

# Conflict and Concord in Work and Family

Family policies and individuals' subjective  
experiences

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*To Joël and Alice*



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## List of original papers in the thesis

- I. Öun, Ida. 'Work-Family Conflict in the Nordic Countries: A comparative analysis.' *Journal of Comparative Family Studies*, Vol 43, no 2 (2012), pp. 165-184.
- II. Grönlund, Anne and Öun, Ida. 'Rethinking Work-family Conflict. Dual-earner policies, role conflict and role expansion in Western Europe.' *Journal of European Social Policy*, Vol 20, no 3 (2010), pp. 179-195.
- III. Öun, Ida. 'Interactions of Class, Gender and Policy: Implications for work-family conflict and satisfaction.' *Submitted to journal*.
- IV. Öun, Ida. 'Is it Fair to Share? Perceptions of fairness in the division of housework among couples in 22 countries.' *Submitted to journal*.

# Abstract

**Background** This thesis explores the relationship between individuals' subjective experiences and the welfare state setting. The research questions in focus deal with the outcomes of women's and men's increasing dual roles in work and family in contemporary welfare states. The studies analyse women's and men's subjective experiences of combining work and family, and their perceptions of fairness in the division of household work.

**Methods** The thesis applies a comparative perspective where the unit of analysis is country and/or family policy model. A broad perspective with the aim to capture general patterns across a broad range of welfare states is combined with a narrower case-oriented approach. Multilevel analysis is used to analyse patterns at national as well as individual levels in the same model. Latent Class Analysis is used to capture patterns of latent dimensions with regard to the central concept of subject experiences.

**Results** The results indicate that the introduction of policies aiming to promote dual roles among women and men and the articulation of gender equality can matter for individuals' subjective experiences of work-family conflict. In dual-earner countries, the probability that a high level of conflict is counterbalanced by feelings of life satisfaction is higher than in other policy models. A class asymmetry is found when it comes to effects of policy on men's and women's levels of work-family conflict and work-family satisfaction; women in the working class and the salaried class are more similar when it comes to experiences of work-family conflict and satisfaction in Sweden than in Germany and the UK. The analysis also shows that perceptions of fairness in the division of housework are moderated by the institutional and normative context. The politicisation of gender equality increases the correspondence between actual share of housework performed and the perceptions of fairness in the division of housework. The effect of politicisation is more important for men's perceptions than for women's.

**Conclusion** The thesis contributes to a deepened understanding of the relationship between policy and work-family conflict and the integration of the perspectives of role conflict and role expansion; knowledge about the ways in which both class and gender relations are structured concerning the patterns of work-family conflict and satisfaction in different policy contexts; and new knowledge about the relationship between policy and men's – and not only women's – perceptions of fairness in the division of household work.



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*Umeå, November 2012*  
*Ida Öun*



# Introduction

One of the major transformations of society in our times has been the lowering of gender barriers and the erosion of the breadwinner-homemaker ideal. This transformation has brought about fundamental changes in the gender composition of the labour force and the ways in which families arrange their lives. This thesis is about some of these changes. It explores the relationship between individuals' subjective experiences and the welfare state setting in which individuals pursue their everyday lives. The research questions in focus deal with the outcomes of women's and men's increasing dual roles in work and family in contemporary welfare states. The four studies included in this thesis apply a comparative perspective. The studies analyse women's and men's subjective experiences of combining paid work and family responsibilities, and their perceptions of fairness in the division of household work.

In recent decades, a common trend in all welfare states has been the increase in women's participation in the labour market and the development towards a dual-earner society. Still, the share of gainfully employed women varies greatly from one country to another, as does the degree to which women – particularly mothers – are integrated into the labour market (Daly 2005; Lewis 2009). Women's greater participation in the labour market has been an important step towards increasing gender equality. However, the difficulties in juggling work and family responsibilities are considered especially important for women, as they still do the greatest share of household work and childcare. The increase in women's participation in the labour market has not been followed by a drastic change in men's behaviour with respect to unpaid work in the household (Lewis 2009). Nonetheless, men today have taken on more of the household work and childcare than in the past (Hook 2006), and men with higher levels of education tend to do a larger share of the household work (Nilsson and Strandh 2007). In sum, women and men have increasingly taken on dual roles both as workers and carers, and many struggle with the pressures of combining employment with family responsibilities (Gornick and Meyers 2003; Nordenmark 2004; Hochschild 1997; Lewis 2009).

This development has brought new attention to questions concerning the welfare state and gender relations, both in the political world and in the field of welfare state research. The development of family policies has been put on the political agenda in many countries, and the issue of balancing work with family life has become a matter of political concern (Crompton and Lyonette 2006; Lewis 2009), not least in the light of the fertility decline and population ageing of the last decades. However, the political reactions to women's large-scale entry into the labour market, the rise of a dual-earner

society and the issue of reconciling work and family life have taken varying shapes.

Within the field of comparative welfare state research, a feminist approach focusing on the relationship between the welfare state and the gendered division of labour developed during the 1990s. The development of this approach was prompted by criticism that scholars had been overlooking gendered aspects of welfare states (e.g. Lewis 1992; O'Connor 1993; Orloff 1993; Sainsbury 1999). In this feminist approach, it is generally agreed that gender relations are influenced by a country's institutional framework (e.g. Daly and Rake 2003; Orloff 1993; Sainsbury 1999; O'Connor 1993; Lewis 2009; Crompton 2006). Public policies can influence gender relations and have an effect on the gendered division of labour both in the labour market and in the home sphere. Policies concerning the labour market and the family differ between countries as do the type and extent of welfare states' support to families, which in turn can make a difference with regard to men's and women's choices, experiences and perceptions.

The development of theories and conceptions focusing on gendered aspects of the welfare state has made a fruitful contribution to the field of comparative welfare state research. However, research concerning men's and women's subjective experiences of aspects that tend to be gendered has generally been limited. For example, little comparative research has been produced with regard to the question of how men and women perceive their abilities to combine work and family life and how they perceive the sharing of household work, which are the main focuses of this thesis. In particular, the processes through which welfare state institutions may affect subjective experiences at the individual level have not been thoroughly discussed in this area of research, and systematic empirical studies are scarce.

In the light of these developments, the overarching aim of this thesis is to examine the interplay between public policy and the outcomes of women's and men's increasing dual roles in contemporary welfare states. To do this, all studies in the thesis take on a comparative perspective. My analytical focus is on men's and women's subjective experiences of combining paid work and family life, and their perceptions of fairness in the division of household work.

