferential flexible working arrangements, that is, those most aligned to what women consider their ideal at that moment in time, continues to be a privileged position afforded to those operating at the most senior levels and in highly valued roles inside organisations. Seniority may secure access to flexible working arrangements, however the physical, cognitive, and emotional work involved in making them work in practice in

workplace cultures that are unfamiliar and untrusting of employee flexibility is universally demanding. It is to the 'doing' of part-time and flexible work that the next section attends.

8.2 Practicing part-time and flexible work

Making visible the hidden work behind a flexible working arrangement is a key contribution of this thesis. The heavy lifting involved establishing, implementing and sustaining a part-time and flexible working arrangement falls to the individual employee. The nature of the work involved in making a flexible working arrangement work in practice is cognitive, physical, and emotional. The labours of women working flexibly extend beyond doing the job to managing the way the job is done within limited hours, restricted schedules, and out of office locations. Key findings about professional women's transition experiences and practices are summarised in these concluding themes that illuminate what we learn from women's approaches, successes and failures to implement flexible working arrangements in professional and managerial jobs.

8.2.1 Quiet responsibility

Women embarking on a flexible working arrangement take quiet responsibility for fitting in to established organisational structures, systems, processes and attitudes, and not the other way round. The experience of implementing a flexible working arrangement is a self-directed one; the practical, cognitive, and emotional demands of which are largely invisible to others at work. Women assumed it was their personal responsibility to make their arrangement work in practice and by their own accounts, were largely unsupported by their employing organisations in achieving effective job-designs for flexibility. Women in this study were highly aware of the labours of their responsibility, yet few had assumed that the responsibility should or could be shared with employing organisations. The social construction and apparent mutual interpretation between employee and employer of flexible working policy as an employee benefit and not an organisational capability, locates that responsibility with the individual not the organisation. This is entirely consistent with what Gill (2016) describes as the 'personalisation of responsibility' that is endemic in the neoliberal framework around individual lives. The personalisation of responsibility appears to extend to the personalisation of failure as well because it was common for women to blame themselves for failing to make a big job smaller or more manageable by simply working faster and harder. It was equally common for women to dismiss the problems they experienced achieving uninterrupted and predictable time away from paid work on their designated non-working days as due to 'the nature of the job', implying that their jobs were and always will be designed in a certain way.

The idea that the managerial or professional job is an immoveable construct that offers limited potential for redesign so that it can be performed in different amounts of time, schedules and places, limits ambition for further transformation of working practices and for gender equality. Women's quiet endeavours to implement their arrangements with minimal inconvenience to others at work disappears their considerable effort. This further preserves the fixed and unaccommodating nature of the job rather than transforming it and the ways it is possible to perform it. This is not to hold these professional women responsible for a universally stalled transformation of working practices rather it is to point out the limited reach and perverse impacts of *individual* solutions to working time and flexibility issues, when *collective* solutions may yield greater beneficial impact on both organisational resourcing and individual working lives.

8.2.2 Flexible working in action

Work status, job insight, and management skill are the resources that women need to make the necessary job-design adjustments and convert a full-time job into a part-time job, to restructure job responsibilities to be shared with a job-share partner, to regularly work from home, *and* keep professional careers on track. These resources are not universal. In this way accessing a flexible working arrangement and the supports to sustain it continue to be a privileged position.

Women starting new jobs lack job insight to be able to design-in a great deal of flexibility to their roles from day one. Women in the middle of organisational hierarchies lack status and authority to re-scope their jobs and to re-allocate responsibilities. In the absence of a job redesign response to flexible working requests by employers (Perlow *et al.*, 2014), by necessity women worked out on-the-job and by trial and error how to manage their workflow, workload, and work relationships and perform effectively in their adjusted temporal and spatial boundaries.

Active management of time, space, and boundaries characterised the day-to-day experience of working flexibly (discussed in 7.1 and 7.2). Individuals' strategies for managing time are linked to managing place and given the authority to do, so women eliminated unnecessary travel from their schedules, minimised home-to-work commuting, and chose the best location for the task. Far less time can be found for personal development, training, social activities, networking, food and rest breaks. Stripping out the developmental, social and expansive aspects of their professional work, over time, drained employment of its meaning and women of their energy and enthusiasm for it.

8.2.3 Flexibility fatigue

Flexibility fatigue impacts employees working differently in organisations where everyone else works the same. In this study flexibility fatigue describes the debilitating impact of women's sustained efforts to fit their new ways of working into organisational structures, processes and cultures that seem designed to exclude them. Women described periods of physical, mental and emotional exhaustion that they associated with managing largely unadjusted full-time jobs as well as the way they did them.

Boundaries between work and home become more permeable for professionals and managers working flexibly. Women report a new fluidity in the way they integrate and volley between domestic and work tasks each day, facilitated by technology that enables anytime anywhere working. An interesting finding is how few women narrate this fluidity as intrusion and a manifestation of work-life conflict, despite concluding that they have little choice but to operate this way. It seems the nature of the professional and managerial job is collectively understood to be bigger than any amount of time anyone could have to give to it.

The fatiguing effect of active management of routine work absences due to part-time and home working is amplified for mothers simultaneously going through significant personal change. Few women were unequivocal about the outcomes of their transition to a flexible working arrangement. There were periods when it worked and periods when it was a struggle. Few women achieved the weekly work-life balance that they had sought without further adjustments to their working hours, schedules or locations, and parallel adjustments to the time, timing, and location of childcare. Change was a constant, and women were certain that their arrangements would need to change again, and again, through time.

