Negotiating Career Progression and Parenthood: Family-Adaptiveness in an Australian University

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Abstract

This thesis is concerned with identifying the conditions under which it is possible for mothers and fathers to successfully combine career progression and parenthood in an organisational context. I developed the ‘family-adaptive’ theoretical framework in order to examine the extent to which

a) organisations can adapt to facilitate the changed working conditions of new parents associated with childbirth, and

b) employees can find ways, through the use of formal entitlements and informal arrangements, to adapt to their new role as parents while maintaining their professional identities and career goals.

The framework, which has its foundations in the theory of gendered organisations and identity theory, identifies how the gendering of a range of formal and informal organisational processes and practices interacts with individuals’ processes of identity negotiation and resource constraints at various levels in the organisation to determine how ‘family-adaptive’ an organisation is.

The research focuses on the ‘parental leave process’, defined as the time spanning from when staff members inform the organisation about their intention to go on leave, through the parental leave period and including the time when they return to work while they avail of entitlements associated with parental leave.

A single organisational case study methodology was adopted, focusing on general staff in an Australian university. A ‘qualitative dominant’ mixed methods approach was followed. The primary data source comprised of qualitative interviews carried out with 28 participants in a range of roles in the case study university. This rich data source was supplemented with quantitative analysis of parental leave provisions in the Australian university sector. Three specific levels of analysis were examined: senior managers at the organisational level, middle managers at the work unit level and non-managerial employees at the work unit level.

The research findings indicated that gendering processes interacted with identity and resource constraints in a variety of ways across the three levels of analysis to contribute to family-adaptiveness.

At the senior management level I focused on formal parental leave policy development. Evidence suggested that senior managers adopted a narrow business case focus in enterprise negotiations regarding parental leave policy. Their stance was dictated by a concern with resource constraints, whereby the short-term costs, but not the long-term benefits of improvements, were acknowledged. While the rhetoric surrounding the university’s provision of parental leave was framed in terms of a
concern with gender equity, evidence suggests that these ‘social justice’ motivations were strongly entangled with strategic business motivations. Additionally, evidence suggested that the gendered understructure, based on the male-breadwinner norm, shaped management’s approach to parental leave negotiations. The reliance on a narrow business focus coupled with the male-breadwinner organisational logic resulted in a parental leave policy that reaffirms male-breadwinner norms and has limited potential to promote a family-adaptive environment.

At the middle management level the focus was on policy implementation across the parental leave process. Evidence suggested that while resource constraints inhibited managers in their approach to policy implementation, they had some discretion to implement informal practices to manage work-family needs. The extent to which managers were willing to exercise this discretion was related to the salience of their managerial and/or parent identities. Three distinct approaches to the management of work family issues were identified, which resulted in differing gendered effects. ‘Family blind’ managers displayed highly salient managerial identities and took a restrictive approach to policy implementation. ‘Family first’ managers generally displayed salient parent identities and were likely to utilise informal practices to enable employees achieve work-family balance. ‘Family fair’ managers straddled a line between these approaches, displaying salient parent and managerial identities. The approach taken by managers had implications for family-adaptiveness, with the family first approach most likely to result in gender equitable outcomes in work and care while the family blind approach was associated with gendered effects which inhibited family-adaptiveness.

At the employee level the salience of respondents’ professional and parent identities was a key factor in shaping their approach to the management of their career and caring responsibilities. The ways in which employees invoked their identities could significantly affect family-adaptiveness, both in terms of their own work-family balance and in terms of broader organisational processes. Those who contested gendered norms surrounding work and care had the greatest potential to contribute positively towards a family-adaptive environment. Women who invoked a prominent professional identity were most successful in challenging the male-breadwinner, female-carer norm and could open up opportunities for career progression. Similarly, men who invoked a salient parent identity could challenge the ‘ideal worker’ norm and develop opportunities for alternative work practices which facilitated their greater involvement in childcare.

Overall, the findings indicated that individuals at various levels within the organisation had the potential to influence family-adaptiveness and that the interaction of gendering processes with identity work and resource constraints across all three levels was crucial in determining how family-adaptive an organisation is.
Declaration by author

This thesis is composed of my original work, and contains no material previously published or written by another person except where due reference has been made in the text. I have clearly stated the contribution by others to jointly-authored works that I have included in my thesis.

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Parental leave, career progression, family-adaptive workplaces, gendered organisations, identity

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List of Abbreviations

EBA – Enterprise Bargaining Agreement
EO – Equal Opportunities
EOWA – Equal Opportunity for Women in the Workplace Agency
FFP – Family Friendly Policy
FTE – Full-Time Equivalent
HEW – Higher Education Worker
HR – Human Resources
NES – National Employment Standards
NTEU – National Tertiary Education Union
SSI – Structural Symbolic Interactionism
Chapter 1: Organisational Family-Adaptiveness: A Route to Addressing Gender Equality in Work and Care

Introduction

Over the past half century great strides have been made towards the achievement of gender equality in Australian workplaces. In the early 1960s women’s overall participation rate was 34 percent; this figure had doubled to 59 percent by 2011 (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2011). However, gender equality in employment eludes many women. Although the male-production / female-reproduction divide has been partly dismantled, remnants of the male-breadwinner culture remain. Women continue to be considered primary caregivers and this is reflected in statutory and organisational level policies which are designed to facilitate mothers’ caring responsibilities to a much greater extent than fathers’. Accordingly, it is not surprising that women continue to take on the majority of caring responsibilities. The impact of this ideological and policy approach to work-family management on women’s careers is clear: many women’s careers stall before reaching the upper echelons of management and senior positions and periods of leave to care for children impact on earnings potential and opportunities for career advancement. This phenomenon – known as the ‘motherhood penalty’ (i.e. decreased earning potential and diminished opportunities for career progression associated with motherhood) – is widely acknowledged (Correll, Benard, & Paik, 2007; Livermore, Rodgers, & Siminski, 2010; Napari, 2010).

At the organisational level, a broad range of policies that have potential to ameliorate the problem of the ‘motherhood penalty’ have been adopted. This includes, for example, a suite of family friendly arrangements including flexible working hours, part-time work, telecommuting as well as formal entitlements to parental leave. Paid parental leave in particular is widely recognised as a key strategy to facilitate gender equality in the workplace (Ray, Gornick, & Schmitt, 2010). However, these policies often are targeted towards mothers, rather than being accessible to all parents, thus reinforcing the male-breadwinner/ female-carer model. Additionally, evidence suggests that even when comprehensive policies are in place there can be a ‘provision- utilisation gap’ between policy availability and uptake (Kossek, Lewis, & Hammer, 2010; McDonald, Brown, & Bradley, 2005; McDonald, Guthrie, Bradley, & Shakespeare-Finch, 2005, p.480). The mismatch between availability and accessibility can be explained by a range of factors, including managerial and co-worker influence, perceptions about accessibility and availability of information about entitlements (see for example Jahn, Thompson, & Kopelman, 2003; Thompson, Beauvais, & Lyness, 1999; Wang & Walumbwa, 2007). Penalties associated with uptake of policies may discourage parents
from availing of them – in fact, these penalties may be felt more severely by fathers (at least in the short term), who, in straying from the ‘ideal worker norm’ may be perceived to lack organisational commitment. However, in terms of overall career consequences of parenthood, it is generally agreed that motherhood is a career liability for women while fatherhood is a career asset for men (Calas & Smircich, 2006, p.285).

Due to the slow progress towards achieving gender equity in organisations through policy provision, it is now widely recognised that it is necessary to move beyond policy provision towards engendering deeper cultural change within organisations (Smith, 2006). The recognition of the need for a multidimensional approach to work-family balance has resulted in an increasing scholarly focus on ‘family supportive’ workplaces (Newman & Mathews, 1999; Smith, 1997; Thompson, et al., 1999; Waters & Bardoel, 2006). This literature recognises that in addition to providing formal work-family policies, it is important that a ‘culture of inclusion’ is fostered within the organisation (Drago, et al., 2005). Research stresses the need to instigate change in both formal structures as well as informal processes in organisations (Wallace, Hunt, & Richards, 1999, p.550). However despite the important contribution of this growing body of research, gaps remain. For example, while various scholars have examined employee perceptions about the extent to which organisations are supportive of their work-family needs (Cook, 2009; Forsyth & Polzer-Debruyne, 2007; Jahn, et al., 2003; Warner & Hausdorf, 2009), less attention has been given to the perspective of managers or employers. Additionally, while a number of measures of family supportive work environments have consequently been developed, which identify the importance of a range of formal and informal workplace policies and supports (Allen, 2001; Cook, 2009; Feierabend, 2010; Greenberger, Goldberg, Hamill, O'Neil, & Payne, 1989; Jahn, et al., 2003), I have not found evidence of a framework that examines how a range of organisational and individual factors interact to create family supportive workplaces. This thesis is concerned with examining these issues, specifically by identifying the factors that determine how successfully organisations enable employees to combine parenthood and career progression. I hope to provide a more nuanced account than previous research by examining how the interaction of a range of formal and formal organisational processes across various levels within the organisation contributes to the development of what I term ‘family-adaptive’ workplaces.

**Research Aims and Approach**

The concept of ‘family-adaptive’ work environments has been formulated for the purposes of the thesis. In the context of this study the term ‘family-adaptiveness’ is utilised to describe the extent to which:
a) organisations can adapt to facilitate the changed working conditions of new parents associated with childbirth; and

b) employees can find ways, through the use of formal entitlements and informal arrangements, to adapt to their new role as parents while maintaining their professional identities and career goals.

The key research question to be addressed in the thesis, therefore, is:

*What factors contribute to the development of a family-adaptive workplace?*

The ‘family-adaptive framework’ draws on two key theoretical fields: the theory of gendered organisations and identity theory. Additionally, the framework incorporates insights drawn from the literature on family supportive policy provision in organisations, particularly theories of ‘business case’ influences, from which I draw the notion of ‘resource constraints’. I contend that individuals’ processes of identity negotiation and resource constraint management at various levels in the organisation interact with the gendering of a range of formal and informal organisational processes and practices. The interaction of these processes determines the extent to which workplaces are adaptive to meeting the needs of employees who wish to combine career progression and parenthood. The conceptual framework developed for this thesis builds on previous research by examining not only organisational factors, but also the potential for individuals at different levels within the organisation to determine the extent to which organisations are family-adaptive. The theoretical fields that inform the conceptual framework are discussed below.

The concept of gendered organisations is well established in the literature on gender and work and forms the theoretical foundation of this thesis. The theory of gendered organisations contends that gender inequality is produced and reinforced through a range of formal and informal organisational processes. This approach moves beyond frameworks which focus solely on structural barriers to gender equality, recognising that gendering of organisations occurs at both the observable level, via organisational rules and work norms as well as at the more abstract level, including interactions and processes of identity construction (Acker, 1990, 1999; Britton, 2000; Britton & Logan, 2008; Ely & Meyerson, 2000b). I draw in particular on Acker’s ‘points of entry’ (Acker, 1992b, 1999) and subsequent theorisation which builds on Acker’s work (Ely & Meyerson, 2000a, 2000b; Meyerson & Kolb, 2000; Meyerson, et al., 2000), identifying six key gendering ‘points of entry’: formal policies and processes; formal interactions; informal work practices, norms and patterns of work; images, symbols, language and rhetoric; informal interactions; and internal mental work. In the context of a discussion of the intersection between parenthood and career progression, the theory of gendered organisations allows for an examination of the influence of gendering processes on the
development of formal policy, the portrayal and interpretation of policy and the informal ways in which messages are conveyed to organisational members about availing of entitlements.