The first article examines experiences of work-family conflict in the Nordic welfare states. The second article aims to deepen the understanding of work-family conflict and the impact of social policies by integrating the theoretical perspectives of role conflict and role expansion. The third article examines the interactive effects of gender, social class and public policy on men's and women's subjective experiences of work-family conflict and life satisfaction, both with regard to their work situation and their family life. The fourth article explores the relationship between the actual division of

housework and perceptions of fairness in this regard among men and women in different family policy models.

Next, previous research in the field will be presented along with a discussion about some of the concepts that are central in the analysis. This will be followed by a discussion of the processes through which welfare state institutions can influence men's and women's actions, experiences and attitudes in relation to work and family. This constitutes the central theoretical basis for the thesis. Subsequently, the methodological strategy of the thesis will be presented, followed by a section on the data and variables used in the different studies. After that, the studies included in the thesis are summarised. Finally, general conclusions and my contribution to the research field will be discussed.

## **Previous research - Subjective experiences in work and family**

The focus of this thesis touches upon different areas of research with regard to both the labour market and the home sphere, and the point of intersection between the two. It should be emphasised, however, that the analytical focus concerns women's and men's subjective experiences and perceptions about the combination of paid work and family responsibilities in contemporary welfare states, and not the measurement of their actual work and home situations.

Within the comparative field of research that focuses on individuals' subjective experiences in work- and family-related issues, the most thoroughly studied area has been attitudes towards gender roles, particularly with regard to women's employment. A number of scholars have analysed and compared such attitudes among a variety of countries, representing different welfare regimes and gender regimes (e.g. Sjöberg 2004; Sundström 2001; Scott 1999; Scott, Alwin and Braun 1996; Ellingsæter 1998). In the main, it has been shown that women, individuals with higher education, young people, and individuals living in more gender-equal policy contexts hold less conservative gender-role attitudes.

With regard to one central research question in this thesis – the issue of men's and women's subjective experiences of work-family conflict – much less attention has been paid to cross-national variations. Work-family conflict can be described as the “lived experience of combining employment with caring responsibilities” (Crompton 2006:78). Although my focus is on conflict, in European political and societal debates the concepts of work-family ‘balance’ or work-family ‘reconciliation’ are more prominent. These terms have been criticised, though, as the idea of balance suggests that people have achieved some kind of harmony between the competing demands of paid and unpaid work, which is not necessarily the case, and that

it implies a trade-off between employment and care responsibilities (Crompton 2006; Lewis 2009). The concept of work-family 'articulation' is therefore preferable, as it is neutral with regard to how harmonious the everyday situation is for the individual and places the focus on men's and women's strategies for combining paid and unpaid work (Crompton 2006). In this thesis, men's and women's experiences of work-family conflict are thought to be associated with variations in strategies of work-family articulation, which in turn are assumed to vary between welfare states.

This experiential dimension of work-family articulation, the construct of work-family conflict, emanates from theories of role conflict and role strain. The role strain hypothesis states that multiple roles create stressful conflict. Research in the field has shown that long work hours, heavy workload, higher education/class position, presence of children and female gender increase work-family conflict (e.g. Byron 2005; Pitt-Catsouphes et al. 2006; Grönlund 2007; Voydanoff 1988). However, when reading previous cross-national research in the field, it is difficult to draw any clear conclusions about the impact of policy on the experiences of work-family conflict. Only a few researchers have set out to explore the impact of public policies (Crompton and Lyonette 2006; Lippe, Jager and Kops 2006; Strandh and Nordenmark 2006; Nordenmark 2008; Edlund 2007a), and the results point in different directions. Some studies conclude that welfare states that have implemented policies aimed at encouraging dual-earner families decrease the experiences of work-family conflict, while other studies show the contrary. As I see it, there may be three reasons behind this. First, the fact that the studies do not use the same criteria when selecting populations may to some extent explain the discrepancies. Some studies include only full-time workers in the analysis, while others select all respondents engaged in some kind of paid labour, regardless of the number of hours worked per week. Others include only working couples in the analysis. Second, the different studies also include different countries in their analyses, which may account for some of the variation. Finally, the studies do not all use the same measure of work-family conflict. More research is needed to determine the extent to which these issues can explain the inconsistencies in the results of previous research.

One thing all of these studies have in common, though, is that they only describe work-family conflict as a problem, while the results in this thesis show that it should not necessarily be described as a solely negative phenomenon with respect to individuals' well-being and life satisfaction. By combining different outcomes of work-family articulation I try to problematise the concept of work-family conflict by challenging assumptions of linearity regarding the relationship between experiences of conflict and well-being (see below and the different studies for more details). The general aim of the empirical analyses included in the thesis is to look at

constellations of individuals' subjective experiences, with less focus on levels of the outcomes.

Another gap in the field of research has been the lack of focus on class effects on work-family conflict across countries. Most previous research has assumed that class effects in relation to experiences of work-family conflict are similar across regime types. A closer focus on the relationships between policy, class and gender would be valuable to the field, not least with regard to the issue of selection effects; the participation of women in the labour market varies between countries due to differences in possibilities to combine work and family responsibilities.

One of the studies in the thesis explores men's and women's perceptions of fairness in the division of housework in a comparative perspective. Recent research shows that, in all countries, housework is divided unequally between the genders, but that men's participation in housework increases with women's integration into the labour market (Hook 2006). The question of whether and how women's and men's perceptions of equity vary among policy contexts has as yet received little attention; only a few researchers have set out to study the relationship between policy, the actual division of housework and men's and women's perceptions of fairness in this regard (e.g. Braun et al. 2008; Rupanner 2008; Davis 2010). Further, a big problem with the existing studies is that they have been limited to married or cohabiting women, while men's perceptions of fairness have not been explored cross-nationally.

A common shortcoming among previous studies within the field of comparative work-family research is that the processes through which policy may affect individual-level experiences and orientations have not been thoroughly discussed, especially in the light of empirical findings. In general, research about welfare state institutions on the one hand and individual-level experiences and orientations on the other often fails to capture the links between the two levels – the so-called *policy-feedback effects* (Mettler and Soss 2004; Pierson 1993). Such relationships have not been analysed satisfactorily; existing theories do not sufficiently take into account the processes that mediate policy effects.