8.2.4 Rumbling discontent

Our later research encounters were characterised by a rumbling discontent with domestic relationships and with employment relationships. Through time and with frequent experience of formulating and reformulating their work-life approaches, women's awareness increased of the gendered workplace attitudes and structures that produced their lives, and of the cultural pressures and expectations placed upon them as mothers and professionals. It was too soon to say whether women felt their careers had been negatively impacted by their working arrangement in the ways in which the considerable body of research discussed in chapter two suggests. There was some evidence already of mothers being marginalised in lower status jobs. Some women's pre-emptive and protective moves into less intensive jobs were regretted later when they found themselves underemployed and with limited opportunities to move up or out and retain their status as flexible workers (discussed in 7.5). Relationships were under pressure and some women's discontent was aimed squarely towards the ambivalence of their male partners to the weight of women's life loads. Domestic

disagreements about who does how much of what in relation to home and family life were common, although as discussed in 7.4, the majority of women were entrenched in their gendered relationships of care and found it difficult to envision how things might be different.

8.3 The transformational potential of flexible working

Women continue to experience significant challenges accessing, implementing, sustaining and adjusting their ways of working to facilitate their lives and futures as professionals and mothers. Paradoxically, reducing and compressing working hours seems to create *more* work for the individual to redesign their jobs and actively manage their absences that are left unfilled by the organisation. Flexible working arrangements made these women's professional lives possible in the context of their enduring maternal responsibilities, although not always in ways they wanted to live them. The key risks and impacts arising for individuals and their families, employing organisations, policy and society from persistence of the themes discussed in this thesis are:

8.3.1 Risk of burnout

Reducing working hours without redesigning jobs compels women to work intensively and to privilege organisational priorities over their own satisfactions, career and personal development. Few women succeeded in converting full-time to part-time jobs and many felt fatigued by a felt pressure to present the façade of full-time availability to clients and colleagues. To find themselves managing full-time or near-to-full-time workloads in part-time hours left those who also carry the domestic, emotional, and caring load at home feel that they are 'leaning-in' (Sandberg, 2013) so much they are falling over.

8.3.2 Obscured inequalities

The felt pressure to make a reduced hours schedule appear seamless obscures the clear view of the extra effort that women put to managing their part-time absence from work. Some women's acceptance of less-than full-time salary for retained full-time responsibilities and outputs was not an issue raised with employers. Instead of viewed as discriminatory it was justified by women as a small price to pay for greater personal control over their work time, timing and location.

8.3.3 Weakened ties to the organisation

To every woman in this study work is part of who they are and few want to give up. Women are particularly vulnerable to the structural signals of employers during the early weeks and months of joining and re-joining organisations. Bungled induction processes, lack

of equipment, lack of facilities for nursing mothers, and ambiguity about how flexible working works in practice communicates that mothers and flexible workers are unwelcome. When women felt they were going it alone and were unsupported in *practical* ways by their employer to implement their working patterns successfully, within a year they questioned whether this was the place for them. Conversely, ties to the organisation appear strengthened when transition support is offered and is practical.

8.3.4 Failure of egalitarianism

Couple relationships will continue to be under pressure and relegated below other time-absorbing priorities of work and childcare without intended radicalisation of the couple-relationship and disruption of traditional gendered relationships to childcare. Women speculated that their level of satisfaction with their careers and with everyday lives was lower than their male partner's. This study did not set out to test that. The point is that women are not living the egalitarian ideals that they hold, and were encouraged to hold, as they progressed through higher education and into the workplace. Living with contradiction exerts an emotional cost and puts pressure on relationships.

8.3.5 Stalled modernisation of working practices

A vision of flexible working for all feels remote if the hard work involved in making it work in practice is loaded upon the individual and not led or at least shared by the employer. A collective understanding among women that appears to be shared by employers is of part-time and flexible working practices as a private issue and not a matter of organisational resourcing and capability. Making these workplace practices and women's experiences visible through this analysis is therefore an important step in a process of transforming and modernising flexible working practices in large organisations. Men also need to consider working flexibly and how flexible working is managed in their work teams, otherwise flexible working practices and the people who use them are inevitably marginalised.

8.4 Implications for policy and practice

This study offers insight about how well flexible working policy works in practice for professional women at the critical point in careers when women get stuck or get out of the pipeline to leadership. As a solution to the problem of gender equality in employment, flexible working policy is at a pivotal point. Flexible working policies at the level of the state and the organisation are *"brought to life"* (Cooper and Baird, 2014 p580) by employees in interaction with their line managers. There is a policy implementation gap that cuts deeply into human lives because employees continue to do the heavy lifting that makes flexible working work. Most of these employees are women and doing that lifting in the context of

enduring maternal responsibilities, which most women find *increase* when they take on paid work and have to manage expanded care networks with childcare providers and educators. In a being respectful of women's preferences and desires for involvement and success in either or both professional and domestic domains employers and policy-makers should not be blind to the forces shaping those preferences, or to the institutional change required if women's choices are to be more open in the future Leahy and Doughney (2006). By giving scholarly focus to the kinds of employment relations within which responsibilities for implementing flexible working are assigned it is possible to illuminate the kinds of interactions that create or confirm gendered norms and conventional attitudes to productivity and professionalism. It follows that illuminating these interactions and how employees experience them, highlights the kinds of strategies that unpick them. The ideas that follow have unpicking in mind and promote genuine choice for women (and men) in the work-life strategies they adopt and the occupational positions they achieve.

8.4.1 Job-sharing

Job-sharing, the arrangement between two complementarily skilled professionals to share the responsibilities of one role has significant potential to alleviate the felt pressures of part-timers in largely unadjusted full-time jobs. Job-sharers' reflections about the positive outcomes from their experience identifies some benefits, notably accessing 'career jobs' *and* achieving uninterrupted time away from work on non-working days, and relief from the pressure to be always-on and available to clients and co-workers all the time.