A key issue I am concerned with examining is the ways in which individuals negotiate parenthood and career progression in particular organisational contexts. While the theory of gendered organisations tacitly recognises that organisational actors are involved in the gendering of a range of formal and informal organisational processes, including workplace interactions and the constructions of gender identities (Acker, 1990, 1992b, 1999), I argue that the theory does not provide sufficient scope to examine the role individuals play in shaping gendering processes and thus their potential to contribute to the development of family-adaptive workplaces. Identity construction and interactions are identified as processes through which the gendering of organisations is reinforced. However the potential for these processes to be used to challenge gendered norms remains unexamined. I argue that individuals are not passive organisational participants and that in certain circumstances they have the potential to exercise agency to challenge gendering practices.

Identity theory provides a lens through which to examine the capacity of individuals at various levels in the organisation to challenge gendering processes. Aspects of identity theory, including identity negotiation, thus form the second major theoretical foundation of the thesis. A sociology-based conceptualisation of identity is used, particularly the structural symbolic interactionist (SSI) frame (Stryker & Burke, 2000), which contends that identity develops both from personal traits as well as interactions with others (Lee, Dohring, MacDermid, & Kossek, 2005). Identity is a ‘situational measure of self’, assessed by examining identity salience (Serpe & Stryker, 2011, p.235). This conceptualisation of identity allows for an examination of how identities change and develop over time and also how the organisational setting influences how individuals negotiate their identities.

In addition to these two theoretical foundations, I also draw on ‘business case’ theories of family supportive provisions, presenting the notion of ‘resource constraints’ as an influence on how work-family issues are addressed at various levels within the organisation. Research has in fact identified the importance of examining both identity and utilitarian motivations in tandem (Rothbard & Edwards, 2003). Therefore ‘resource constraints’ comprise an additional element of my analytical framework to examine how individuals and organisations approach work-family issues.

**Methodology**

I utilise a single organisational case study approach, basing the research in an Australian university. The university sector in Australia has a reputation as a leader in the provision of work-family
entitlements (Baird, Frino, & Williamson, 2009, p.686; McDonald, Guthrie, et al., 2005) and provides some of the most progressive parental leave schemes evident across a range of industries and organisations (Baird, Frino, et al., 2009). However, reflecting broader societal trends, the tertiary education sector is characterised by significant gender inequalities, with women underrepresented in higher paying and prestigious positions in both academic and general roles (Armenti, 2004a, 2004b; Chesterman, Ross-Smith, & Peters, 2005a; Probert, 2005; Ward & Wolf-Wendel, 2004). Indeed, universities have been described as highly gendered organisations (Chesterman, Ross-Smith, & Peters, 2005b, p.175; Currie, Harris, & Thiele, 2000; Eveline, 2004; Probert, Ewer, & Whiting, 1998). The combination of generous work-family entitlements coupled with the continued gender imbalance makes the university sector a suitable arena for my research purposes.

I focus in particular on general staff in two contrasting occupational groups in the case study university. General staff play an integral role in the operation of the university (Graham, 2009), accounting for approximately 57 percent of all university staff in Australia, a ratio which has been consistent for the past two decades (Department of Education Employment and Workplace Relations; various years; Department of Education Science and Training, various years; Department of Industry Innovation Science Research and Tertiary Education, 2013). The general staff sector is becoming increasingly feminised, with the proportion of FTE (full-time equivalent) female employees among general staff rising from 58 percent in 1996 to 64 percent in 2012 (Department of Education Employment and Workplace Relations; various years; Department of Education Science and Training, various years; Department of Industry Innovation Science Research and Tertiary Education, 2013). However, within this diverse group of employees there are both highly feminised and highly masculinised occupational groups. Figures from 2010, for example, indicated that of 15 occupational groups for which data were available, three had staff profiles that were more than 70 percent female and three that were more than 70 percent male (Department of Education Employment and Workplace Relations, 2011). An examination of the most recent data available from the Australian Government indicates that gender inequalities persist in the general staff population. While women account for 64 percent of all general staff, only 52 percent of those in positions HEW 8-10 are women. These inequalities are present in both feminised and masculinised occupations. The concentration of men and women within the sector also reveals gender inequalities, with 17 percent of all female employees employed at levels 8-10 compared to 25 percent of male employees (Department of Education Employment and Workplace Relations, 2011). The diversity of the general staff population (in terms of occupational type) combined with
the gendered nature of employment (in terms of horizontal and vertical segregation) thus make general staff a suitable case study for this thesis.

A key concern to be addressed in this thesis is how gendering processes differ across organisational contexts and the implications for family-adaptiveness. Therefore I examine two contrasting occupational groups: Library Services and Computing Centres. Library Services within the university sector are usually dominated by women, while Computing Centres are typically a male domain. Gendered conceptualisations about the nature of employment are evident in both occupations, with librarianship seen as stereotypically ‘feminine’ work (Hickey, 2006; Passet, 1993; Piper & Collamer, 2001) while, in contrast, computing has traditionally been seen as men’s work (Crump, Logan, & McIlroy, 2007). While both of these occupations are particularly gendered, gender stereotypes attached to both occupations have shifted and changed over time. Librarianship was a traditionally a male domain (Dickinson, 2003) until the turn of the 20th century when the profession saw an influx of female employees (Moran, Marshall, & Rathburn-Grubb, 2010). The feminisation of librarianship saw the profession develop into one which was low paid and low in status (Garrison, 1972). In contrast, while the computing or IT sector has traditionally been a male bastion, recently a distinction between male ‘hard’ and female ‘soft’ skills has developed (Crump, et al., 2007; Whitehouse & Diamond, 2006). It has been argued that segregation between these hard and soft skills – although quite fluid – benefits men, as occupations developed around ‘hard’ skills are usually afforded higher status.

While research has shown that female-dominated occupations generally are more family friendly (Glauber, 2011; Kitterod & Ronsen, 2012) and male-dominated occupations, such as IT, can be ‘chilly climates’ for women (Roldan, Soe, & Yakura, 2004), evidence suggests that employees in both occupational groups can face difficulties in achieving work-family balance. For example, research on librarianship has highlighted difficulties faced in attempting to combine work and care, particularly for female employees who attempt to move to higher earning roles (Graves, Xiong, & Park, 2008). Computing occupations have been identified as having family unfriendly working patterns (Whitehouse & Preston, 2005) and some research has found that women chose routine technical roles over time-intensive consultancy roles as a means of managing work-family balance (Whitehouse & Diamond, 2006; Whitehouse & Preston, 2005). These gendered parallels between Computing Centres and Library Services professions make them suitable as case studies to include in the research.

This thesis is concerned with examining organisational family-adaptiveness for employees around the time of childbirth. Thus I investigate the experiences of parents with children up to five years of age. The research has a very specific focus on what I term the ‘parental leave process’. I define the
parental leave process broadly, as the time spanning from when staff members inform the organisation about their intention to go on leave, through the parental leave period and including the time when they return to work following parental leave, while they avail of entitlements related to parental leave, such as flexible work hours or graduated return to work. I examine the experiences of both new mothers and new fathers.

As discussed, ‘family-adaptiveness’ is observable in different ways at different levels within the organisation. For this reason, I employ three levels of analysis: a) senior managers at the organisational level; b) middle managers at the work unit level; and c) non-managerial employees at the work unit level. Throughout the thesis, these levels are referred to as ‘senior management’, ‘middle management’ and ‘employee’ for simplicity. At each level I examine how various factors relating to gendering processes, identity and resource constraints influence the development of family-adaptiveness.

A mixed method approach was utilised. Both quantitative and qualitative methods were employed in order to gain a full understanding of the range of structural and individual issues at play. The primary research method comprised of qualitative interviews, which were supplemented with broad contextual quantitative data. Analysis was carried out on the ‘Parental Leave’ provisions of Australia’s 37 publicly funded universities in order to situate the case study university in terms of leave duration and model of provision. At the senior management level, qualitative interviews were conducted with senior human resources (HR) officers, an equity and diversity office representative and trade union officials. Additionally, in-depth analysis was carried out on the organisation’s parental leave and related entitlements. At the middle management level, qualitative interviews were carried out with direct line managers in two occupational groups: Library Services and the Computing Centre examining managers’ perceptions about the implementation of work-family policies. Finally, at the employee level, qualitative interviews were conducted with new parents in the same two occupational groups. Overall, a total of 28 qualitative interviews were conducted with respondents across the three levels of analysis discussed above.

Multiple data analysis methods were utilised. Analysis of quantitative data, specifically parental leave entitlements, was facilitated by the use of SPSS quantitative software. Qualitative data was analysed using NVivo qualitative data analysis software. The data analysis process is outlined in detail in Chapter 3.

**Thesis Overview**

Following development of the Family-Adaptive Framework in Chapter 2, and elaboration of my research methodology in Chapter 3, three analytic chapters are presented, each examining the ways
in which specific gendering processes interact with identity and resource constraints to contribute to
the development of family-adaptiveness at a particular level of analysis. A brief outline of the
analytic chapters is provided below.

In Chapter 4 I apply the conceptual framework to an examination of parental leave policy
development and implementation at the senior management level. I focus on two gendering
processes: *Formal policies and processes* and *Images, symbols, language and rhetoric*. I focus on
these points of entry as they apply to the development and provision of formal paid parental leave
entitlements at the level of senior management. In the first part of Chapter 4 I provide a detailed
analysis of parental leave provision across the university sector. This sets the context of the research
and facilitates an evaluation of how the case study university’s policy compares to other Australian
universities in terms of quantum and other conditions. Next, I examine parental leave policy
development over recent enterprise bargaining rounds, drawing on interviews with key stakeholders
who were involved in the negotiations. Key issues to emerge in this chapter relate to the influence
of resource constraints and the gendered understructure on policy development and hence the
potential for parental leave policy to contribute to family-adaptiveness. The chapter focuses on the
mismatch between the rhetoric put forward by the university regarding the motivations for policy
provision (the ‘social justice’ argument) and the evidence regarding the underlying motivations that
influence policy development (a ‘narrow business case’ focus). The findings contribute to
understanding of how senior managers, through formal policy provision, can contribute to family-
adaptive workplaces. The in-depth exploration of the factors that influence senior management in
the stance they take towards provision – from their own perspectives – is a unique contribution to
this literature. Additionally, the identification of how underlying factors, including resource
constraints and the gendered understructure, influence senior management adds a further layer of
depth to understanding of how senior managers are influenced in the decisions they take regarding
parental leave policy development.