In addition, most previous empirical studies and theoretical contributions focusing on policy feedback effects have mainly been interested in the relations between welfare state institutions and subjective experiences and orientations with class as the analytical focus (Svallfors 2007a; Edlund 2007b; Svallfors and Kumlin 2007). As was pointed out in the introduction, the central question in this thesis concerns how institutions influence the outcomes of women's and men's increasing dual roles in contemporary welfare states, that is to say subjective experiences of work-family conflict, work-family satisfaction and perceptions of fairness in the division of

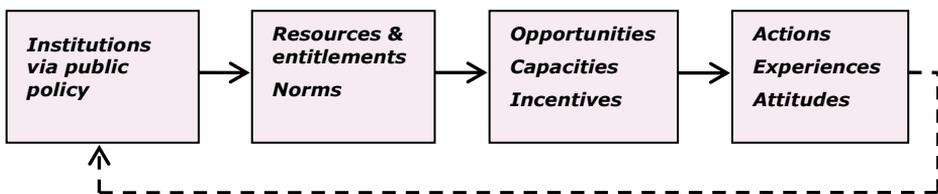
housework. Particularly in the field of comparative work-family research, the impact of policy has not been sufficiently theorised.

### **Policy feedback effects – the links between institutions and subjective experiences**

In this section, I will discuss the link between institutions and individuals' actions, experiences and orientations in the field of work and family. Below, I present a model (Figure 1) in which the institutional influence has been broken down into three steps, each containing different aspects of the processes behind policy feedback. First, institutions “modify the structure of rewards and costs” (Svallfors 2007b:11), as (re)distributors of resources and entitlements. These resources and entitlements in turn affect men’s and women’s opportunities and capacities, and can act as incentive for certain behaviour. Men’s and women’s actions, experiences and attitudes can be seen as outcomes of these opportunities, capacities and incentives. Second, institutions are normative; they embody norms and values and convey messages about what is considered proper behaviour for men and women. Consequently, norms can also work as incentives for actions, and influence people’s perceptions of and attitudes towards different social phenomena (Svallfors 2007b).

Throughout the text, the terms ‘institutions’ and ‘public policy’ are used more or less interchangeably. To cite Svallfors (2007b:11-12), “public policies may be seen as concrete manifestations of political institutions”, institutions being defined as “the formal rules, compliance procedures, and standard operating practices that structure the relationship between individuals in various units of the polity and economy” (Hall 1992: 96).

**Figure 1.** Theoretical model of the relationships between institutions and subjective experiences



#### ***(Re)distribution of resources and entitlements***

First of all, public policies have consequences for individuals in that they define the framework of entitlements. These entitlements in turn structure men’s and women’s opportunities and capacities. Additionally, the access (or

non-access) to such entitlements and resources can work as incentives for action. Institutions set the frames for inclusion and exclusion in society by defining the scope of citizenship and by deciding who can make demands for different kinds of public provision. For example, public policies play an important role in determining the grounds on which men and women are entitled to social benefits. In some welfare states, certain social benefits are provided according to family circumstances. This is mainly the case in family-oriented welfare states (such as Germany and Italy), where dependents benefits can be claimed. In other welfare states (such as the Nordic countries) social programs are more individualised (Saraceno 1997).

A common characteristic of contemporary welfare states is that an individual's labour market position is important for access to full citizenship, in the sense that full citizenship includes all dimensions of T. H. Marshall's definition of citizenship: civil, political and social rights (O'Connor 2004). Indeed, social rights have often been based on the economic activity of the individual. The scope of social citizenship rights is important for women's (and men's) opportunities and choices with regard to the labour market, and has an influence on their abilities to combine demands from work with demands from the family. According to O'Connor (1996:78): "Independence is the key to citizenship and in the democratic welfare state employment is the key to independence. (...) Whether or not personal autonomy materializes depends on the quality of employment and the range of services facilitating the organization of daily life." In the debate about welfare states and gender relations, citizenship has been a central concept. Many researchers who do not take a gender-sensitive approach have been criticised for looking only at the relationship between paid work and social policies and benefits that influence (implicitly male) workers' possibilities for de-commodification. A result of this is that "women disappear from the analysis when they disappear from labour markets" (Lewis 1992:161). Before a person can have an interest in the possibility of becoming de-commodified, he or she must be commodified.

Institutions also distribute and redistribute resources. Public policies and services can work as resources for employees with family responsibilities and can affect the prevalence of experiences of work-family conflict, especially among women, who traditionally do a majority of the household work and childcare and who are often the ones using the supportive programs. Examples of such policies are: access to childcare and other types of family care; employment and pay equity; maternity, paternity and parental leave; and policies relating to the length and flexibility of the working day (Gornick and Meyers 2003).

Leira (2002a; 2002b) discusses three sets of childcare provisions that encourage different family models: the expansion of state-sponsored childcare services encourages a model where the mother is a secondary provider; the institution of paid parental leave available to both mothers and fathers encourages shared societal roles for parents; and the legislation of cash benefits for childcare encourages a specialisation of parental roles.

There is no consensus around the question of which policy approach is the 'best' for the reconciliation of work and family. Should welfare states encourage a special kind of family model, and if so, which one?

Different family models are emphasised, facilitated or promoted in different countries. Some have developed and implemented policies that encourage men and women to have double responsibilities, both as providers and carers (parental leave, publicly financed childcare, part-time work with retained social benefits, etc.), while other countries support more differentiated roles for women and men, at least sequentially during the life cycle. In the latter countries, policies encourage a more traditional family model; these include tax incentives for single-earner families, limited access to publicly financed childcare, long (and poorly compensated economically) leaves of absence for mothers of young children, cash for care, etc. Some countries pay almost no attention in policy to the issue of balancing work and family life. Hence, public policies can affect the gendered division of labour at the household level, which in turn may influence experiences of work-family conflict.

Some of the previous research on work-family conflict has proposed that more supportive policies lead to less work-family conflict and greater gender equality (Crompton and Lyonette 2006). However, as this thesis shows, policy outcomes are not always that simple. They are also mediated through normative frameworks and influence the extent to which men and women strive to combine paid work and family in the first place, both by providing (or not providing) resources and entitlements and, as will be discussed more in detail in the following sub-section, by increasing individuals' awareness of specific social issues and inequalities. Access to social provision and services can thus also have the opposite effect on the experiences of work-family conflict, as it can exert greater influence on men and women to take on dual roles.

### ***Normative messages***

Institutions embody norms and values about what is considered proper behaviour for men and women. Through the design of rules and regulations public policies convey messages about men's and women's roles and responsibilities and their expected behaviour in different situations (Daly and Rake 2003). These normative messages can work as incentives for individuals to act in specific ways. Public policies can influence individuals' self-identification with their gender, which in turn can affect their disposition to choose a particular behaviour. Public policies are also normative as they influence people's views about societal problems, and affect whether social phenomena are seen as political rather than private matters (Svallfors 2007b). They can, for example, affect individuals' expectations about men and women's rights and responsibilities in society, or sensitise them to inequalities. Policies provide information about who should take the main responsibility for paid and unpaid work and about the extent to which certain kinds of behaviour are deemed acceptable or deviant.