There are few practical resources available to employers and individuals about designing job-shares and implementing the arrangement effectively, see for example (Cunningham and Murray, 2005). This thesis expands those resources by in 7.3 setting out the key design features of job-shares in professional and managerial occupations, and the experiences of women implementing this collective approach to how one job is done. Job-sharing has potential to appeal not only to women ambitious for leadership roles, but also older workers pre-retirement, and young so-called 'millennial' workers motivated by career flexibility and work-life balance.

Without doubt job-sharing certainly demands open-mindedness among employers and a willingness to make practical accommodations so that two people can successfully perform one role, but it does not require a fundamental redesign of the full-time standard model of work for all. Assuming that a job-share is designed so that when one partner is working the other is not there will not be any routine absences that require colleagues and managers to step in, or compel teams to re-think their routines and schedules. Making job-sharing more widespread could therefore be an interim strategy. It would appeal to employers seeking to expand the choice of flexible working options they support, and

employers who are on their way towards more fundamental re-thinking about what work is valued and what matters about how and when people do it.

8.4.2 Job-design capability

> …we need to demand more from our employers I think, It is not enough for them just to say yes or no to flexibility, managing how it is done is just as important.
>
> *Sasha [5] Senior Manager, private sector, 2 pre-school children, Protective, 90% of full-time working hours, some schedule and location flexibility*

Sasha eloquently and succinctly describes the missing element to making flexible working work in practice. Women in this study worked out for themselves how to work flexibly. Some had greater latitude for adjustment and greater ability to draw on organisational resources to support their transition than others did, but in all cases, it was the women and not the organisation who were responsible for finding a way. Their accounts reveal the lack of job-design capability in organisations. Training and support to Human Resources practitioners and line managers to understand and practice job-design for flexibility will beneficially move organisations away from what Perlow *et al.* (2014) describe as an 'accommodation model' of flexible working and towards a 'work redesign model'.

The work redesign model implements co-ordinated, collective change and re-thinks how work is done and what is valued. Perlow *et al.* propose that a work redesign model will have more success overcoming barriers that inhibit uptake and effective implementation of flexible working in higher level jobs than moves to simply assist employees to accommodate the demands of work in their lives. Work-life scholars Bailyn (2011), Correll *et al.* (2014), and Moen *et al.* (2016) agree and promote work and job redesign frameworks to support gender equality, health and well being. The Timewise Foundation (2016) also promotes a job-design approach to responding to employee flexibility requests. Rather than placing the onus on the employee to suggest a pattern of work and the organisation to accept or reject it, a job-design approach requires a different response. It involves managers working with individuals to collectively re-think the task, time, schedule and location components of a job with the aim of find a 'best-fit' for the individual, the local work group, and the organisation. Insights from this study suggest that collective approaches such as these, which re-examine and re-draw the way work is done are likely to arrive at a mutually acceptable arrangement.

Women's accounts of their experiences over the course of a year signal the fluidity of their lives, made up as they are of many moving parts. Balance as a sustained state of equilibrium is rarely achieved. Genuine flexibility in the working arrangements individuals negotiate should not simply mean replacing one rigid work pattern with another. It should

also mean the ability to change work time and timing when life demands it and not only once a year when the policy permits it.

8.4.3 Opportunity ladders

In 8.6.1 it is suggested that job-sharing arrangements in professional and managerial jobs offers work-life balance benefits for individuals. Women with job-shares in their work histories reflected that promotion was rarely offered to the partnership, and they felt that in order to move up they should to return to full-time work. It seems that it is possible to work part-time in a job-share *within* a job, but it remains much more difficult to move *between* jobs. Promotion ladders tend to lead to full-time jobs. This means that women for whom flexibility has become a necessity and new norm are locked out of opportunities to advance their careers.

Moving up might not be top priority for everyone, but moving on to new environments and new challenges often is. Moving into a new professional job on a part-time and flexible arrangement is certainly more difficult that it could be. This is why more employers offering flexibility from day one is important and is what the *Hire Me My Way* campaign aims to encourage (www.hirememyway.org.uk), supported by 30 large UK employers. Women's employment opportunities and choices would be greatly enhanced by opening up professional and managerial jobs to flexibility from day one not only after six months in a job as current national policy permits. Being able to take one's flexible status into a new job on promotion or, from outside as a new joiner was an idea welcomed enthusiastically by women in this study.

8.4.4 Normalising flexibility for all

Much is said about the beneficial effects of organisational role models on employee work identification and aspirations (Sealy and Singh, 2010). Seeing more women in top jobs, more men take extended paternity leave, more men work part-time are thought to have both a motivating and normalising effect (Durbin and Tomlinson, 2014). The women participating in this study were often the first and only individuals working in the way they were at their levels in their organisations. If there are more women and men successfully carving big jobs into anything other than full-time chunks, their case studies should be promoted far and wide.

Some work environments were more hospitable places for professional women working flexibly than others and perhaps surprisingly, these did not divide neatly into private sector or public sector employers. The distinction between more and less supportive employment contexts was in relation to workplace cultures and associated professional time norms. Although not well represented in the stories of women in this study, some supportive

workplace characteristics were discernable in their accounts. These included: high trust work environments where professionals and managers benefit from total or partial schedule control; results-based work environments where productivity is determined by the outputs produced and not the units of time used to produce them; and workplaces that dispense with the full-time work week for all and describe a four-day week, or home-working, or no fixed schedule at all as standard practice.

A game-changing model to consider in the UK, is the *"All Roles Flex"* campaign that has been taken up by large commercial and public sector employers in Australia and changes the default job design from full-time to flexible (Carter, 2016). Every job at every level is considered suitable for flexible working and employers mobilise a job-design process in response to a flexibility request that can come from any employee, for any reason, at any point.