In Chapter 5 I analyse the role of middle managers in the development of family-adaptive
workplaces. I frame this chapter through two points of entry: *Informal work practices, norms and
patterns of work* and *Formal interactions*, specifically as they relate to middle managers’
implementation of policy across the parental leave process. Unlike senior management, who are
strongly influenced by the gendered understructure, I argue that middle managers, being removed
from the central operations of the university, have the potential to challenge gendering processes
and to develop a family-adaptive environment (at least within their work unit). However, although
they may have the potential to influence the extent to which their work unit is family-adaptive, this
is not a straightforward process. Managers are limited in their potential to develop family-adaptive
environments by the resources available to them (including budgets and personnel, for example) and can experience conflicts between meeting organisational goals and the work-family needs of their staff. Evidence from the research indicated that there were a variety of ways in which managers dealt with work-family issues, regardless of the resource constraints within their work unit. I argue that how they chose to do so was related to their own identity, and specifically how they invoked their managerial and/or parent identity in the workplace. I identify three distinct managerial approaches including the ‘family blind’, ‘family fair’ and ‘family first’ approaches.

The findings outlined in Chapter 5 contribute to understandings of the role middle managers play in developing family-adaptive workplaces in a number of ways. The extant literature often alludes to the central role managers play in shaping family supportiveness, but little is written from their perspectives. This research deepens understanding of the conflicts managers can face in attempting to reconcile the needs of the organisation and employee needs. The examination of the impact of managerial identity on the decisions taken at the work unit level is a further contribution to the literature.

The final analytic chapter, Chapter 6, examines how employees contribute to the development of family-adaptiveness. I investigate how employees can shape their own work-family balance in an organisational context, as well as exploring whether they have the potential to influence broader organisational practices and processes. The chapter centres on two gendering processes: Internal mental work and Informal interactions. I examine how employees articulate ‘professional’ and / or ‘parent’ identities in the workplace and whether these processes of identity work can influence family-adaptiveness. In particular I focus on cases of male and female employees who invoked identities that challenge gendered norms around work and care and the consequences for the advancement of alternative work and care practices. The role employees themselves play in developing supportive workplace cultures has received little attention to date: most literature takes a narrow focus, examining only the ways individuals can shape work-family balance in their own lives. The findings in Chapter 6 thus add to our understanding of the development of family supportive environments by illustrating how employees can shape gendering processes in organisations by invoking identities that challenge gendered norms around work and care and thus contribute to family-adaptiveness.

**Contributions to Knowledge**

This thesis makes a significant contribution to understanding of the range of organisational processes that influence the development of family-adaptiveness. Throughout the thesis I identify how the gendering of a range of organisational processes interacts with identity and resource
constraints across various levels in the organisation to contribute to the development of family-adaptive work environments. The examination of how identities are negotiated and resources managed within differing organisational contexts makes it possible to gain a deeper understanding of the specific conditions that contribute towards the development of workplaces which are family-adaptive. By investigating not only the perceptions of employees, but also how supervisors and senior management negotiate their responsibilities to both the organisation and to employees, I provide a more nuanced picture of the various factors which influence work-family policy development and implementation, thus adding to current literature on ‘family supportive’ workplaces. In particular, this thesis leads to a better understanding of how top-down as well as bottom-up pressures influence the development of family-adaptive workplaces.

A related contribution to knowledge is the development of a comprehensive framework for examining the extent to which organisations can facilitate employees in combining work and caring roles successfully. In bringing together the three strands of ‘gendered organisations’, ‘identity’ and resource constraints I provide a more complete and complex picture of the various forces at play in creating ‘family-adaptive’ workplaces than is evident in existing literature. Another significant contribution is the advancement of the theories utilised in the development of the conceptual framework. In relation to the theory of gendered organisations, I develop Acker’s typology and advance hers and others’ theorisation in two ways. First, by examining the interaction of gendering processes at various levels within the organisation, I address concerns that research is needed into the specific ways in which organisations are gendered in order to effect organisational change (Britton, 2000; Britton & Logan, 2008; Green & Cassell, 1996). Second, by exploring how employees exercise agency in both challenging and reinforcing gendered norms, I acknowledge critics who question whether organisations are inherently and immutably gendered (Crawford & Pini, 2011; Kantola, 2008). I add depth to the application of the theory of gendered organisations by examining how gendering occurs through a range of gendering processes, thus avoiding the trap of applying the theory of gendered organisations selectively and failing to integrate its elements coherently, a shortcoming scholars have identified in previous research (Dye & Mills, 2012). The application of identity theory to a multilevel organisational study is a further contribution of the thesis. I examine not only how individuals negotiate conflicting identities, but how these processes impact on broader organisational practices. I have not found evidence of research which utilises identity theory in this way. By focusing on how identities are negotiated across various levels within the organisation, I hope to provide a more nuanced analysis of how gendering of organisations and identity negotiations interact in the creation of ‘family-adaptive’ workplaces.
Conclusion

This chapter had outlined the key aim of this thesis – namely, to identify the range of organisational factors that contribute to the development of family-adaptive work environments – and the methodology that will be followed in order to address this issue. In the chapters that follow, I expand on the theoretical underpinnings of the thesis, the methodology and the key research findings. Chapter 2 outlines the conceptual framework in order to provide a clearer understanding of the theoretical approach guiding this study and how the framework will be applied at each level of analysis. Following from this, in Chapter 3 I outline the methodology. This chapter provides an overview of the case study university and outlines the specific research methods to be employed for each aspect of the research. Throughout the chapter I identify why the particular research methods employed were chosen in order to address the substantive and theoretical aims of the thesis. Chapters 4 to 6 present the analysis and outline the research findings. As mentioned previously, findings are discussed as they apply at each of the levels of analysis identified earlier. Thus, Chapter 4 focuses on the senior management level, Chapter 5 on middle management and Chapter 6 on the non-managerial employee level. Chapter 7 brings together the research findings and offers conclusions about the key contributions of the thesis.
Chapter 2: Development of the Family-Adaptive Framework

Introduction

In this chapter I develop a theoretical framework for examining organisational family-adaptiveness, a concept that extends the existing literature on family supportive workplaces. Over the past two decades a significant body of research has developed in this area, focusing on a number of issues at organisational and workplace levels, including formal and informal workplace policies and processes (e.g. Crawford & Pini, 2011; Desrochers & Sargent, 2004, p.45; Feierabend, 2010; Greenberger, et al., 1989; Poelmans & Sahibzada, 2004; Swody & Powell, 2007), perceptions about organisational supportiveness from the perspective of employees (e.g. Allen, 2001; Cook, 2009; Jahn, et al., 2003) and strategies employees utilise to maintain equilibrium between their work and family lives (e.g. Ashforth, Kreiner, & Fugate, 2000; Kossek & Lautsch, 2012; Kreiner, Hollensbe, & Sheep, 2009; Matthews, Barnes-Farrell, & Bulger, 2010). The extant research provides a broad overview of a range of supports that can be put in place in workplaces to enable employees to successfully combine work and caring roles and the strategies individuals utilise to manage work-family balance within organisational contexts. However, there are some limitations in the scope of current research which I aim to address in this thesis.

In developing the theoretical framework I first provide an overview of the literature on family supportive workplaces, which I have categorised into three broad areas of concern: formal policy development at the level of the organisation as a whole; policy implementation at the level of middle management; and employees’ perceptions about and uptake of policy provisions. I then draw on two key theoretical bodies of literature – the theory of gendered organisations and identity theory – to inform my analytical approach. Finally I draw this material together to provide a conceptual framework to guide my research.

By focusing on three specific areas of concern in relation to family supportive organisations that I have identified in the literature (and on the connections between these levels), as well as drawing on the theoretical perspectives of gendered organisations and identity, my research will address important gaps in the extant literature. At the organisational level, literature has focused largely on the importance of formal policy provision. However, the factors that influence the types of policies that develop, and the consequences of policy design, have rarely been addressed in ways that take into account gendering processes in organisations. At the middle management level, while research has consistently pointed to the role that managers and supervisors play in determining the extent to which policies are available, much of the research to date has relied on employee perceptions of the extent to which management is supportive, while few have focused on the perspective of managers
or supervisors themselves. From the employee perspective, the literature on work-family balance often focuses on work-family conflict and the strategies employees use to manage this conflict. However, little is known about the ways in which employees can influence organisational policies and processes and how they can contribute to family supportiveness in the workplace in a broader sense.

Another gap in the literature relates to the informal strategies middle managers and employees utilise to create family supportive environments. While researchers have identified the importance of informal supports in enabling employees to achieve work family balance (Behson, 2005; Premeaux, Adkins, & Mossholder, 2007; Sanz-Vergel, Demerouti, Bakker, & Moreno-Jimenez, 2011), this has been focused largely at middle management level. I will extend research in this area by examining the variety of ways in which middle managers and employees utilise informal strategies to manage work-family balance, with a particular emphasis on why some managers and employees do engage in informal strategies while others do not. A final gap that I address is the lack of an overarching framework for examining organisational family supportiveness, which links organisational levels and illustrates how these levels interact. While it is acknowledged that support for work-life initiatives operates at both the level of organisational work group and at the organisational level (Kossek, et al., 2010) and studies have examined how various levels of the organisation impact on work-family conflict (Poelmans & Sahibzada, 2004) I have not found evidence of a comprehensive framework which examines and explains how various organisational levels interact in creating family supportive workplaces. I address these limitations by developing a conceptual framework which allows for an examination of the interaction of senior management, middle management and employee level factors in the development of supportive environments.

At the senior management level I focus predominantly on formal policy development and provision, at the middle management level I examine formal and informal processes of policy implementation and at the employee level I examine policy uptake. Implementing work-family policy necessarily requires negotiation at a range of levels through the organisation. By examining not only the perceptions of employees, but also how supervisors and senior management negotiate their responsibilities to both the organisation and to employees, I provide a more nuanced picture of the various factors which influence work-family policy development and implementation.

This chapter first provides an overview of the extant literature on family-supportive workplaces, outlining the key issues addressed and where gaps in knowledge exist. Following this discussion, I introduce the two theoretical frames that guide the thesis: the theory of gendered organisations and identity theory. I outline the contributions of key theorists in both fields, noting the strengths and limitations of the theories. Through a discussion of empirical research which has employed these
theoretical frames I outline their suitability for this research project. Finally, I outline how a framework that incorporates both theoretical frames along with resource constraints will allow for a comprehensive evaluation of family supportiveness in an organisational context.

In outlining the development of the conceptual framework, I reiterate my focus on the ‘parental leave process’, as described in Chapter 1. As explained in Chapter 1, I define the parental leave process broadly, spanning the timeframe from when a staff member first informs the organisation about their intention to go on leave, through their time away from work on parental leave into the period following their return to work while they avail of entitlements associated with parental leave, including, for example, flexible working hours and part-time work.

**Family Supportive Organisations: A Review of the Literature**

A growing body of research has developed around the concept of family supportiveness in an organisational context. In broad terms, scholarship has focused on three key issues: the role of formal policy provision at organisational level; policy implementation at the work unit level, specifically focusing on the role of managers; and how employees shape their own work-family balance in an organisational context. More recently, a smaller body of academic work, which aims to incorporate each of these perspectives into a holistic framework for examining organisational family supportiveness, has developed. In the discussion below I outline the key issues which have emerged in each of these bodies of research, highlighting strengths and limitations of current literature and outlining how I aim to extend current knowledge on family supportiveness in an organisational context.