In sum, policies convey normative messages about gender roles and gender equality that may influence how people act, think and feel when it comes to combining work and family.

To illustrate, nowadays it is taken for granted that women participate in the labour market, but the extent of women's labour market integration – whether they work full-time or part-time, and in which periods of the life cycle – is still contested and varies to a large extent across social contexts. In different welfare states the participation is either explicitly conditioned, for example by the non-provision of childcare, or implicitly through the prevailing perceptions of women's and men's social roles. In the same way, fathers' involvement in childcare has been differently emphasised in different countries.

The normative messages conveyed by public policies can also have mobilising or pacifying effects (Mettler and Soss 2004). For example, on the issue of women's and men's experiences of conflicting demands between work and family life, one hypothesis is that if the societal messages about appropriate behaviours and responsibilities for men and women in general do not correspond to individuals' everyday experiences and expectations, the individuals are more likely to interpret situations as fraught with conflict (cf. Nordenmark 2004; Crompton and Lyonette 2006). The experience of work-family balance or conflict can thus be relative, dependent upon the normative social context.

The framing of policy agendas and the salience of an issue in public debate are part of the normative impact of institutions, and are important aspects of how policies can influence people's experiences and orientations. The prevalence of an issue in the societal debate and the articulation of messages about its meaning and origins, for example by the mass media or political parties, are important for the moulding of behaviour, experiences and orientations at the individual level (Svallfors 2007b). First, public policies have the power to simply put issues on the societal agenda. What issues are considered to be important? And to what extent is it worthwhile for the public to take a particular issue into consideration? Individuals' interpretations of such signals are influenced both by the design of a particular policy and by the policy context as a whole. Second, the portrayal of a societal issue through the policy design can have an impact on individuals' attitudes towards the matter. For instance, it gives messages to individuals about the origins of a problem by formulating corresponding solutions, such as by directing social benefits to a specific social group or by non-provision of social benefits. This influences whether citizens perceive a problem as one that should be dealt with at the individual or family level, or as one for which the state should take responsibility.

Finally, when discussing the impact of policy one should keep in mind that institutional frameworks are not necessarily coherent; different policies can give diverse signals and mediate contradictory norms. Also, similar public policies can have differing outcomes in different social contexts, depending on the broader institutional framework. Another aspect of

institutional influence is that it can take different forms; it does not have to influence an individual directly, but can have an effect via the choices and behaviours of one's spouse/partner or other reference persons (Hook 2006).

The four studies included in the thesis all take this theoretical discussion as their starting point. By applying a comparative perspective where the unit of analysis is country and/or family policy model, the studies analyse the relationship between policy and subjective experiences concerning the intersection between work and family. In this section I have mainly discussed the relationship between policy and subjective experiences in terms of processes behind institutional impacts on individuals, and this is also my focus in the thesis. All included studies analyse how different institutional arrangements can influence men's and women's subjective experiences and perceptions. The empirical focus thus lies on the right-hand side of the model. However, it is important to point out that the relationship between institutions and human actions and orientations should not be perceived as determinative but as two-sided. The structure of men's and women's experiences, practices and attitudes also have repercussions on the institutional framework (cf. Brooks and Manza 2007). The welfare state "reflects existing gender relations as well as contributing to their continual reconstitution" (Daly and Rake 2003:40). Moreover, the attention is on public policy, with a particular focus on family policies. Plausibly, adjacent policies, such as other social policies in general and rules and regulations pertaining to the labour market and workplace organisations, may also affect individuals' resources and norms, but these are beyond the scope of my empirical focus.

## **Methodological approach**

To study policy feedback effects in the field of work and family and the outcomes of the increasing occurrence of dual roles among women and men in contemporary welfare states, a comparative perspective is fruitful. Taking as a starting point that institutional arrangements differ between countries, the study of individuals' subjective experiences and orientations in the light of such arrangements is a good basis on which to understand the processes behind policy feedback effects.

Taking a comparative approach focusing on individual-level experiences and orientations in the light of a country's institutional arrangements is useful for studying both general patterns cross-cutting national boundaries and distinctive characteristics of social categories in particular countries or within specific types of welfare regime (Daly and Rake 2003). In the broad perspective, countries can be compared by analysing similarities and differences in many aspects of the welfare state arrangement by means of typologies, or by analysing the effect of institutional indicators across a large number of countries. The narrow perspective is more oriented towards specific cases. The analytical focus is on social policies concerning particular aspects of the welfare state and how they influence the conditions for specific social categories. I believe that both approaches are fruitful in the study of

policy feedback effects; the choice between the two depends on the research question in focus for the specific study.

Accordingly, the methodological strategy in this thesis is twofold. It aims to combine the broad perspective with the narrower case-oriented approach to survey-based work-family research. On the one hand, it seeks to capture general patterns across a broad range of welfare states. To do this, multilevel analysis (MLA) is a suitable tool (Hox 2002). This method makes it possible to analyse patterns at national as well as individual levels by including both contextual variables and individual-level variables in the same statistical model. This is important since the major theoretical standpoint in the thesis is that institutional characteristics, which are contextual, are of importance for individual outcomes in the form of subjective experiences related to women's and men's increasing dual roles in contemporary welfare states. It also allows for the estimation of interactions between contextual variables and individual-level variables – that is, one can examine whether and how the effect of individual-level variables varies between countries.

On the other hand, the thesis takes on a narrower perspective, focusing on theoretically interesting cases. The study of experiences and behaviour among women and men in these typical cases makes it possible to pay closer attention to context-based experiences and orientations of specific social categories – especially men and women belonging to different social classes, but also individuals with and without children in the household, and with different educational levels, among other things. An important analytical point in this regard is to see if policy contributes to levelling out or reinforcing group differences. A narrower and more case-oriented approach to the study of policy feedback effects can also contribute knowledge about social phenomena that have not yet been studied to a great extent. A more case-oriented approach is also a good complement to MLA because of the limited spectrum of available cases at the contextual level, which can lead to fragile results (Bell et al. 2010; Overmars and Verburg 2006).