8.4.5 Living gender egalitarianism

Who does what at home matters to equality and cannot reasonably be separated from discussions about gender progress in employment (Crompton *et al.*, 2007c). There does need to be a parallel shift in the domestic division of labour if women in heterosexual dual-earner couples are to achieve genuine choice in the work they do, how they do it, and the successes they achieve. This is difficult terrain for couples to traverse because it connects with deeply held values, morals and ideas about gender, femininity and masculinity. The experiences of women told from their point of view signal that genuinely lived gender egalitarianism, that is a sharing of responsibility for earning and caring, requires synchronised action by men to step up as well as women to share what they have learned and step back. Living gender egalitarianism seems less about who does the cooking and the laundry, although women in this study had a lot to say about how these particular tasks divided, it is about how responsibilities within the family can be genuinely shared. There is a temporal dimension to this. One couple in this study *exchanged* responsibility for childcare when their children were infants and into the pre-school years in bigger blocks of time, she took a year then he took a year away from work to provide day-to-day care. They did this before the policy framework now in place that facilitates sharing of paid and unpaid maternity leave between two parents. Same sex couples developing loving families without hetero-normative gender scripts are writing their own. One lesbian mother in this study described how she and her wife both worked part-time and shared childcare between them.

The future of work for mothers could look quite different if fathers were pro-actively encouraged to exchange or share responsibility for children and their care.

8.5 Implications for further research

The interview data generated by this qualitative enquiry forms an archive that I am motivated to continue to explore and to add to over time. Many of the women who participated in this study have agreed to talk again which will extend further the time horizon of this longitudinal study.

A significant and original contribution of this thesis is the identification of five transition narratives that powerfully illuminate mothers' negotiations of moralities and identities at specific biographical moments, in specific relationships and circumstances.

Lone-parent Jane's story provides a good example of the fluidity and applicability of this framework to women's work-life transitions, which I shall briefly explain here. In our first interview Jane described her impending reduction in working hours, as an intentional move to manage the intensity of her job and its excessive workload. At that time I analysed her transition narrative as *Restorative*, and Jane agreed when we discussed my interpretation during our second interview two months later. In that second encounter Jane reported feeling much better; much less stressed and overloaded even though she had rarely worked within the adjusted work schedule that she had negotiated. She felt the arrangement had benefited her by giving her enough space to recover, to breathe, and to think about how to best sustain her restored sense of balance and keep moving forward professionally. Jane described her plan to further reduce her working hours so that she could start a postgraduate training course. At that time, two months later, Jane's narrative was signalling an *Expansive* intent. Jane's example illustrates just how much change women can experience in a relatively short time and the different meanings and significance of employment transitions at different biographic points and in different life circumstances. Further analysis could test the narrative conceptual framework developed in this study by applying it analytically to other professional transitions to reveal whether women (or indeed men) navigating redundancy, voluntary workplace exit, promotion, or self-employment, narrate these transitions in the same Restorative, Expansive, Protective, Compromised, and Sense-Making ways.

Redundancy impacted two women who participated in this study. Both were made redundant during maternity leave and got back in touch with me about a year after our final interview and told me how they felt it about it. The lived experience of maternal redundancy among professional and managerial women is not well researched and is an area I am interested in exploring.

An obvious complement to this study would be to look at fathers, fatherhood and flexible working in the UK. Fathers experience different stigmatising effects for seeking flexibility for reasons of care and positioning them less advantageously in the labour market than men without care responsibilities (Williams et al, 2013). A qualitative perspective on the lives and experiences of fathers navigating work and family boundaries and expectations

would be complementary to the emerging fatherhood and masculinities research area (see for example the ESRC Modern Fatherhood project at the University of East Anglia, the Thomas Coram Research Unit, and NatCen).

The final research area I think would be valuable is in the design and application of organisational approaches to flexible working. Much of the action research and workplace trials of collective approaches to work redesign have been undertaken in the US (Kelly *et al.*, 2011, Perlow *et al.*, 2014, Moen *et al.*, 2016). Developing action research approaches and working with organisations to trial specific types of flexible working and collective approaches to job-design or work redesign, will advance insight into what works and why. Outcomes of this action research will provide vital insight for organisations minded to take up the Select Committee for Women and Equalities (2016) recommendation and open up opportunities to work flexibly in managerial and professional jobs to advance gender progress in employment.

8.6 Concluding remarks

In concluding this thesis I return to the theme with which I opened, balance, and what I think it means to professional mothers who are using flexible working arrangements to achieve it. Balance is the seductive and coercive mantra of modern motherhood that draws professional women towards flexible working practices. It is seductive because work forms part of a women's sense of self and few want to give up. It is coercive because mothers feel obliged to comply and make balance the quest of their lives. For many professional women who become mothers, achieving balance has become a career aim in itself. Balance across work and family life cannot be achieved arithmetically by dividing time evenly across two domains because balance is subjective and cannot be measured in working hours. Almost as soon as equilibrium is sensed things change again and in that way balance is also a dynamic construct; what it means tomorrow will be different from today. Finally, balance is social. It means balancing the demands and rewards of work and childcare between partners in parenting, and balancing the responsibilities for crafting flexible jobs that fit into real lives between employer and employee.

This study has attended to the difficulties and the challenges of combining professional work with family life but these women's lives were not dark, bleak or desperate. It was clearly the case that mothers who participated in this study loved and enjoyed their children. A deeply felt moral obligation to take responsibility for their care was twinned with a pleasure and satisfaction from doing so. Women might have expressed regret for what some considered their own poor choices of working pattern, profession, employer or even partner, and yet no woman in this study regretted her children.