**Senior Management, the Organisational Level and Formal Policy Provision**

The provision of work-family policy at the organisational level is a key contributory factor in the development of family supportive work environments. It has been shown that the provision of paid leave is associated with a greater propensity to return to work amongst leave takers – predominantly women – and thus leads to improved career prospects (Baxter, 2009; Burgess, Gregg, Propper, & Washbrook, 2008; Ulker & Guven, 2011). However, while it is important to ensure that leave policies facilitate the maintenance of attachment to the workforce for women, it is similarly important that policies facilitate fathers’ attachment to their children through meaningful and substantial participation in caregiving (Allard, Haas, & Hwang, 2011; Brandth & Kvande, 2001; Haas, Allard, & Hwang, 2002; Hosking, Whitehouse, & Baxter, 2010; Wells & Sarkadi, 2012). The development of work cultures in which it is acceptable for both men and women to participate in work and care equally is an important goal (Sallee, 2012), which can be achieved in part through the provision of gender equitable leave entitlements that provide opportunities for both mothers and
fathers to avail of leave (Brandth & Kvande, 2009; Haas & Hwang, 2007, 2009; Ranson, 2011; Whitehouse, Diamond, & Baird, 2007). However organisations do not necessarily adopt such policies, and researchers have addressed this issue through an examination of rationales for the provision of entitlements. Associated bodies of literature address issues relating to policy practice, including gaps between provision and uptake and policy outcomes. These issues are discussed below.

**Rationales for Organisational Work-Family Policy**

Many organisations have some form of work-family policy in place, although the impetus for introducing policies varies from one organisation to the next (Kramar, 1996; Pocock, 2005). An examination of the extant research uncovers three interlinked and sometimes overlapping motivations for the introduction of family friendly entitlements, which are commonly referred to as business case, social justice and institutional drivers, each of which is discussed briefly below.

The most commonly cited arguments for introducing work-family policy relate to business efficiency (Dickens, 1999; Smith, 2006). This perspective, commonly referred to as the business case rationale, emphasises the potential benefits that can be gained by organisations from introducing work-family balance provisions (Brough, Holt, Bauld, Biggs, & Ryan, 2008; Forsyth & Polzer-Debruyne, 2007; Lewis, 1997, p.13). The financial outlay associated with the provision of paid parental leave entitlements can be a significant disincentive for organisations. However, while the implementation of work-family policies may incur some costs, the level of uptake is generally low meaning that these costs are generally not overly excessive. Added to this, there are perceived financial benefits of implementing such policies, including the retention of quality staff, reduced recruitment costs associated with lower staff turnover, reduced training costs and increased productivity (McDonald, Guthrie, et al., 2005, p.480). Conversely the costs of failing to implement work-family policies may include reduced performance and organisational commitment, low job satisfaction and absenteeism (Brough, et al., 2008; Brough, O'Driscoll, & Biggs, 2009; Glass & Riley, 1998). Provision of paid parental leave also portrays a positive organisational image which may potentially attract staff. According to the business case rationale, the introduction of family friendly policies is most likely in ‘high-commitment’ workplaces (Osterman, 2000), comprised of employees who have high educational and specialist skill levels and are therefore not easily expendable. On the other hand, in workplaces which are characterised by unskilled routine work, where there are low replacement and training costs, the introduction of family friendly policies may not make business sense. Taking a business case approach to the provision of work-family policy therefore has the potential to lead to a divide between highly skilled workers who have generous
provision and low-skilled workers who have limited or no access (Whitehouse, Haynes, Macdonald, & Arts, 2007; Whitehouse & Zetlin, 1999).

Much of the literature on the business case focuses on the reasons why, despite the costs associated with the provision of work-family entitlements, organisations choose to put these provision in place. It is argued that the benefits accrued by organisations by introducing work-family policies outweigh the costs of such policies. However, while business case arguments can be used to justify the provision of parental leave entitlements, an organisation’s ability to provide generous paid leave (both in terms of leave duration and the extent to which salary is replaced) is inevitably limited by the resources available to it. While business case arguments may be used to support the introduction of policies, resource constraints may restrict the generosity of entitlements organisations can afford and as a result they may have limited effectiveness in terms of addressing the work-family needs of employees. In this thesis I address this issue, examining how both positive and negative business case arguments can be influential in shaping parental leave policy. In particular I explore how senior management can employ a ‘positive’ business argument to justify the provision of entitlements while at the same time utilising ‘negative’ business case arguments (driven by resource constraints) to place limits on the types of provisions that are in place.

A second common argument for the introduction of work-family policies relates to social justice concerns. In contrast to the business efficiency rationale, the social justice perspective generally stresses that parental leave entitlements should be made available because it is ‘the right thing to do’ (Charlesworth, 2007; Charlesworth & Probert, 2005). From a social justice perspective, parental leave policy should potentially promote egalitarian pattern of work and caring responsibilities, enabling both parents to maintain workforce attachment and to choose the way in which they share responsibility for caring for their children in the formative months after childbirth.

Finally, work-family policy may also be introduced due to a range of social and regulatory pressures (e.g. to meet legislative requirements, institutional and social norms or due to trade union influence). This is commonly known as the ‘institutional’ rationale (Whitehouse, Haynes, et al., 2007). From this perspective, organisations which are highly regulated and unionised, and larger corporations which are in the public eye and open to scrutiny from regulators, are most likely to establish family friendly policies (Whitehouse & Zetlin, 1999).

The rationale behind the introduction of work-family policies may have implications for the extent to which they successfully enable employees to combine work and caring roles. For example, when

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1 For example, in Australia important catalysts for the introduction of work-family policy included test cases brought before industrial tribunals and legislative changes (often brought in to ratify international conventions and agreements) (Baird, 2003; Bourke, 2004; Charlesworth, 2007; Charlesworth, Hall, & Probert, 2005; Kramar, 1996; McDonald, 2008; Whitehouse, 2005)
a business case rationale influences the introduction of policies, it is possible that costly options such as childcare may be sacrificed for less costly (and perhaps less effective) options (Whitehouse & Zetlin, 1999). It has been argued that work-family ‘... policies may be adopted for symbolic rather than substantive reasons and thus fail to produce any real changes in organisational structure or behaviour’ (Blair-Loy & Wharton, 2002, p.816). In other words, policies may simply be window dressing, used to portray a positive organisational image despite there being little concern for work-family balance within the organisation.

**Provision - Utilisation Gap**

Regardless of the motivation for the introduction of work-family policy, even when they are in place there is often a ‘provision-utilisation gap’ between policy availability and uptake (Kossek, et al., 2010; McDonald, Brown, et al., 2005; McDonald, Guthrie, et al., 2005, p.480). One concern is that the availability of information about entitlements (or lack thereof) impacts on their uptake (see for example Jahn, et al., 2003; Thompson, et al., 1999; Wang & Walumbwa, 2007). It has also been argued that when policies are ‘controversial or ambiguous’, it is less likely that they will be utilised (Blair-Loy & Wharton, 2002, p.816). This highlights the importance of making these policies ‘a real option’ for employees, by ensuring that they are well publicised in the organisation and that the types of policies available meet the needs of employees (Thornthwaite, 2004, pp.180-181). However, reluctance to avail of policies can be attributed to factors that go beyond lack of awareness. Research has shown that policies are ‘produced and reproduced through processes of interpretation and interaction’ (Kirby & Krone, 2002, p.51). When work-family policies are not clearly articulated employees tend to rely on the actions or attitudes of colleagues and supervisors when deciding whether to access entitlements (Kirby & Krone, 2002). Thus where there is a negative organisational attitude towards work-family policies it is less likely that employees will avail of them.

**Unintended Outcomes of Work-Family Policy and Programs**

One of the key purposes of work-family policy is to enable parents to combine work and care without having to make unreasonable sacrifices in either sphere. However, policies which are portrayed as being family friendly may by their very nature discriminate against those with parenting responsibilities (particularly against mothers) and therefore work against gender equity aims. Researchers have argued that in some cases work-life balance initiatives can lead to intensification in work and may serve to reproduce gender stereotypes (Kossek, et al., 2010). An increase in non-standard employment amongst mothers (e.g. part-time work) can also lead to a decrease in security and income as well as contributing towards lower levels of work-life balance
and the reinforcement of gender stereotypes which see the mother as the primary caregiver (Brough, et al., 2008).

The concept of ‘the mommy track’ (Benschop & Doorewaard, 1998) is used widely in academic literature and refers to covert discrimination, whereby mothers are side-lined into careers with limited potential for progression. It is argued that ‘bias against caregiving’ exists in some organisations in which ‘careers are structured so that only workers with few family responsibilities can succeed’ (Drago, et al., 2005, p.22). Others have referred to a ‘motherhood penalty’ associated with combining parenthood and work, whereby ‘cultural understandings of the motherhood role exist in tension with the cultural understandings of the “ideal worker” role’ (Correll, et al., 2007, p.1298). This can lead to mothers being discriminated against (either directly or indirectly) in terms of earning potential and opportunities for career advancement. The ‘ideal worker norm’ also impacts negatively on fathers wishing to access work-family policies and fathers are more willing to utilise family friendly provisions where there is a well-developed family supportive work culture (Allard, et al., 2011). A study of discrimination related to family responsibilities conducted in Queensland found that those who had family responsibilities experienced barriers associated with their caring role in a number of areas, including experiencing substantive changes in their role following maternity leave, negative attitudes towards carer leave, and lack of opportunities for promotion (McDonald, 2008, pp.57-59). Similarly, in a survey of women’s experiences during and following pregnancy, the Australian Bureau of Statistics found that 22 percent of women reported difficulties during their pregnancy at work, including receiving inappropriate or negative comments and missing out on training opportunities and promotion (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2006).

It is argued a ‘flexibility stigma’ exists in organisations, whereby ‘deep cultural assumptions that work demands and deserves undivided and intensive allegiance’ fuel a reluctance to avail of flexible working arrangements (Williams, Blair-Loy, & Berdahl, 2013, p.211). Empirical research has shown a perception amongst women that flexible work arrangements can put limitations on career advancement opportunities (McDonald, Guthrie, et al., 2005) and the perception that availing of entitlements can lead to tangible career disadvantages has been supported. For example, researchers have found that engaging in part-time work or reduced hours following parental leave can diminish opportunities for promotion (Glass & Riley, 1998) and can result in a reduction in earnings disproportionate to the reduced hours (Hardill & Watson, 2004). A consequence of these issues is reluctance amongst women to avail of part-time work and other flexibility arrangements following maternity leave, even when these entitlements are provided and promoted within organisations (e.g. Brough, et al., 2009).
The discussion above outlines some key problems in the provision of formal work-family entitlements, relating to the rationale underlying provision, problems in implementation and the possibility of unintended negative outcomes of policy. Throughout the thesis I aim to provide a deeper insight into why problems exist in the formulation and implementation of policies, by examining the issues through a gendered lens. I aim to show that when a gendered ideology underpins policy provision this can result in the formulation of policies that can discriminate against caregivers (predominantly women). In addition to focusing on how gendering processes impact on policy development, I also seek to extend existing literature relating to how the business case can influence policy development. While much of the literature in this area focuses on how business case arguments are employed to support the introduction of policies, I will build on current research by examining how negative business arguments can also be used to limit policy provisions. In particular, I examine how arguments relating to a concern about resource constraints can be employed by managers to limit the scope of policies. As a result how their potential to meet parents’ needs may be compromised.