For both the narrow and broad perspectives, an important aim is to capture latent dimensions with regard to the central concept of subject experiences. To capture these latent dimensions a method is needed that can create genuinely comparative latent measures based on the manifest variables available in the data. In the thesis I frequently use Latent Class Analysis (LCA) (Magidson and Vermunt 2001; Hagenars and McCutcheon 2002; McCutcheon 1987) to meet this need. By exploring the relationships between several variables, LCA identifies classes (clusters of respondents sharing the same characteristics). The principle of classifying individuals is empirical and based on the probability of belonging to one cluster or another. In a second stage, these latent clusters are used as dependent variables in the analyses. One advantage with LCA is the ability to control for theoretically important categories when creating the clusters. This is of central importance in my comparative analyses as it is possible to include country as a covariate to ensure that the empirical assessment of the theoretical construct is the same in each country.

The possibility to compare different welfare states is valuable in the analysis of how welfare states can influence people's experiences and attitudes (Svallfors 2007b). Comparisons between welfare states can be used to analyse similarities and differences between specific countries or clusters of welfare states (Daly and Rake 2003). In the thesis, I study countries both within and between clusters of welfare states. The use of typologies emphasises variations between clusters of countries, but may overlook differences in a specific policy area among countries within the same regime type (Daly and Rake 2003). Different classifications of countries according to policy models or regimes will be used in the thesis, depending on the research question and countries in focus. The favoured approach in previous research in the field has been Esping-Andersen's typology of welfare regimes (1990), which distinguishes between the conservative-corporatist, the social democratic, and the liberal welfare regime.

In his analysis of welfare states, Esping-Andersen discusses how welfare provisions reflect the relationships between the state, the market and the family, focusing on how states contribute to workers' *de-commodification* by reducing their exposure to market forces. However, Esping-Andersen has been criticised for overlooking the gendered aspects of welfare states (e.g. Lewis 1992; Orloff 1993; Hobson 1994; O'Connor 1993, 1996). Feminist scholars have emphasised that the unpaid work carried out in the family is part of the welfare production in society and that, for women, the important welfare state policies are not only those bringing *de-commodification*, but also policies, such as childcare and parental leave, that contribute to women's integration into the labour market – that is, to their *commodification*. Also, the focus on *de-commodification* has been challenged by researchers who have introduced the concept of *de-familialisation*, highlighting the difference between economic and social rights granted to the individual and those made contingent on the family situation (Saraceno 1997; Lister 2003).

I believe that the feminist observations regarding the gendered aspects of policy should be incorporated into comparative research on social policies, especially when discussing dual roles, work-family conflict, and perceptions of fairness regarding the division of housework, where gender has an obvious impact. In addition, the policies of interest in the thesis are not social policies in general but those particular policies that facilitate or hamper the development of dual-earner/dual-carer families. Some feminist scholars have aimed to incorporate the gender dimension into existing theoretical frameworks (e.g. Orloff 1993; O'Connor 1993), while others have developed new typologies (e.g. Lewis 1992; Sainsbury 1999). However, to my knowledge, none of them have provided an exhaustive and systematic classification of national policies that can be used when comparing a larger set of countries.

Korpi and colleagues (Korpi 2000; Korpi et al. forthcoming), on the other hand, have systematically examined 18 OECD countries according to their level of support for either dual-earner families or male-breadwinner families

and found three policy models: the dual-earner model, the traditional family model and the market model. In the two studies that take a broad perspective that includes 15-20 countries, these policy models are used as the main independent variable at the contextual level. Korpi's classification is two-dimensional and distinguishes between policy structures that support women's paid work and those that encourage a traditional family model with a female homemaker. The first dimension is captured with an index measuring public day-care services for children under three years old, full-time public day-care services for children aged three and over and, finally, generosity in the provision of earnings-related parental insurance. The second index measures the provision of cash child allowances, public day-care services dominated by part-time services for children aged three and over, allowances for the care of small children in the home, and marriage subsidies via tax benefits for families with children with only one economic provider. Countries with high scores on the first dimension and low scores on the second have been classified as dual-earner countries, while countries with high scores on the second dimension and low scores on the first are labelled traditional countries. Countries with low scores on both indexes – countries largely lacking public support for childcare – are classified as belonging to a market model, since childcare is provided mainly by markets and kin.

There are of course also other scholars who have classified countries with regard to family policies. Many attempts seem to roughly agree upon the classification of countries, which means that the classification is rather insensitive to the choice of indicators included. Recent work by Thévenon (2011) largely confirms Korpi's family policy models and expands the analysis to include more Southern and Eastern European countries. Thévenon's analysis distinguishes between two principal components. The first of these includes support to working parents with children under age three to enable them to combine work and childcare. The second component includes long but not as well compensated periods of leave and investment in educational services for somewhat older preschool children. According to Thévenon, five country clusters can be identified, but they all contain some heterogeneity. These clusters are similar to the ones described above. The Eastern European and Mediterranean countries have not been classified by Korpi. However, I have included them in some of the empirical analyses for explorative reasons and treated them as separate groups. Even though family policy schemes vary considerably among the Eastern European countries, a common characteristic is the provision of long maternity leaves and limited provision of care services, emphasising private care by mothers until the child is three years old (Neyer 2006; Saxonberg and Sirovatka 2006; Robila 2012). In the Mediterranean countries also, family-based care is the norm, with the influence of Catholicism and the idea of subsidiarity being central features (Ferrera 1996, 2005). As in the market-oriented countries, assistance to families is generally limited, and the provision of care services

is limited. Instead, the traditional family plays a prominent role (Bettio and Plantenga 2004).

In the different studies, the family policy models are used as analytical tools to examine the impact of policy on individuals' subjective experiences related to work and family, with a special interest in the dual-earner model.

## **Data and variables**

The data used in the thesis come from two international surveys: the *International Social Survey Programme* (ISSP) ([www.issp.org](http://www.issp.org)) and the *European Social Survey* (ESS) ([www.europeansocialsurvey.org](http://www.europeansocialsurvey.org)). Both surveys consist of nationally comparative data sets, and the samples are representative of the adult population in the member countries. The ISSP is a cross-national collaboration that carries out attitude surveys on varying issues of interest for research in the field of social science. Currently, 48 countries are members of the ISSP. The surveys are carried out once a year, each time with the aim of analysing attitudes in relation to a specific topic (e.g. role of government, social inequality, religion, environment, national identity). Since the mid-1980s, when the collaboration started, topics have been repeated regularly to allow comparisons over time. The family module has been carried out three times (also in 1988 and 1994) and a fourth round is forthcoming with data collected in 2012. The ESS is a European collaboration with the aim of analysing attitudes, behaviour and living conditions. The survey started in 2002 and is carried out every two years. It includes thematic modules which are rotated between different rounds. Twenty-three countries took part in the 2004 round, including both new and older members of the European Union as well as Norway, Switzerland and Israel.