The lived experience of highly educated, professionally experienced women who are mothers and work flexibly is not assumed to reflect that of all women, or of all mothers, however it is relevant to them. It is relevant to all women because culturally shared notions of femininity that assume fulfilment through heterosexual partnership, through mothering and a domestic life that feminist scholars and cultural commentators have critiqued for decades, continues to be a shaping influence on the aspirations of and opportunities for all women. Its influence is present in gendered pay inequalities and patterns of vertical and horizontal segregation in workplaces, and in the political and market economies that reward care work in and outside the home with low or no pay. Its influence is there in the tone and content of media discourses about working mothers attempting to 'have it all' as at best juggling and struggling, and at worst, greedy and irresponsible. It is present in the reflections of sacrifice and accounts of every-day sexism of women who are crafting careers in inhospitable contexts. It is present in the proliferation of advice aimed at women about what good mothering looks like and that very little is said about what is good enough mothering or even fathering. It is imprinted on organisational structures and processes built in a bygone industrial era around the lives and linearly upward career trajectories of the unencumbered male worker. The situation is changing, yes, but the transformation has stalled. The insights and ideas contained in this thesis will, it is hoped, advance not only knowledge and understanding, but also commitment to action in pursuit of better work for better lives.

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Appendices

A1 Participant characteristics and circumstances

	Participant Job role	Transition Scenario	Flexible Work Arrangement	Decision context	Domestic context	Transition narrative
1	Sarah Human Resources Manager	New job	4 days per week, 1 day from home	First maternity leave	Egalitarian 1 infant	Protective
2	Claire Law Professional	Conversion	3 days per week	First maternity leave	Transitional 1 infant	Compromised/ Sense-making
3	Erin Senior Manager	Conversion	4 days per week, schedule and location flexibility	First maternity leave	Transitional 1 infant	Protective
4	Cathy Senior Project Manager	Conversion	80% of full-time, 5 days per week, shorter days	Other part-time/flexible arrangement	Transitional 2 teenage children	Restorative
5	Sasha Senior Manager, Professional Services	Conversion	90% of full-time, schedule and location flexibility	Second maternity leave	Transitional 2 pre-school children	Protective
6	Lara Law Professional	Conversion	3 days per week	Second maternity leave	Transitional 2 pre-school children	Compromised
7	Meera Senior Manager	New job	3 days per week, schedule flexibility	Other part-time/flexible arrangement	Transitional 2 children, primary school	Compromised
8	Gemma Strategy Manager	New employer	3 days per week, job-share	Second maternity leave	Transitional 2 pre-school children	Expansive
9	Fiona Human Resources Manager	New job	4 days per week, schedule flexibility	Career-break	Transitional 1 pre-school child	Restorative
10	Amanda Communications Manager	New job	4.5 days per week, half-day from home	Other part-time/flexible arrangement	Transitional 2 children, primary school	Expansive
11	Esther Senior Manager	New job	3 days per week, job-share	Other part-time/flexible arrangement	Egalitarian 2 pre-school children	Expansive
12	Jane Project Manager	Conversion	4.5 days per week, 2 from home	Full-time work	Lone parent 2 primary school children	Restorative
13	Eleanor Senior Manager	New employer	4 days per week, schedule flexibility	Other part-time/flexible arrangement	Transitional 3 children, 2 primary school, 1 pre-school	Compromised

	Participant Job role	Transition Scenario	Flexible Work Arrangement	Decision context	Domestic context	Transition narrative
14	Hayley Research Manager	Conversion	4 days per week, 2 days from home	Other part-time/flexible arrangement	Transitional 2 primary school children	Compromised
15	Joanne Human Resources Manager	New job	4 days per week	First maternity leave	Transitional 1 infant	Compromised/ Sense-making
16	Nina Research Manager	Conversion	3 days per week	First maternity leave	Transitional 1 infant	Compromised/ Sense-making
17	Sadie Education Professional	New job	Compressed, schedule flexibility	First maternity leave	Transitional 1 infant	Restorative
18	Jenny Programme Manager	New job	3 days per week	First maternity leave	Transitional 1 infant	Compromised
19	Frances Medical Professional	Conversion	2 days per week	First maternity leave	Transitional 1 infant	Restorative/ Sense-making
20	Gail Finance Manager	New job	2.5 days per week, job-share	First maternity leave	Transitional 1 infant	Restorative
21	Victoria Medical Professional	Conversion	4 days per week	Second maternity leave	Egalitarian 1 infant, 1 pre-schooler	Protective
22	Maya Project Manager	New job	4 days per week, 1 day from home	First maternity leave	Egalitarian 1 infant	Restorative
23	Jessica Senior Manager	Conversion	4 days per week, location and schedule flexibility	First maternity leave	Transitional 1 infant	Protective
24	Emma Project Manager	New job	3 days per week	First maternity leave	Transitional 1 infant	Restorative/ Sense-making
25	Rachel Education Professional	Conversion	80% of full-time, schedule and location flexibility	Full-time work	Transitional 1 pre-school child, 2 primary school children	Restorative
26	Charlotte Sales Manager	New job	80% of full-time, home-based, schedule flexibility	Other part-time/flexible arrangement	Transitional 2 pre-school children	Restorative
27	Andrea Legal Professional	New employer	4 days per week, 1 from home	Other part-time/flexible arrangement	Transitional 3 primary school children	Expansive
28	Sally Education Professional	Conversion	3 days per week, location flexibility	Full-time work	Transitional	Expansive

	Participant Job role	Transition Scenario	Flexible Work Arrangement	Decision context	Domestic context	Transition narrative
29	Juliet Finance Manager	New employer	3 days per week, home-based	Other part-time/flexible arrangement	Transitional 4 children at school	Expansive
30	Sophie Communications Manager	New employer	4 days per week	Career-break	Transitional	Expansive

Transition narrative	Count
Restorative *Resolving or avoiding work-life conflict*	10
Expansive *Renewing professional identity and career*	7
Protective *Protecting professional identity and career*	5
Compromised *Circumstances overpowering ideals*	8
Sense-making *Working out how professional identity fits with new motherhood*	5 *(in combination with one of the above)*

A2 Recruitment questionnaire

Extracts from the web-based participant recruitment questionnaire built using Survey Monkey and distributed via social media.