**Middle Managers: Policy Implementation and Informal Support**

While formal policy provision is crucial to the realisation of a family supportive environment, it is equally important to ensure rigour in policy implementation; middle managers play a central role in this regard. Managerial support is frequently identified as a key contributory factor in the development of ‘family supportive’ work environments (Brough, et al., 2009; Brunetto, Farr-Wharton, Ramsay, & Shacklock, 2010; Thompson, Brough, & Schmidt, 2006a; Thornthwaite, 2004) and managers have a significant influence in shaping the work-family climate. Kossek and Lautsch (2012) distinguish between standardised and customised work family climates. In standardised work environments employees are generally expected to fall in line with their employers’ preferences regarding the management of family commitments. In these workplaces is likely that formal policy will shape the work-family climate with managers implementing formal policy strictly and uniformly in their work unit. In contrast, customised workplaces provide employees with greater potential to manage work and family in ways that suit their particular needs. Managers of customised workplaces are perhaps more likely to employ informal supports, subject to the characteristics of the work unit and the particular needs of employees. These two key aspects of managerial supportiveness: implementation of formal policy and instigation of informal supports are discussed below.

Middle managers play a key role in determining how easily employees can access work-family arrangements, specifically parental leave and return to work programs (Anderson, Coffey, & Byerly, 2002; Lapierre, et al., 2008; McDonald, Brown, et al., 2005; O'Neill, et al., 2009; Straub,
Researchers regularly report that work-family entitlements are considered to be more accessible – and hence uptake is higher – when managers are supportive (Glass & Riley, 1998; Kirby & Krone, 2002). For example, in a review of empirical literature in the area of work-life policies McDonald et al (2005) suggested that lack of managerial support for work-life balance and perceptions about negative career consequences were important factors in discouraging employees from availing of work-life balance supports (McDonald, Brown, et al., 2005). Managers exercise a degree of discretion in how they choose to implement organisational wide policies at the work unit level. Research has shown that ‘even in the presence of formal policies, employees may find enactment difficult with unsympathetic supervisors who subtly communicate the negative consequences of doing so’ (Glass & Riley, 1998, p.1427). To the extent that there is a perception among managers and employees that availing of work-family entitlements constitutes a lack of organisational commitment, use of provisions can lead to staff being passed over in times of promotion or looked on unfavourably by colleagues (McDonald, Guthrie, et al., 2005; Pocock, 2005; Renda, Baxter, & Alexander, 2009). Various studies have showed that that having a supportive supervisor and colleagues increases the likelihood that employees will avail of work-family policies (Brough, et al., 2009; Brunetto, et al., 2010; Kirby & Krone, 2002; Thomas & Ganster, 1995; Thompson, Brough, & Schmidt, 2006b; Thompson, et al., 1999; Thornthwaite, 2004) and will display higher job satisfaction and reduced work pressure (Forsyth & Polzer-Debruyne, 2007).

Another theme in the literature relating to managers is the importance of informal supports in reducing work-family conflict (Anderson, et al., 2002; Sanz-Vergel, et al., 2011). In fact research has shown than informal supports may be as important as (Premeaux, et al., 2007) or even more important than (Wayne, Randel, & Stevens, 2006) formal policy provision in reducing work-family conflict. Informal supports generally operate at the work unit level, rather than being effected at the organisational level. In the view of one research team ‘organisational and managerial support for employers in the form of a positive work-family culture may be almost as important as some FFPs [family friendly policies] in helping workers achieve balance’ (Premeaux, et al., 2007, p.724). Similarly, Behson (2005) found that informal supports (supervisor support, career consequences and job autonomy) were more important than formal supports, such as job flexibility and benefit availability, for employee wellbeing.

The discussion above highlights the importance of the implementation of formal policy and instigation of informal supports in creating family supportive environments. An examination of how managers can adopt both formal and informal policies and processes and the implications for family-adaptiveness is a key aspect of my research.
While broad consensus exists regarding the pivotal role managers play in parental leave policy implementation, gaps remain in our knowledge. For example, little research has been conducted into the factors that affect managers’ decisions regarding the implementation of policy. There has been little exploration of why differences exist between managers in how they deal with work-family balance issues. Research has been critiqued for portraying managers as ‘a single, univocal, homogenous entity’ (Thomas & Linestead, 2002, p.73) and for failing to take into account organisational context and issues such as race, gender and social class (Linestead & Thomas, 2002; Thomas & Davies, 2002; Thomas & Linstead, 2002). Consequently, it has been argued that it is important to examine ‘[h]ow various identities interact, conflict, are backed up and challenged in the context of various organisational arrangements and forms of social interaction’ (Sveningsson & Alvesson, 2003, p.1166).

This study aims to overcome these limitations by examining managers across range of contexts in order to determine how individual difference as well as organisational context impact on the management of parental leave. I draw on a small and growing literature that examines managerial identity, including the work of Sveningsson and Alvesson (2003) which examines ‘the constructions of and struggle with various managerial and non-managerial identities in a complex, changing and multi-ordered organisation’ (Sveningsson & Alvesson, 2003, p.1165). This literature, discussed in detail later in this chapter, highlights how managers can employ various, sometimes conflicting, identities in the workplace (Clarke, Brown, & Hailey, 2009; Watson, 2008). I draw on these ideas to extend the current debates on the role of managers in developing family supportive workplaces.

It is important to note that differences in policy implementation across work groups cannot be seen solely as a result of managerial discretion; organisational context must also be taken into account. A key issue relating to organisational context is how gendered patterns of employment will influence family supportiveness. Organisational context can be gendered in a number of ways, for example, through conceptualisations about the type of work performed and divisions of labour (i.e. patterns of horizontal and vertical segregation). Research has shown that female-dominated environments are more likely to be supportive than male environments (Glauber, 2011; Kitterod & Ronsen, 2012). The extent to which managerial approaches differ in occupational groups that are ‘gendered’ in contrasting ways is thus crucial to this study. Other factors such as the work unit’s size, function and work patterns will also impact on managers’ approaches to implementing work-family policy. Consequently, meeting employee requests for leave or flexible working arrangements may be more easily achievable in some work units than others. I will therefore examine how the gendered composition of workplaces and constraints relating to human resources and work functions...
influence managers in their approach to parental leave implementation. The examination of how resource constraints can shape managerial approaches to the parental leave process parallels my examination of the ways in which a ‘negative’ business case might operate at the senior management level.

Non-Managerial Employees and Work-Family Balance

A significant body of literature focuses on employees’ personal strategies for managing work-family balance, particularly around the concept of work-family conflict (Premeaux, et al., 2007; Reynolds & Aletraris, 2007; Voydanoff, 1988, p.749). Work-family conflict occurs when work obligations interfere with family (work-to-family conflict), or when family responsibilities interfere with work (family-to-work conflict)(Premeaux, et al., 2007). The premise underlying work-family conflict literature is that individuals face conflict in trying to deal with competing demands of work and family life and that decisions about which role to prioritise leads to an inability to perform the other role adequately. Types of conflict identified include time-based, strain-based and behaviour-based conflict (Elloy, 2004; Greenhaus & Powell, 2003).

Scholars have put forth a number of theories to describe how employees deal with work-family conflict. Some researchers have focused on ‘adaptive’ strategies (Moen & Wethington, 1992; Wierda-Boer, Gerris, & Vermulst, 2008) that families engage in in order to achieve a satisfactory work-family balance, including decreasing work-related demands by cutting hours of work or increasing caring resources by employing outside childcare or household services (Wierda-Boer, et al., 2008). Another focus is on the ‘bias avoidance’ or ‘bias acceptance’ strategies employees engage in to deal with the ‘bias against caregiving’ that exists in organisations (Drago, et al., 2005, p.22). Drago (2006) posits that the extent to which employees will engage in bias avoidance activities depends on a number of factors, including the ‘disciplinary, institutional and community context’; culture, gender composition and size of institution; and community resources (Drago, et al., 2006, p.1225). By engaging in bias avoidance, employees aim to counteract the negative impacts on their careers of childcare responsibilities (for example, by delaying parenthood to pursue career goals). Further, Drago and colleagues outline a number of factors which can ensure that workers do not have to engage in bias avoidance strategies, including: the provision of formal policies which enable workers to combine work and caring responsibilities; promotion of a culture where workers are not only permitted but encouraged to avail of work family policies; and bias resistance, whereby workers actively work against policies which impact negatively on those with caring responsibilities (Drago, et al., 2005).
Despite the established literature in this area, little attention is paid to the reasons why employees choose to prioritise one role over the other and ‘the process by which individuals decide whether to comply with the demands of a particular role at a given point in time, the original conceptualisation of inter-role conflict… has been largely unexamined’ (Greenhaus & Powell, 2003, p.292). Others have argued that research has ignored ‘the individual’s influence on the selection of personal strategies for work/family role integration that may beget spillover and conflict in the first place’ (Kossek, Noe, & DeMarr, 1999, p.103). An examination of the limited literature that does address this issue reveals two contrasting schools of thought: broadly speaking, motivations can be categorised as being either ‘utilitarian’ or ‘salience’ related (Carlson & Kacmar, 2000; Lobel, 1991; Rothbard & Edwards, 2003). Proponents of the utilitarian perspective argue that individuals invest in roles that provide the greatest rate of return in terms of monetary reward and satisfaction. On the other hand, proponents of the ‘salience’ perspective argue that investment in a role is related to the degree to which an individual identifies with that role. Wayne et al argue that ‘it is not merely possession of a family or work role, or the time spent in each role that is necessary to consider but rather the importance of each of these roles to the individual’ (Wayne, et al., 2006, p.457).

While there is limited evidence of literature that employs the concept of identity salience in the study of work-family issues in an organisational context, the literature that exists provides some useful insights into how the concept can be used. This literature will be discussed in detail later in the chapter. One key body of knowledge that has developed recently centres on the concept of ‘boundary management’. Boundary theory examines how individuals can successfully manage transitions between work and family life, and maintain borders between the two realms (Ashforth, et al., 2000; Bulger, Matthews, & Hoffman, 2007; Chen, Powell, & Greenhaus, 2009; Desrochers & Sargent, 2004; Kreiner, et al., 2009; Matthews, et al., 2010; Winkel & Clayton, 2010). This literature identifies the extent to which roles can be permeable (i.e. it is possible to integrate one role in another) or flexible (i.e. roles can be enacted in a variety of situations) (Ashforth, et al., 2000). Different approaches to boundary control are also identified, whereby employees can be ‘integrators’, ‘separators’/‘segmenters’ or ‘alternators’ (Ashforth, et al., 2000; Bulger, et al., 2007; Kossek & Lautsch, 2012; Kreiner, et al., 2009), depending on the extent to which they are willing to blur the boundaries between work and family roles. Researchers have argued that work and family identities impact on the extent to which employees are ‘family-centric’, ‘work-centric’ or ‘dual-centric’ (Kossek & Lautsch, 2012) and that ‘work-family boundary styles are a function of individual boundary crossing preferences and identity, along with the organisational work-family climate for boundary control’ (Kossek & Lautsch, 2012, p.155). In essence, how employees manage the relationship between work and family is determined both by their preferences and identities as
well as organisational factors which impact on how they can manage the work-family boundary (Ashforth, et al., 2000; Desrochers & Sargent, 2004; Winkel & Clayton, 2010). While this literature provides an insight into employees’ management of their own work-family balance I hope to go a step further to examine how employees’ identity salience can shape broader organisational processes, particularly by examining how employees can contribute to the development of family-adaptive environments through their identity work. In this context ‘identity work’ refers to the ways employees invoke and enact their identities in the workplace, particularly in interactions with other organisational actors relating to work-family issues. Additionally, I focus on how identity operates at distinct levels within the organisation, including the senior management, middle management and employee levels, thus adding further depth to the existing literature.