Two data sets are used in the studies in this thesis: the 2002 round of the ISSP on family and changing gender roles, and the 2004 round of ESS, both of which include questions about work, family and well-being. The focus of the two data sets differs to some extent and the choice of data for the four studies depends on the variables and countries available in each data set. Both of the data sets include a broad variety of background variables that make it possible to control for variables concerning the respondents' work situation and family characteristics, as well as other social and demographic factors.

In articles 1 to 3 the issue of work-family conflict is in focus. Measures of work-family conflict are included in both ISSP 2002 and ESS 2004, but the items differ slightly. In the following I present the items included in the different articles.

In article 1, the following questions from ISSP 2002 are used to measure experiences of work-family conflict with a specific focus on the Nordic countries: How often has each of the following happened to you during the past three months? (1) several times a week, 2) several times a month, 3) once or twice, or 4) never.) (a) I have come home from work too tired to do the chores which need to be done; (b) It has been difficult for me to fulfil my

family responsibilities because of the amount of time I spent on my job; (c) I have arrived at work too tired to function well because of the household work I had done; (d) I have found it difficult to concentrate at work because of my family responsibilities. Items (a) and (b) relate more to work-to-family conflict, while items (c) and (d) relate more to family-to-work conflict. The four items are analysed with the help of LCA and three clusters of different types of work-family conflict are found: work-family balance, occupational work overload, and dual work overload. It is shown that the cluster representing balance is the largest while the cluster representing dual work overload contains less than 5 per cent of the respondents. No cluster is found that represents family-to-work conflict only, which confirms findings from Edlund (2007a) that work-to-family conflict is more prevalent in Western countries.

In article 2, data from ESS 2004 are used. The ESS also contains items measuring work-family conflict; however, these are slightly different from the ones included in the ISSP and include only the work-to-family conflict dimension. In the article, work-family conflict is measured with an index of four questions, asking how often the respondents (a) keep worrying about work problems when they are not working; (b) feel too tired after work to enjoy the things they would like to do at home; (c) find that their job prevents them from giving the time they want to their partners or families; and (d) find that their partners or families get fed up with the respondent's job pressures. The aim of the second article is to deepen the understanding of work-family conflict and the impact of social policies by integrating the theoretical perspectives of role conflict and role expansion. Indicators of role expansion are two items that measure the respondent's life satisfaction and psychological well-being. Life satisfaction is an index of two questions: All things considered, how satisfied are you with your life as a whole nowadays? and Taking all things together, how happy would you say you are? The index of psychological well-being is built on five questions asking how often in the past two weeks respondents have woken up 'fresh and rested', felt 'cheerful and in good spirits', 'calm and relaxed' and 'active and vigorous' and have felt that their daily lives have been 'filled with things that interest' them.

In article 3, the aim is to study men's and women's experiences of both work-family conflict and work-family satisfaction. Data for this article come from ISSP 2002, which contains questions about both conflict and satisfaction. In this article, only the first two of the four work-family conflict items are used (see above). The two items measuring family-to-work conflict are excluded as they were so marginal for the results in article 1. Work-family satisfaction is measured with an index of two questions asking a) how satisfied the respondent is with his or her (main) job; and b) how satisfied the respondent is with his or her family life (ranging from completely dissatisfied to completely satisfied).

In article 4, data from ISSP 2002 is used. The dependent variable in focus is the respondents' perceptions of fairness in household work, measured by the following item: Which of the following best applies to the sharing of

household work between you and your spouse/partner? (scale 1-5: I do much less than my fair share of the household work, I do a bit less than my fair share of the household work, I do roughly my fair share of the household work, I do a bit more than my fair share of the household work, I do much more than my fair share of the household work). In this article, perceptions of fairness are put in relation to the actual division of household work between the respondent and his or her partner, as reported by the respondents. This is measured by an additive index that takes into consideration who in the couple usually does six common household chores.

## **Results: Summaries of the four studies**

### *ARTICLE I: Work-family conflict in the Nordic countries: A comparative analysis*

The aim of the first study is to examine men's and women's subjective experiences of work-family conflict in the Nordic welfare states. These countries are often considered to be frontrunners with regard to gender equality, especially concerning the provision of policies that aim to support the reconciliation between work and family life. However, previous research has produced divergent results in response to the question of whether the welfare state institutions of the Nordic countries help to reduce work-family conflict. Do supportive institutions matter, or is the household division of labour of greater importance regarding experiences of work-family conflict? Drawing on data from the 2002 module of the International Social Survey Programme, the analyses indicate that experiences of work-family conflict among Nordic men and women can be divided into three clusters: 1) work-family balance, which indicates an absence of conflict; 2) occupational work overload, which means an experience of conflict from work to family and 3) dual work overload, which represents a two-directional conflict – from work to family and from family to work.

The main results show that in spite of their shorter working hours, women in general experience higher levels of work-family conflict than men. An unfair division of housework also increases work-family conflict, and where more of the household work is done by the man, the probability of experiencing work-family conflict decreases. As to country comparisons, experiences of work-family conflict do not differ greatly among the Nordic countries, with the exception of Finland, where the level is lower than in the other countries. Regarding the special case of Finland, it turned out that this especially concerned the Finnish women. This points to a difference within the Nordic welfare state regime regarding the transition towards gender equality and women's integration into the labour market, which in turn would influence the experiences of work-family conflict. In Finland, the question of gender equality has been less present in the political debate regarding issues of childcare, and Finnish mothers are less integrated into the labour market.

In sum, gender equality at the household level seems to entail lower levels of work-family conflict in the Nordic countries. Nevertheless, policies that aim to promote gender equality also seem to matter, but they do not necessarily dampen work-family conflict. Instead, they appear to influence the composition of the labour force, especially through the integration of mothers into the labour market, which in turn increases the overall level of work-family conflict.

*ARTICLE II: Rethinking work-family conflict. Dual-earner policies, role conflict and role expansion in Western Europe*

The aim of the second article is to deepen the understanding of work-family conflict and the impact of social policies by integrating the theoretical perspectives of role conflict and role expansion. The article is co-authored with Anne Grönlund. First, a theoretical model is presented, identifying different processes through which policy may affect both role conflict and role expansion, with a particular focus on dual-earner policies. By granting social rights based on a concept of individual autonomy, providing services that facilitate the combination of work and family, and presenting the dual-earner/dual-carer family as a normative ideal, such policies encourage women's labour force participation and career ambitions, and therefore work-family conflict is likely to be higher in these countries than in countries where family policies (or a lack of policies) necessitate a distinct, and traditionally gendered choice between career and family. However, by supporting autonomy from both market and family, dual-earner policies may also increase possibilities of expansion. Thus, we hypothesise that in dual-earner countries, a high level of work-family conflict is counterbalanced by high levels of life satisfaction and psychological well-being (indicators of role expansion).