US
University of Sussex

Professional Working Women, Motherhood and Flexible Working

About this survey

My name is Zoe Young and I am a working mother researching working mothers' experiences of flexible working. I am doing this for a doctoral research project at the University of Sussex and you can find out more about me and my work here.

This short survey invites you to tell me a bit about your work and family life, and about the flexibility you have and the flexibility you want. It is **completely confidential** and should only take 10 minutes to complete.

I am asking these questions to help me find around 30 women to take part in some research interviews over the next 9 months. I am especially interested to find women who are returning to work after a break (maternity or otherwise) and doing so on a flexible basis, and women who for any reason have recently changed - or are about to change - their working pattern.

Please PLEASE please leave me your email address or phone number below or at the end of the survey if you would like to take part in the follow-up interviews that I plan to run by phone/Skype or in-person. This is the only way I will be able to get in touch with you, which I will do within a week or receiving your completed survey if your situation is a good fit for the study. **Thank you!**

1. Contact details

Name	
City/Town	
Email Address	
Phone Number	

[Next]

Powered by
SurveyMonkey®

US
University of Sussex

Professional Working Women, Motherhood and Flexible Working

What kind of flexibility do you have?

Please describe the pattern of flexible working in your current working pattern. Or if you are about to change it, please describe the working pattern that you will have.

6. Which working pattern best describes your current pattern, or the pattern you are soon to have?

☐ **Part-time** (e.g. 30 hours per week or less, on agreed number of days per week)

☐ **Job-sharing** or job-splitting (e.g. one role performed by two people, with or without overlap)

☐ **Annualised hours or days** (e.g. working for a set number of days or hours per year, with flexibility when you work)

☐ **Term-time only** (e.g. working full (or part)-time during school term-time and using unpaid and annual leave to take school holidays off)

☐ **Flexi-time** (e.g. varying start and finish times)

☐ **Freelance/contract/interim** (e.g. working on short-to-medium term projects, full or part-time, as employee or self-employed)

☐ **Part-home based** (e.g. formal agreement to work from home on certain days per week)

☐ **Occassional home-working** (e.g. informal working-from-home on an ad hoc basis)

☐ **Compressed hours** (e.g. working the standard full-time hours but over fewer days, usually compressing 5 days work into 4 or 4.5 by working longer hours on those days)

☐ **Full-time** (e,g, over 30 hours per week, on agreed number of days per week)

☐ Other (please specify)

7. When did you or will you start working in this pattern?

	DD	MM	YYYY
Date		/	/

* 8. If you are about to start your new work arrangement, will you be starting before 30th March 2015?

A3 Participant Information Sheet

INFORMATION FOR RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS

Study title

Working women's experiences of changing the way they work

You are being invited to take part in a research study. Before you decide whether or not to take part, it is important for you to understand why the research is being done and what it will involve. Please take time to read the following information carefully.

What is the purpose of the study?

At a time when Government, professional bodies, and campaign groups are calling for renewed employer focus on action to maximise the potential of women's contribution to the economy, this research offers timely insight into the value of flexible working practices for the women that experience these working patterns in the contemporary UK employment.

This project will track the experiences of around 30 manager-level and professional women employed in the UK public and private service sectors who change their working pattern to one that offers flexibility in the time or location that paid work gets done. By interviewing women whilst they are making the shift into a new pattern of work, the aim is to understand:

- the decision-making processes and factors that brought each individual to the point of making a change,
- how they manage the change and adjust to it, and
- reflections on the opportunities and challenges working flexibly has brought at home, for family, and in work and for career.

By gaining insight into the factors that influence women's decision-making about working patterns and the experience of doing it, policy-makers, employers and influencers will be better placed to design and implement policies and approaches that improve the experience and the outcomes for women electing to work in this way.

Why have I been invited to participate?

You will have been invited to take part either by your employer, or via a recruitment advertisement circulated via social media or a by a personal referral.

If you heard about the project from your employer, they helped to identify a small number of people within your organisation who are about to change their working pattern or who have made a recent change. They did this either by sending out an email or other communication inviting expressions of interest and to which you

responded, or by approaching you directly as someone known to the business about to or recently change your working pattern.

Do I have to take part?

Participation is entirely voluntary, it is up to you to decide whether you wish to take part. Your employer may have assisted in identifying you as a potential participant, but it is not up to them whether you take part. It is entirely your decision.

If you do decide to take part you will be given this information sheet to keep and be asked to sign a consent form prior to beginning the first interview.

If you decide to take part you are still free to withdraw at any time and without giving a reason.

What will happen to me if I take part?

You are invited to take part in up to three one-to-one interviews with the researcher, Zoe Young. Ideally the first interview will be in-person, and the second and third interviews too although but we may be able to run them by telephone/Skype if this is more convenient for you. I would like to audio-record our interviews for later transcription and analysis, since this allows me to concentrate on what you say rather than taking notes. If you are not comfortable to be recorded, we don't have to.

The first interview will be the longest, potentially 90minutes - 2 hours long, and will gather information about your life and work history, your current employment and family circumstances, and how you reached the decision to make a change to your working pattern.

Subsequent interviews will last approximately 60-90 minutes and will explore with you how you have experienced the change you have made, the gains and losses, the challenges and opportunities, and your thoughts about the future.