The utilitarian perspective has some parallels with the concept of ‘resource constraints’ which I utilise in this thesis. I argue that employees’ choices regarding work and family will to some extent be influenced by the financial and other resources available to them to support them in combining work and care. I touch on this issue throughout the thesis. However, I argue that it is necessary to look beyond the utilitarian perspective as employees in similar situations are liable to choose different strategies for managing work and family and that differences in choices are related to an individual’s identity salience, as discussed above. Researchers note the benefits of examining utilitarian and identity motivations in tandem (Lobel, 1991; Lucius-Hoene & Deppermann, 2000). It is argued that ‘even when controlling for utilitarian motives and demographic characteristics, identity is positively related to the time invested in a role’ (Rothbard & Edwards, 2003, p.716). Therefore, rather than examining utilitarian motivations in detail, my focus at the employee level centres around identity and how identity salience influences the decisions employees make.

**Family Supportive Models**

A number of scholars have attempted to incorporate this wide range of formal and informal supports discussed above into broad models through which to examine family supportiveness. Table 1 briefly summarises some of the factors that have been identified in the literature.
Table 1: Determinants of Family Supportive Work Cultures

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<td>Communication</td>
<td>Managerial support</td>
<td>Attitude of management</td>
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<td>Career consequences</td>
<td>Support systems</td>
<td>Workloads</td>
<td>Perceptions about career consequences</td>
<td>Trust (lack of)</td>
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<td>Sense of entitlement</td>
<td>Mentors</td>
<td>Attitudes of supervisors/managers</td>
<td>Organisational time expectations</td>
<td>Work culture (workaholic culture)</td>
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<td>Time expectations</td>
<td>Organisational culture</td>
<td>Career repercussions</td>
<td>Gendered nature of policy utilisation</td>
<td>Communication and Training (limited)</td>
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<td>Management conventions</td>
<td>Influence of peers</td>
<td>Co-worker support</td>
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Some theorists have developed structured measures of family supportive work environments (Feierabend, 2010; Greenberger, et al., 1989). These include the Family Supportive Organisation Perceptions described by Allen (2001) and later adopted by Cook (2009) and the measure of Perceived Organisational Family Support (Jahn, et al., 2003). However, these measures are limited in that their analysis is reliant solely on the perspective of employees in determining the extent to which organisations are supportive. While these measures are useful in examining employee perceptions about either the extent to which organisations are supportive of family obligations, or the availability of supportive policies, they fail to provide a holistic picture of the structural supports and policies which are available, how they are implemented in practice, the extent to which employees are aware of them, and the extent to which employees perceive them as accessible. The models are also limited in that they do not focus on broader organisation-wide influences and issues particular to the organisational work group.

A review of the literature provides a number of examples of multi-level models which have been developed for the examination of organisational family supportiveness. For example, Kossek and
colleagues argue that cultural support for work-life initiatives operates at two interacting levels: at the level of organisational work group (e.g. department) and at the organisational level ‘where resources and overarching cultural values are engendered’ (Kossek, et al., 2010). Another group of researchers examined the importance of a range of factors, including: individual differences in work and family identity; organisational support (both formal and informal); and family support (instrumental and emotional), in determining how individuals experienced enrichment through the work and family interface (Wayne, et al., 2006). This study provides insight into the way in which structural, cultural and individual factors influence employees’ work-family enrichment. Similarly, Poelmans and Sahibzada (2004) put forward a framework for examining how various factors at the macro, meso and micro levels impact on the extent to which employees experience work-family conflict. However, again the focus is solely on employees’ experiences of work-family conflict. The top-down approach to examining the impact of the organisation on the employee does not take into account the role that employees can play in challenging cultures which are not supportive. In a study that examined more than one set of relationships, Swody & Powell (2007) proposed two models for examining predictors of participation in family friendly programs: the first model focused on the relationship between individuals and managers while the second model emphasised the relationship between individuals and the organisation. While the authors note the extent to which employees will avail of policies depends on how supportive they perceive employers and managers to be (Swody & Powell, 2007), they fail to examine how managers can challenge organisational policies or the potential for employees to challenge unsupportive cultures. In their study of work-life balance in Hungary and Sweden, Hobson and colleagues developed a model which built on the concepts of agency and capabilities to examine work-life balance at the societal level (Hobson, Fahlen, & Takacs, 2011). Their conceptual model includes the agency of the individual, organisational level, institutional and normative societal factors. The model is one of few that include the agency of the individual as a key factor. However its societal focus is too broad for the present study.

The discussion above indicates that a large body of research has been conducted into family supportiveness. A number of scholars have sought to identify the factors that contribute to the development of family supportive work environments, focusing on employees’ roles in shaping their own work-family balance (Drago, et al., 2006; Moen & Wethington, 1992; Wierda-Boer, et al., 2008), on staff perceptions about the extent to which organisations are supportive (Allen, 2001; Cook, 2009; Jahn, et al., 2003) and on the range of formal and informal policies and supports which are available within workplaces (Feierabend, 2010; Greenberger, et al., 1989). However, in my examination of the literature I have not found a framework that comprehensively incorporates the
influence of a range of structural and individual factors at various levels within the organisation in creating family supportive workplaces. In order to address this gap in knowledge, I aim to put forward a framework that encapsulates a range of factors at the level of the organisation, middle management and employee levels that contribute to the creation of family supportive environments.

**Family Supportive Organisations: Gendering Processes**

The central theoretical construct which informs the conceptual framework is the theory of gendered organisations. This theoretical lens was chosen due to its identification of the gendering of a specific set of organisational processes that can be applied to the study of organisational family-adaptiveness at the senior management, middle management and employee levels. Theorists in the field of gendered organisations have defined gender as a ‘complex set of social relations enacted across a range of social practices in organisations’ (Ely & Meyerson, 2000b, p.104). In general, proponents of the theory agree that gendering of social relations mean that ‘the positions of women and men are defined, the cultural meanings of being a man and a woman are negotiated, and their trajectories through life are mapped out’ (Connell, 2006, p.839). Gendering of organisational processes occurs at both structural and abstract levels, in both the formal policies and work patterns as well as in the less visible messages that are portrayed through interactions and internal thought processes of individuals in the organisation (e.g. Britton, 2000; Britton & Logan, 2008; Ely & Meyerson, 2000b; Kelly, Ammons, Chermack, & Moen, 2010; Martin & Collinson, 2002; Swanberg, 2004) Scholarship in this field has addressed a range of issues, ranging from examinations of the impact of gendering processes on broad organisational ideologies and principles, such as the ‘gender subtext’ of organisations (Bendl, 2000; Benschop & Doorewaard, 1998, 2012) to more specific examinations of organisational operations, such as the effect of the ‘ideal worker norm’ on gendering of patterns of work and care (Kelly, et al., 2010; Kelly, Moen, & Tranby, 2011; Lewis & Humbert, 2010). Despite the breadth of research in this area, many studies fail to adequately outline a conceptual framework to describe what exactly gendering means and how it occurs. In fact, a general critique of studies in this field is that they lack theoretical rigour and clearly defined parameters (Martin & Collinson, 2002). This makes it difficult to examine how specific gendering processes occur (Britton, 2000; Britton & Logan, 2008; Green & Cassell, 1996). However, an examination of the scholarship of Joan Acker, who is arguably the leading theorist in the area of gendered organisations, reveals a structured framework through which to examine the gendering of organisations which will be adopted for the purposes of this research.

Many scholars note the important contribution Acker has made to the development of research in the field of gender and organisations (Britton, 1997, 2000; Britton & Logan, 2008; Dye & Mills,
Acker’s contribution to the field of gender studies remains highly influential today with evidence of a broad range of studies which have utilised adaptations of her theory (see for example Benschop & Doorewaard, 1998; Britton, 1997; Britton, 2000; Britton & Logan, 2008; Crawford & Pini, 2011; Ely & Meyerson, 2000a, 2000b; Sayce, 2012a). She is credited with shifting the focus of gender studies towards examining gendering processes as an organisational/structural rather than an individual phenomenon (Britton & Logan, 2008). In an oft-cited passage from her seminal publication *Hierarchies, Jobs, Bodies* (1990), Acker stated:

…to say that an organisation… is gendered means that advantage and disadvantage, exploitation and control, action and emotion, meaning and identity, are patterned through and in terms of a distinction between male and female, masculine and feminine (Acker, 1990, p.146).

Her scholarship provides a structured framework through which to examine gendering processes in organisations. Below follows a summary of the development of Acker’s theory, outlining the key literature which informs my study. Following this overview I briefly discuss studies which have utilised Acker’s theory, outlining some of the limitations of the theory and its application and illustrating how I hope to add to scholarship in this area.

**Acker’s Theory of Gendered Organisations**

The cornerstone of Acker’s research, where she first extrapolated her theory of the gendering of organisations, is her highly influential article *Hierarchies, Jobs, Bodies*, published in 1990. In this publication, Acker outlined the reasons why a systematic theory of gender and organisations was needed. She argued that organisations are intrinsically gendered and that in order to understand why gender inequalities are continually reproduced in organisations, and thus challenge gendered practices, it is essential to deepen our understanding of the factors underlying structural divisions between men and women in organisations by examining the specific processes which contribute to these inequalities. Acker argued that gendering occurred through five distinct organisational processes, including: divisions along gender lines; images and symbols that serve to reinforce these divisions; processes of interaction within the organisation; individual processes of identity construction; and organisational logic (based on the division between production and reproduction) (Acker, 1990).

In subsequent publications Acker adapted and extended her framework. In the first departure from her previous work, Acker reworked her framework to focus on four, rather than five, gendering processes: the fifth process – ‘organisational logic’ – was reconceptualised as the ‘gender
substructure’; a broader phenomenon underlying organisational processes which ‘lies in the spatial and temporal arrangements of work, the rules prescribing workplace behaviour, and in the relations linking workplaces to living places’ and which espouses the values and assumptions that guide the organisation (Acker, 1992b, p.255). These values and assumptions are so deeply engrained in organisational policies, practices and processes that they often appear gender neutral. The importance of the gendered substructure, according to Acker, lies in the fact that ‘it is hidden within abstract, objectifying, textually mediated relations and is difficult to make visible’ (Acker, 1992b, p.259). In scholarship around this time Acker used the terminology of gender substructure and gender understructure seemingly interchangeably (Acker, 1992a, 1998).² Acker argued that the ‘fundamental divide’ between men and women, which sees men as predominant in public institutions and women in the private sphere, is based on the differentiation between production (traditional industrial production of goods and services) and reproduction (of people). This system sees production privileged over reproduction, with reproductive roles (childcare, eldercare, education, health) seen as ‘wealth consuming’, rather than central to the functioning of society (Acker, 1992b, p.567). The gendered understructure leads to women being excluded or objectified due to their sexuality and procreative abilities, which do not fit with traditional organisational logic and the disembodied worker.