Second, we examine some of the implications of the theoretical model, using data from the European Social Survey comprising 10,950 employees in 15 countries. The analysis shows that, in contrast to traditional theories presenting conflict and expansion as mutually exclusive, work-family conflict and experiences of role expansion may go hand in hand. Respondents with high demands from both spheres tend to experience both conflict and expansion, as measured with indicators of life satisfaction and well-being. In fact, the main indicators defined as problematic in previous research on work-family conflict – long work hours, small children and service-class employment – also have a positive side. Regarding gender, we find that for women confronted with high demands from work and family, the level of conflict is higher than for men – however, for these women, it is counterbalanced by feelings of expansion and well-being. The results also indicate that a situation where a high level of conflict is balanced by high levels of well-being and life satisfaction is more common in dual-earner countries than in other policy models.

*ARTICLE III: Interactions of class, gender and policy: Implications for work-family conflict and satisfaction*

The aim of the third article is to explore the interactive effects of gender, social class and public policy on men's and women's subjective experiences of work-family conflict and work-family satisfaction. The central idea is that effects of gender and class covariate between different types of gender policy models. Most previous comparative research on the experiences of work-family conflict among women and men in different social contexts has assumed that class effects are similar across policy models, neglecting the possible interactions between policy, gender and class on the experiences of work-family conflict.

However, the results in this paper point to a class asymmetry when it comes to effects of policy on men's and women's levels of work-family conflict and work-family satisfaction in three countries representing typical cases with regard to gender policy model (Germany, UK and Sweden). The analysis draws on data from the 2002 round of the International Social Survey Programme concerning family and changing gender roles, and shows that patterns of work-family conflict and work-family satisfaction and the ways in which class and gender relations are structured differ between the three countries.

The results for Sweden demonstrate distinct gender cleavages concerning both work-family conflict and satisfaction. Swedish women in both the working class and the salaried class experience higher work-family conflict than men. Sweden's focus on de-familialisation policies and women's relatively high levels of integration into the labour market irrespective of class location are interpreted as important factors behind this result. However, the feelings of conflict among Swedish women go hand in hand with correspondingly higher levels of work-family satisfaction. In the German case, class differences are more prominent, at least regarding experiences of work-family conflict, while gender differences are not significant. Women and men in the salaried classes experience higher levels of work-family conflict than women and men in the working class. Contrary to the results for Sweden, the high levels of work-family conflict among salaried women and men are not compensated by higher levels of satisfaction. In the UK the analysis shows that both class and gender matter – women in the salaried classes stand out with the highest level of experienced work-family conflict of all groups, but do not report higher levels of satisfaction than the other categories. In fact it was shown that British women had the highest levels of work-family conflict in the whole sample. As in Germany, the reported levels of work-family satisfaction do not differ significantly between the categories in the UK.

*ARTICLE IV: Is it fair to share? Perceptions of fairness in the division of housework among couples in 22 countries*

The fourth study explores the relationship between the actual division of housework and men's and women's perceptions of fairness in this regard. The central question is how the actual sharing of housework influences the perceptions of fairness in the division of housework. It is hypothesised that the perceptions of fairness differ between policy models. In countries where gender equality has been more present on the political agenda and dual earner policies have been introduced, people are expected to be more susceptible to unfair sharing of housework. By analysing the relationship between actual division of housework and perceptions of fairness in household work for 22 countries, representing different family policy models, the study takes on a comparative perspective with the purpose of analysing the normative impact of policy. The analysis draws on data from the 2002 round of the International Social Survey Programme on family and changing gender roles.

The results show a general pattern that the more equally shared the housework by a couple, the higher the perception of fairness in the division of housework. However, the perceptions of fairness in the division of household work in relation to the actual sharing of housework are not universal, but rather are moderated by the institutional and normative context surrounding individuals; they vary according to family policy model. The politicisation of gender equality through the introduction of policies aiming to promote dual roles in work and family increases the correspondence between actual share of housework performed and the perceptions of fairness in the division of housework both for women and men.

The perceptions of fairness also vary by gender. The policy context seems to have a stronger effect among men than among women. This can be interpreted as indicating that women, irrespective of policy context, are more rooted in actual circumstances in their perceptions of fairness in the household work. For men there seems to be an important cleavage between family policy models. The cleavage runs between men in the North/West and men in the South/East, with the effect being significantly weaker in the South/East.

## **Concluding discussion**

The aim of this thesis is to examine the relationship between public policy and the outcomes of women's and men's increasing dual roles in contemporary welfare states by focusing on women's and men's subjective experiences related to work and family issues. In doing this, I seek to combine the research field of political institutions and public opinion with the feminist tradition of comparative welfare state research. The former perspective has a solid tradition of survey-based empirical research of individual-level orientations pertaining to a variety of social phenomena, but

tends to miss out on gendered dimensions of the welfare state. The latter has largely focused on more theoretical aspects and aggregate-level outcomes of the welfare state, with gender relations as its centre of attention. But comparative survey-based research where such aspects are taken into consideration is scarce. My ambition is to combine these two traditions, thereby making an important contribution to the field of survey-based work-family research.

The four studies included in the thesis deal with the relationship between welfare state institutions and women's and men's subjective experiences of work-family conflict and life satisfaction, and their perceptions of fairness in the division of housework. The research questions in the studies are formulated in relation to the gaps and inconsistencies in previous research. Various important issues are assessed, all of which add to the knowledge of the research field. This includes a deepened understanding of the relationship between policy and work-family conflict and the integration of the perspectives of role conflict and role expansion; knowledge about the ways in which both class and gender relations are structured concerning the patterns of work-family conflict and satisfaction in different policy contexts; and new knowledge about the relationship between policy and men's – and not only women's – perceptions of fairness in the division of household work.

Overall, the results from the first three studies indicate that the introduction of policies aiming to promote dual roles among women and men and the articulation of gender equality seem to matter for individuals' subjective experiences of work-family conflict. However, they do not necessarily dampen them. The results rather show that the introduction of dual-earner policies increases the experiences of work-family conflict. In view of common theories on welfare state regimes and previous comparative research in the field, such a result may seem counterintuitive. Dual-earner policies are expected to make it easier for individual men and women to successfully combine work and family roles, by providing buffers against the stresses of everyday life. However, these results are not as odd as they may at first seem. Policies aiming to facilitate the combination of paid work and family responsibilities appear to influence the composition of the labour force, especially through the integration of mothers from all social classes into the labour market, which in turn increases the overall level of work-family conflict. In the thesis, the higher level of conflict in the dual-earner model is thus interpreted as being connected to women's greater ambitions and opportunities in the labour market and a less selected labour force in countries with dual-earner policies compared with other countries in which women have to make a more distinct choice between career and family.