What are the possible disadvantages and risks of taking part?

Your time will be required to take part in the interviews. Your travel will be minimized as interviews can take place at your place of work, or a convenient local venue. It would be preferable to interview you alone without children present, so a disadvantage may be the requirement to arrange extra childcare, or to perhaps schedule the interview at a time when you can participate alone.

What are the possible benefits of taking part?

By sharing your experiences for research purposes you are helping illuminate the benefits and opportunities as well as the challenges and consequences that flexible working practices afford experienced and skilled women in important sectors of employment for the UK economy.

You are among a little studied group of women who statistics show are not as well represented in number as men at senior levels in the UK service sector organisations. By participating in this research you will be helping to further knowledge about whether and how workplace flexibility enables women to stay in work and develop their careers. It is my aim for this project to make recommendations to organisations about how to improve the transition experience for people moving from one working pattern to another, and how to support the retention and importantly the career development and advancement of women who work flexibly in their organisations.

Will my information in this study be kept confidential?

All information collected about you will be kept strictly confidential and be available only to members of the research team. The research team includes Zoe Young and academic supervisors at the University of Sussex.

Access to your information will not be granted to your employer or to any other organisation.

To protect your confidentiality all recorded information about you and provided by you for this project will be labelled with a unique identification code (not your name), and stored electronically on a password protected secure computer and back-up server hosted by the University of Sussex.

Excerpts from the interview and individual quotes may be made part of the final report and other publications and presentations, but under no circumstances will your name, the name of your workplace and employer, or other identifying characteristics be given. Your anonymity is assured.

Your employer may have helped to identify you as a potential participant, but they will learn nothing further about what you say in interviews. The researcher will use a naming convention, for example "false name, age", or "false name, team leader" and where you may refer to your workplace or other individuals (e.g. your manager, your partner, or your children), their names will either be changed or blanked out in publications as well.

It is important that you feel comfortable with the level of assurance I can give you about confidentiality and protecting your identity, so I will review the steps that I will take to assure this with you at the start of our interviews, and if you have any further questions we can discuss them at that point also.

What should I do if I want to take part?

If you would like to take part, please get in touch with the researcher Zoe Young at z.young@sussex.ac.uk or via mobile 0771 200 5956

What will happen to the results of the research study?

The results of the research will be used for the researcher's PhD thesis at the University of Sussex. The thesis is a public document and will be available via the British Library, and via the University of Sussex online.

A short report will also be produced, summarising the findings and targeting audiences of employers and employees, policy-makers, and campaign groups. I also intend to make presentations of the findings at academic conferences.

If you would like a copy of the short report please let Zoe Young know.

Who is organising and funding the research?

Zoe is a postgraduate research student at the University of Sussex in the School of Law, Politics and Sociology. Zoe has organised the research, set the aims and objectives, and designed the method of enquiry. The research is funded by a combination of personal funds and small grants from the following organisations: KPMG, Linklaters, Bond Dickinson, Santander, and Unilever.

Who has approved this study?

The research has been approved by the Social Sciences & Arts Cross-Schools Research Ethics Committee (C-REC) of the University of Sussex.

Contact for Further Information

Your point of contact for this project is the researcher Zoe Young, who can be contacted on 0771 200 5956 or z.young@sussex.ac.uk.

This project is supervised by Dr Lizzie Seal (e.c.seal@sussex.ac.uk) and Dr Tamsin Hinton-Smith (j.t.hinton-smith@sussex.ac.uk) in the School of Law, Politics and Sociology. Should you have any concerns about the way in which the study has been conducted, you should contact either of the project supervisors in the first instance.

Thank you for taking the time to read this information sheet

A4 Participant Consent Form

CONSENT FORM FOR PROJECT PARTICIPANTS

PROJECT TITLE: **Working women's experiences of changing the way they work**

Project Approval Reference: **ER/ZY44/1**

I agree to take part in the above University of Sussex research project. I have had the project explained to me and I have read and understood the Information Sheet, which I may keep for records. I understand that agreeing to take part means that I am willing to:

- Be interviewed by the researcher 3 times in a 12 month period
- Allow the interview to be audio taped
- Make myself available for a further interview should that be required

I understand that any information I provide is confidential, and that no information that I disclose will lead to the identification of any individual or workplace in the reports on the project, either by the researcher or by any other party.

I understand that my participation is voluntary, that I can choose not to participate in part or all of the project, and that I can withdraw at any stage of the project without being penalised or disadvantaged in any way.

I consent to the processing of my personal information for the purposes of this research study. I understand that such information will be treated as strictly confidential and handled in accordance with the Data Protection Act 1998.

Name: _____

Signature _____

Date: _____

A5 Interview Topic Guide

TOPIC GUIDE FOR INTERVIEWS

Interview 1

These questions are designed to elicit the career and life history of individual participants (in chronological terms) to identify key moments that have brought them to the point of changing their working pattern; to identify people and factors important in decision-making about work and career; and how change in working pattern is anticipated

- Using a timeline, ask participant to plot in historical time life phases, experiences and events that brought them to the present
- Pick up on the biographically significant moments/events the participant identifies, explore how and why and with what effect on self
- *Can you tell me about how you got to the decision to change your working pattern?*
    - o *Probe: was anyone else involved? How?*
    - o *Probe: what things did you need to think about/take account of?*
- *What is important to you about reaching this decision?*
- *Can you tell me about why you have gone for the pattern you have?*
- *Is this the ideal way you would like to work?*
- *How do you feel about the change you are about to make?*
    - o *Probe: looking forward to? Concerned about?*