In her 1999 publication ‘Gender and Organisations’, Acker introduced the term ‘points of entry’ (Acker, 1999, p.180) to define four gendering processes, conceptualised as: procedures, activities and divisions; images, symbols and forms of consciousness; interactions in the workplace; and the ‘internal mental work’ that individuals engage in. Acker argues that these processes are grounded in a gendered understructure, based on a ‘hegemonic masculinist culture’ which pervades organisational contexts which sees men’s solidarity and homosocial reproduction lead to the reproduction of stereotypically masculine conceptualisations of the ideal manager and worker. This is what I consider the culmination of her theory on gendered organisations and is the key work upon which my conceptual framework is grounded. Below I discuss the key concepts embedded in this work that will be incorporated into my conceptual framework.

The relationship between some of Acker’s key concepts including the gender understructure (or substructure), gendered subtext and the gendered organisational logic has until recently been somewhat unclear. Indeed, Acker noted that she herself faced difficulty in clarifying what the differences were between the concepts of ‘organisational logic’ and ‘organisational substructure’(Acker, 2012b). In her most recent work (Acker, 2012a), Acker clarifies how these concepts are linked. The gender substructure refers to ‘often-invisible processes in the ordinary

² Throughout this thesis the term gender understructure will be utilised.
lives of organisations in which assumptions about women and men, femininity and masculinity, are embedded and reproduced, and gender inequalities perpetuated’ (Acker, 2012a, p.215). Each of the ‘points of entry’ are conceptualised as the processes through which the gendered substructure is reinforced. The gendered substructure is constituted by the ‘gender subtext’ and ‘gendered organisational logic’. The gender subtext refers to the ‘texts, explicit or implicit, written or just common practice, that shape the gendered processes and structures’ (Acker, 2012a, p.217) while the gendered organisational logic is less tangible, referring to ‘common understandings about how organisations are put together, the constituent parts, how the whole thing works’ (Acker, 2012a). The gendered substructure thus consists of processes and practices, viewed through the lenses of ‘points of entry’ that ‘continually recreate gender inequalities’ (Acker, 2012a, p.219). Underlying these processes, gendering is ‘supported by gender subtexts of organising and a gendered logic of organisation that link the persistence of gender divisions to the fundamental organisational of capitalist societies’ (Acker, 2012a, p.219). The gender understructure therefore exists in the often imperceptible common understandings and shared beliefs about how the organisation works. These abstract understandings permeate throughout the organisation and can be observed through the specific points of entry outlined above.

**Building on Acker’s Work**

More recently a group of researchers have developed a framework based on Acker’s theory through which they posited it would be possible to elicit change in organisations. Their framework was designed with the dual purpose of both increasing the organisation’s productivity as well as creating a gender-equitable workplace (Meyerson, et al., 2000). In modifying Acker’s work, the researchers identified formal and informal work practices and patterns of interaction as additional gendering processes (Ely & Meyerson, 2000a, 2000b; Meyerson & Kolb, 2000; Meyerson, et al., 2000). Accordingly, the four main domains within organisations which they identify as contributing to the reproduction of gendered outcomes are: formal policies and procedures; informal work practices, norms and patterns of work; narratives, rhetoric, language and other symbols; informal patterns of social interaction (Ely & Meyerson, 2000b). The authors argue that each of the domains above needs to be tackled in order to achieve change (Ely & Meyerson, 2000b, pp.106-107). Following Acker’s model, this framework is based on an assumption that organisations develop around social practices ‘created largely by and for men’ and in which ‘men and particular forms of masculinity’ predominate (Ely & Meyerson, 2000b, p.113). This results from an organisational ‘failure to question – and change – prevailing notions about what constitutes the most appropriate and effective ways to define and accomplish work, recognise and reward competence, understand and interpret behavior’ (Ely & Meyerson, 2000b, p.104). The authors argue that the persistence of
gendered notions within organisations also impacts negatively on men wishing to challenge stereotypical roles and limit men’s opportunities to participate in caring responsibilities. Acker’s theory (Acker, 1990, 1992a, 1992b, 1998, 1999, 2006a, 2012a) and the subsequent work conducted by Ely, Meyerson et al (Ely & Meyerson, 2000a, 2000b; Meyerson & Kolb, 2000; Meyerson, et al., 2000) thus form the foundations for the conceptual framework to be utilised in my research. Before elaborating the specific ways in which this work informs my theoretical framework I review some of the research that has drawn on similar foundations in order to identify some limitations to date and explain how my research will extend the existing literature.

Applications of Acker’s Theory to Empirical Research

It has been argued that studies utilising the theory of gendered organisations ‘have been instrumental in narrowing the focus to policies, practices, symbols and interactions that serve to shape the genderedness of organisations and have moved forward our understanding of the interplay between gender, power and privilege in organisations’ (Dye & Mills, 2005, p.90). An examination of empirical research that has employed Acker’s theory reveals a number of studies that have focused either on a) elements of the gender understructure or b) specific ‘points of entry’. I discuss some of these studies below.

The gendered understructure is a complex construct, composed of two concepts: gendered organisational logic and gender subtext. Both of these concepts have been examined through empirical research. A small body of work focuses on the gendered organisational logic in the airline industry (Dye & Mills, 2011, 2012; Parsons, Sanderson, Mills, & Mills, 2012). For example, Dye and Mills used Acker’s framework to examine the development of gendered discourses in the Pan Am airline company between the 1940s and 1980s (Dye & Mills, 2005, 2006, 2011, 2012). Their research examines how ‘organisational logic’ can be changed by altering discourses around appropriate work practices and how this might lead to a less oppressively gendered organisation (Dye & Mills, 2011, 2012). The authors found that in Pan Am the ‘competition’ discourse dominated the ‘women’s lib’ discourse in the implementation of equality measures, serving to silence issues central to women gaining equality. Similarly, in a case study of a science and engineering organisation in France, Lewis and Humbert (2010) highlighted the gap that existed between the ‘discourse’ of enabling women to participate fully in the workforce and the ‘reality’ of the continued structural and cultural barriers which prevented this from happening (Lewis & Humbert, 2010). Taking another approach to the examination of the ‘gendered organisational logic’, Britton examined the gendered nature of women’s and men’s prisons (Britton, 1997). The findings of her research indicated that even gender neutral policies were built upon gendered notions of normality. For example, training predominantly focused on how to manage male prisoners, who
were uncharacteristically violent compared to the general population (Britton, 1997). These examples of research that explore organisational logic raise some issues which I seek to address in this thesis. I examine how discourses can be employed by organisations in shaping policy adaptation, specifically exploring how a gendered discourse pervades senior management’s rationale for and approach to policy provision, and the implications for family-adaptiveness. The thesis also examines the possibilities for a range of gendered outcomes which go beyond the male-domination, female-subordination concept. First, I question the assumption that gendering processes imply ‘masculinisation’ and a negative impact on women by examining how gendered notions around work and care can adversely affect men as well as women.

The second aspect of the gender understructure – the ‘gender subtext’ – has also been the subject of empirical research (Bendl, 2000; Benschop & Doorewaard, 1998, 2012). The gender subtext is described as the ‘set of often concealed, power-based gendering processes i.e. organisation and individual arrangement… systematically (re)producing gender distinctions’ (Benschop & Doorewaard, 1998, p.787). Benschop and Dooreward examined how the gender subtext in the Dutch banking sector masked gendering processes that limited gender equality. They found that the gender subtext was evident in the ‘token’ women who achieved top positions, in the ‘mommy track’ that women with children were side-lined into, and in practices relating to career progression. I will examine the operation of the gender subtext specifically in relation to implicit gendered assumptions that shape parental leave policy in the case study university whereby caring is seen as ‘women’s work’.

A significant body of research has also developed around Acker’s ‘points of entry’. A number of researchers have adopted Acker’s theory in examining the gendering of formal organisational processes. This research generally focuses on the gendering of formal organisational structures, policies and practices. For example, Nichols’ study of domestic violence victim advocacy stakeholders examined how gender-based and gender-neutral models of organisation (i.e. models of organisation which emphasise or ignore gender differences) influence the gendering of organisations (Nichols, 2011). Similarly, Price utilised Acker’s theory to examine the gendered structure of employment in a strip club (Price, 2008). She outlined how the organisation of employment roles meant that female staff (predominantly strippers and cocktail waitresses) were ‘policing’ by, and subjected to surveillance by, all the male members of staff, including DJs, bouncers and bar staff, illustrating the hierarchical organisation of male and female-dominated positions (Price, 2008). Swanberg (2004) also focused on gendering of formal processes, examining the gendered assumptions underlying key organisational policies and practices in a government department responsible for parks and recreation. Gendered assumptions had negative impacts on
policies and practices which were targeted at enabling employees to combine work and caring roles. For example, employees who utilised parental leave and did not make themselves available for work while on leave were given bad performance reviews where they were seen as not being ‘team players’. The need to foster supportive workplace cultures was identified, with evidence suggesting that even when policies were in place, negative attitudes persisted towards employees who availed of policies (Swanberg, 2004). Holt and Lewis (2001) utilised Acker’s theory to examine gendered organisational processes in a large pharmaceutical company which had a reputation as being ‘family-friendly’. They argued that a combination of structural and cultural factors in conjunction with differences in sense of entitlement between men and women lead to inequalities. Their research revealed that there was an undercurrent of gendered organisational practices, despite their label as being family-friendly. While the organisation offered flexibility, choosing to avail of flexible work arrangements was implicitly equated with forfeiting career ambitions (Holt & Lewis, 2011). In this thesis I focus on similar issues, examining how gendered assumptions have influenced formal policy development and the implications of this for the development of family-adaptive work environments. I explore how the rationale underpinning policy provision can shape family-adaptiveness and how, despite appearing ‘family friendly’, formal policies may reinforce gendered patterns of work and care.

Researchers have also examined how the ‘appropriate’ roles for men and women (or for particular men and particular women) are portrayed through images and symbols in the workplace. For example, in her research Price found that images, symbols and rhetoric were used to portray an image of strippers as unreliable, untrustworthy and immature. Strippers’ sexuality was contrasted with other idealised ideas about what a woman ‘should’ be by reference to sisters and mothers as the ideal other. Holt and Lewis (2011) discussed how competence and successfulness were symbolised in the workplace by visibility and flexibility to meet the organisation’s needs. They argued that despite the perception that the organisation was family friendly, the hegemonic masculine ‘ideal worker’ norm was pervasive. There was an underlying perception that women used flexibility for family needs, whereas men were flexible to meet the needs of the organisation. This rhetoric led to gendered outcomes, with women overlooked for promotions and often restricted to less challenging or interesting work. I also examine how gendered assumptions about the role of women and men influence family-adaptiveness in the case study university, particularly through an examination of rhetoric surrounding the development of parental leave policy and the subsequent gendered impact on male and female employees in accessing parental leave entitlements.