This can be seen as a negative outcome produced by modern dual-earner societies and as a downside of the quest for gender equality. However, an important conclusion that can be drawn from the results of this thesis is that the situation is more complex and that there is also another side of the coin. In articles 2 and 3 it is shown that in dual-earner countries, the probability

that a high level of conflict is counterbalanced by feelings of expansion, measured by general life satisfaction and well-being (article 2) and work-family satisfaction (article 3), is higher than in other policy models due to support for individual autonomy from both market and family. It is also found that for women with high demands from work and family (i.e. long work hours, small children and service-class employment), a situation that is more common in dual-earner countries than in other countries, the level of conflict is higher than for men – however, for these women it is counterbalanced by feelings of expansion and well-being. These results should encourage future research not only to pay more attention to the relationship between policy context and subjective experiences of work-family conflict, but also to further investigate the conflict-expansion nexus rather than focus on work-family conflict alone.

Regarding gender, it is well known that men's and women's actual home and work situations and capabilities still differ in various ways. It has been argued recently that the male-breadwinner family is eroding and that Western welfare states are beginning to adopt the idea of an 'adult-worker model' (Lewis 2001, 2009; Lewis and Giullari 2005) based on the assumption that all adults participate in the labour market. Even if this family model is potentially more auspicious for women than the male-breadwinner norm, its outcomes are dependent on its implementation into social policies in different contexts. Moreover, even in dual-earner countries, women carry a large responsibility for household, children and older relatives, and the largest political effort has been directed towards furthering women's (particularly mothers') integration into the labour market rather than towards increasing men's participation in childcare and housework. Interesting in this context is that gender equality at the household level seems to entail lower levels of work-family conflict. Results from the first study contribute to knowledge about the relationship between the sharing of household work and experiences of work-family conflict by showing that an unfair division of housework increases the probability of experiencing work-family conflict, and that where more of the household work is carried out by the man, the probability of experiencing work-family conflict decreases.

Nevertheless, the studies in this thesis show that even when adjusting for some of the gender differences with regard to work and family, women run an overall higher risk of experiencing work-family conflict. For example, it is shown that women have already compensated for the work-family conflict by reducing their hours of work. In this context, it is important to recognise that the prevailing construct of work-family conflict only captures the result of actions taken to handle simultaneous pressures from work and family. Thus, to fully understand work-family conflict, the strategies to *avoid* it must receive further attention. In this context, there is a strong need to develop a more thorough and theoretically founded understanding of gender, for example by examining gender differences regarding the strategies used to successfully combine work and family.

The results from the thesis show that it is also important to consider *within-gender* differences in this regard. The analysis in the third study points to a class asymmetry when it comes to effects of policy on men's and women's levels of work-family conflict and work-family satisfaction, with women in the working class and the salaried class being more similar when it comes to experiences of work-family conflict and satisfaction in Sweden than in Germany and the UK. This can be seen as an indication that women in the salaried class in all countries succeed in integrating into the labour market independent of state intervention in the form of de-familialisation policies, while women in the working class have more to gain from such policies when it comes to labour market integration. However, policy seems to be important also for women in the salaried class regarding the extent to which the experiences of work-family conflict are counterbalanced by experiences of work-family satisfaction.

One central dimension with the aim of enhancing understanding of the relationship between policy and subjective experiences with regard to work and family is to further explore the normative side of policy. Indeed, the organisation of everyday life, including the combination of paid work and family life, is not only a matter of what is most practical or economical, but also of what is considered to be consistent with subjective understandings about appropriate behaviour and choices for men and women. Women's and men's everyday practices and experiences are also linked to norms, ideals and expectations about gender relations, to which they must relate continuously.

One important result with regard to the normative side of policy comes from the fourth study, which focuses on the relationship between the actual share of household work performed and the perceptions of fairness in the division of housework. The analysis from the study shows that such perceptions are not universal, but rather are moderated by the institutional and normative context surrounding individuals. The more prominent the norms of gender equality in a country (i.e. the dominant normative framework concerning gender roles, ideals and expectations), the more the actual share of household work performed will effect perceptions of fairness regarding the sharing of housework. Although difficult to measure, this result gives support for the idea about gender equality norms as an explanatory factor behind policy variation. The politicisation of gender equality increases the correspondence between actual share of housework performed and the perceptions of fairness in the division of housework both for women and men. However, the effect of politicisation of gender equality is shown to be more important for men's perceptions than for women's, which indicates that articulation of gender equality and the introduction of dual-earner policies have the potential to institute a growing awareness of inequity, especially among those who "benefit" from an unjust situation. Here, it is worth underlining the importance of bringing in men in the analytical framework; something that previous cross-national studies have ignored. Since the results demonstrated some key differences on the role of

policies for men's and women's perceptions of fairness, an important part of the picture appeared that was previously completely missing. A focus on both genders de-emphasises the narrow study of women (implicitly assuming a static nature of men's behaviour) in an issue that traditionally has been considered a female domain. This contributes to a more nuanced understanding about gender relations in the household and the influence of policy on these relations. The differences in effect for women and men also raise the question whether the strength and importance of these normative messages differ with regard to class and education – an issue that could be examined further in future research.

Previous framing of a policy area can have long-term effects on how an issue is perceived among individuals, which in turn can make radical change hard to achieve (cf. Pierson 2000). Even though great changes have occurred with regard to women's integration into the public sphere, the traditional roles of men and women, and their inherent inequalities, are still prevalent in contemporary welfare states. In view of the results of this thesis, it can generally be said that the questioning at the state level of the traditional gendered division of labour can influence expectations of gender equality among individuals. However, if they then do not experience gender equality in their daily lives, experiences of conflict and discontent may become more apparent. In contrast, if the state signals (through policies and regulations) that the proper relation between men and women is to have more traditionally specialised roles, conflict seems to become less prevalent.

Hence, the question that arises is: must experiences of conflict – both between work and family and in relation to the division of housework – necessarily be negative? According to the results of the four studies included in this thesis the answer is no. The introduction of policies aiming to promote dual roles and gender equality seems to increase individuals' sensitiveness to inequalities. This may in turn transform into new social cleavages and consequently contribute to social change.

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