At the end of the interview collect the following information (if not gathered during course of the interview):
- Age
- Who lives in the household, age of children
- Other dependents
- Relationship status and/or living with partner
- Accommodation type
- Work: occupation, level, sector, job title

Interview 2

These questions are designed to elicit the story about the interviewees transition to a flexible pattern of work; her day-to-day experience of work and life;

- *Can you tell about what has happened since we last met?*
- *How has it been since going back to work/changing the way you work?*
- *Can you tell me about your first week back/at work?*
- *Tell me about yesterday*
- *Can you tell me about someone who has helped you/or something helpful since you have changed your working pattern?*
- *Can you tell me about someone or something that has been difficult?*
- *With reference to first interview expectations:*
    - o *Has anything surprised you?*
    - o *Have you found anything encouraging?*
    - o *Has anything been disappointing?*
    - o *Have you found anything challenging?*

Interview 3

These questions are designed to give the participant space to reflect on the experience of working in a different way; and to follow-up on some specific themes of enquiry related to work, childcare, and future career

- *Has anything changed since we last met? Probe: job? working pattern? Home? Childcare? Family? [use lifeline to plot any recent history 'moments' and changes in routine]*
- *How do you feel now, XX months after making the change?*
- *Childcare questions:*
  - o *Can you tell me about setting up childcare: how does that work? Has it changed since you changed your work pattern? Who does the care and who does the drop-off/collect?*
  - o *Have there been any times when childcare has broken down?*
  - o *Take me through your child/children's week?*
  - o *How do you feel about the arrangement that you have? Probe: what would be your ideal arrangement?*
- *Work/career questions:*
  - o *Are you doing the same job you were doing when you first changed your pattern? Probe: What has changed? Why has it changed? How do you feel about that?*
  - o *How does it feel working in the way you are in your particular organisation? Probe: What do people/colleagues/managers say or do that is different to your previous experience/or unexpected/or predictable?*
  - o *Changing working pattern can affect things financially. How have you found this year financially?*
  - o *What do you think now, x months on, about your experience working in a different way? Probe: [With reference to second interview 'revised' expectations:] How have things changed? How do you feel about that?*
  - o *What about the future of work for you?*
    - ▪ *How do you imagine things to be for you in 6 months/1 year/ 5 years?*
  - o *What about the future of work for your partner?*
  - o *When I say 'your career', what do you think about?*
- *Finally:*
  - o *How do you imagine family life in the future?*
  - o *What do you think needs to happen to get to that future?*
  - o *Anything you would like to ask or add?*

A6 Lifeline Instruction Sheet

How to draw your lifeline chart

Life Phases   Pick a colour or shading style to block out along a line that represents time, the phases in your life in which you have been in different types of employment, in education, or when you have been caring for children/other dependents. You may have been combining these activities at certain times in your life, and please do reflect that in your lifeline chart (see the example below).

Please use the phase descriptions immediately below on your lifeline chart and add others if you think the descriptions don't fully reflect your life phases. If you want to use different colours or shading, that is absolutely fine but please make sure you fill in a 'key' on your personal chart so that we know which phase is which. Please use this sheet for guidance and draw your own plot (rough free-hand is fine!) using the template on the next page.

Compulsory education/school		University/College		Professional training		Unemployment		Temporary/ casual job	
Parental/ maternity leave		Non-employment (Child/dependent-care)		Permanent work contract		*Add other*		*Add other*	

Life Events   Mark events on your lifeline with an arrow, and make a note next to the arrow what the event was. Life events could include:
moving home, birth of child, marriage, moving-in with partner, break-up/divorce, graduating/becoming qualified, change of job, illness, or anything you feel has significantly shaped the direction of your lifecourse.

Example Lifeline Plot

Age

1976   1980   1985   1990   1995   2000   2005   2010   2014

Chronological time
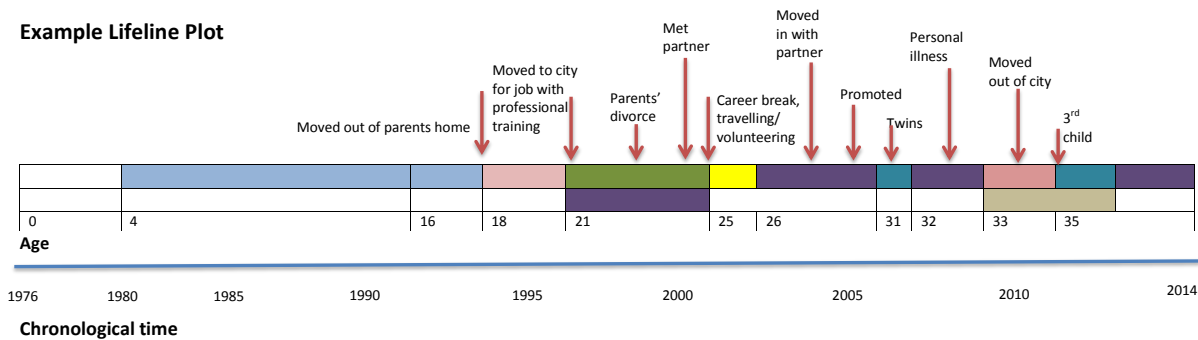
My Lifeline Plot ………………

(1) **Add colours**/shading to the Life Phases Key

Compulsory education/school		University/College		Professional training		Unemployment		Temporary/ casual job	
Parental/ maternity leave		Non-employment (Child/dependent-care)		Permanent work contract		*Add other*		*Add other*	

(2) **Block out sections** of the blank lifeline chart below using your colours/shading aligned to the right years

(3) **Add years** to the blue line (chronological time)

(4) **Add Life Events** using arrows and write what the event was and add the age you were at the time along the Age line

0

Age

2014

Chronological Time

A7 Extract of Interview Coding in NVivo