The gendering of interactions in the workplace (e.g. between male and female co-workers, between male and female staff and supervisors etc.) has also been addressed in the literature. For example,
Crawford and Pini found evidence of gendering in a range of interactions in the Australian Parliament, where a gender division existed in the types of communication that were deemed suitable, with a perception that it was ‘unbecoming’ of females to use some of the ‘colourful’ language their male counterparts used. Additionally, it was common for women to be addressed by their first name rather than their title, whereas this was less common for men. These authors note the importance of viewing Acker’s theory as ‘relational and interactional’ (2011, p.85), showing how gendering of interactions can portray subtle messages about the role of women and men in the workplace. Similarly, research conducted by Holt and Lewis (2011) examined how gendering of interactions in the workplace can be associated with unequal outcomes in terms of the allocation of work and opportunities for career advancement. Their research showed that the gendering of interactions between supervisors and staff led to a gendered division between men, who were assigned more challenging and prestigious tasks, and women, who were more often restricted to routine, mundane work. Their research also revealed that the informal approach to the management of appraisal and career development resulted in gendered patterns in career progression, with the majority of promotions offered to men. I too examine how interactions between organisational actors in a variety of positions contribute to the development of family-adaptiveness.

The final point of entry identified by Acker is the gendering of internal mental work. In their examination of the Australian Parliament Crawford and Pini found that women had to play a delicate balancing act; looking sufficiently feminine without compromising their professional identity and equally not looking overly masculine (2011). Women therefore had to match an identity based around norms of the stereotypical ‘feminine’ woman while also conforming to the male ‘professional’ norm. I also explore the gendering of internal mental work in detail in the thesis. I seek to examine how organisational actors invoke their (gendered) identities in their internal mental work to challenge (or reinforce) gendering processes in organisations. The interaction between gendering processes and identity is a central aspect of my research and one of the ways in which I aim to extend current scholarship in this field.

The research discussed above examines how organisations are gendered through specific ‘points of entry’, as identified by Acker. However, there is limited evidence of research which has utilised Acker’s theory in its entirety. One example is an examination of the gendering of an Anglican parish in Australia, in which Manville (1997) examined how gendered processes were evident in the parish’s ideology and theology and how this impacted on the division of labour in the parish. Interactions between male and female parishioners constructed and reinforced gender stereotypes, with women’s reluctance to speak confidently at meetings reinforcing the notion that they did not belong in decision-making arenas. Manville’s study is an example of how Acker’s theory can be
used in its entirety to discuss gendering processes, although it lacked depth in relation to the influence of the ‘internal mental work’ of members of the parish, which meant that a key aspect of Acker’s theory was underutilised. Another example – a study by Kantola (2008) which examined why women ‘disappear’ from political science in higher level research and academic positions – addressed some of these shortfalls. The findings uncovered a gendered division of labour, with men more likely to be offered and to hold teaching positions while women were offered less challenging work, such as invigilation. Interactions within the department were gendered, with evidence of a distinct lack of supervisory support for female students compared to male students. The internal mental work engaged in by students also indicated gender differences; women were less confident about their research topics and their level of expertise, due to the reactions of supervisors to their topics. This study highlighted how gendering processes can be at work in organisations through practices and processes which on the surface appear gender neutral. The research could perhaps have benefitted from an exploration of supervisors’ perceptions about their supportiveness, in recognition that interactions are two way processes and perceptions about supportiveness may differ between students and supervisors.

The body of literature discussed above highlights the potential of Acker’s framework for examining the gendering of organisations. I follow a similar approach, by examining how family-adaptiveness develops through the ‘gendered understructure’ and gendering of specific ‘points of entry’. The studies reviewed show how gendered ideologies and the gendering of formal and informal practices and processes in organisations can limit employees’ opportunities to avail of work-family entitlements. Researchers have shown how gendered assumptions underlie formal policies and practices in organisations and that while a rhetoric of family friendliness may exist, availing of entitlements may lead to negative career outcomes. The research discussed above also shows how images and symbolism are used in organisations to portray conceptualisations about the expected behaviour of workers and often how this differs between women and men (or between particular women and particular men). An important issue highlighted in the discussion above is that gendering processes are not static; they emerge through interactions in the workplace and can influence how policies are interpreted and implemented. I address this issue throughout the thesis, examining how organisational actors can influence family-adaptiveness through their interactions in the workplace. The discussion of the gendering of identity illustrates how gendered organisational processes can impact on the behaviours of organisational actors. However, the current research does have some limitations (both in the scope and application of the theory) which I seek to address in this thesis. In the following section I outline how I seek to address these limitations and to further the utility of the theory of gendered organisations in examining organisational family-adaptiveness.
Limitations of Gendered Organisations Theory

The first limitation I outline relates to the application of the theory. The studies examined above tended to focus on either the gendered understructure, or on specific points of entry. This supports the contention that there is little evidence of research that applies Acker’s framework in a holistic way to empirically test how organisations are gendered (Dye & Mills, 2012). In fact, Acker herself recognised that she has not used her theory ‘a great deal to inform empirical work’ (Acker, 2012b, p.211). Analysis of some aspects of the theory is underdeveloped in the existing empirical work: in particular, there is a dearth of research that focuses specifically on the gendering of interactions and internal mental work. Thus, studies that employ the theory can lack rigour (Dye & Mills, 2012), making it difficult to determine if the ‘points of entry’ Acker identifies together constitute a rational and complete model to explain gendering in organisations. I aim to address this limitation by applying the theory to the study of gendering processes in one organisation more comprehensively than previous research has done.

In relation to the formulation and application of the theory, there is the lack of evidence about the specific ways in which gendering processes operate across different levels in the organisation. It is argued that in order to develop ‘less oppressively gendered organisations’ it is necessary to examine the levels at which organisations are gendered and the specific ways and contexts through which particular groups are advantaged over others (Britton, 2000, p.431). I address this limitation by examining gendering processes at, and between, different levels in the organisation.

A further limitation relates to the implicit assumption that gendering processes equate to the domination of men and male forms of work so that men are always advantaged by gendering of organisations (Britton, 1997, p.798). In my examination of gendering processes I will focus on the variety of ways in which organisational settings can be gendered, in order to determine whether gendering processes can work to benefit women as well as men. While it is undoubtedly true that organisations are generally constructed around men and assume a ‘disembodied worker’, it may be the case that informal processes and interactions in specific contexts could benefit women.

Another issue that I address is a critique that the theory is overly essentialist, with organisations characterised as inherently and immutably gendered (Crawford & Pini, 2011; Kantola, 2008). While her later writing contested the assertion that gendering was an ‘essentialist, ahistoric’ process (Acker, 1998, p.198), this requires further empirical exploration. Acker argues that gendering in organisations reflects broader society’s views on gender and that societal change can impact on gendering in organisations and vice versa. As long as organisations and broader society fail to acknowledge the role organisations must play in facilitating reproductive needs of society,
organisations will remain gendered. Acker states that there is potential for inequality regimes to change, as organisational goals, culture, employees and government equality laws change (Acker, 2009). However she notes that change is difficult and efforts may often fail. In my research I seek to examine whether there is evidence that gendering processes change over time, particularly through an examination of the development of parental leave policy.

Finally, the most significant limitation of the theory of gendered organisation from my perspective is its failure in large part to take into account the agency of individuals. While gendered organisational policies and practices influence the extent to which organisations have the potential to become family-adaptive, I argue that gendering processes necessarily involve the active participation of individuals, and that therefore by exercising agency individuals at various levels within the organisation also have the potential to influence (positively or negatively) gendered practices and processes. While the theory implicitly acknowledges that individuals play a role in gendering a range of formal and informal processes and practices this is not examined in depth and the potential individuals have to shape the process is essentially ignored. Studies that have utilised the theory do not address the potential for individuals to challenge gendering processes, as the discussion above illustrates. In the context of this study, the way in which individual negotiate parenthood and career progression is of critical importance and therefore I aim to place individuals at the centre of my analysis by examining the potential for individuals to contribute to the development of organisational family-adaptiveness.

Although Acker identifies internal mental work (later conceptualised as gendered identity) as a key gendering process, identity is seen as a vessel to reinforce the gendering of organisations, rather than as a tool that can be used to challenge gendered norms. Acker states that through their internal mental work individuals ‘come to understand the organisation’s gendered expectations and opportunities, including the appropriate gendered behaviours and attitudes’(1999, p.184). Thus, the assumption is that the organisation shapes identity by dictating the internal mental work that individuals engage in. I argue that individuals can challenge gendering processes by invoking identities that go against gendered norms in their internal mental work. The internal mental work that individuals engage in is thus shaped both by their identity as well as by the organisational context. This challenges Acker’s contention that organisational context shapes internal mental work and consequently identity.

As the discussion above alludes to, I argue that identity is a key factor in determining how individuals can shape gendered organisational processes and practices. Some scholars recognise the need to focus on the interaction of identity and gendering processes (Mills & Chiaramonte, 1991). Scholars have noted the importance of examining how organisational structures and practices shape
gender identity negotiation processes at work. For example, an examination of how identities ‘interact, conflict, are backed up and challenged in the context of various organisational arrangements and forms of social interaction’ has been identified as an ‘important topic of analysis’ (Sveningsson & Alvesson, 2003, p.1166). Similarly, gender identity has been characterised ‘as a process of negotiation imbued with power dynamics, shaped by the subtle interplay between organisational forces and individual compliance or resistance’ (Ely & Padavic, 2007, p.1134). I recognise that gendering processes in organisations can influence identity but seek to expand on current research, by examining how identities can be negotiated in gendered contexts and whether through processes of identity negotiation individuals can shape gendering processes. The theory of gendered organisations does not provide sufficient scope for examining this aspect of my research. Thus identity theory constitutes the second major theoretical strand guiding the thesis. I will examine how individuals at various levels within the organisation invoke their parent and professional identities in work and how this impacts on family-adaptiveness. By elaborating the concept of identity I hope to provide a more integrative picture of how organisations become gendered. Below I discuss how identity is conceptualised for the purposes of this research project. The discussion will highlight the roots and broad nature of ‘identity’ research and will highlight some important overlaps and distinctions from other approaches, particularly that of role theory. I will also discuss some potential pitfalls of identity theory and explain how these will be avoided in my analysis.

Organisational Actors and Family-Adaptiveness: Influence of Identity

Identities give individuals a frame of reference through which to interpret social situations and how they might react to, or act in, specific circumstances. The term identity refers to a ‘set of meanings that are taken to characterise the self-in-role’ (Burke & Reitzes, 1981, p.85). It is argued that ‘[i]t is one’s actions that others judge as being appropriate or inappropriate for the identity one has, and appropriateness can only be gauged in terms of the meaning of the behaviour relative to the meaning of the identity and counter-identities’ (Burke & Reitzes, 1981, p.85). Greenhaus and Beutell (1985) note that self-expectations of role requirements should be taken into consideration in analysing role behaviour. Likely sources of self-expectations include ‘a person’s beliefs, values and personality traits’ (Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985, p.83).

The concept of ‘identity’ has been used by scholars in the areas of psychology and sociology to examine a range of social, psychological and psychosocial phenomena (Stets & Burke, 2003; Stryker & Burke, 2000). Two contrasting schools of thought have developed; social identity theory, which has its roots in psychology and identity theory, which has emerged from the field of sociology. Social identity theory examines the creation of identity as part of a social group (see for
example Swann, Johnson, & Bosson, 2009). Identity theory, on the other hand, examines how an individual’s self-identity is constructed through interactions in the social world (Hogg, Terry, & White, 1995). Identity theorists contend that identity is ‘socially constructed and negotiated in social interaction’ and ‘is based on both personal traits as well as social roles and group memberships’ (Lee, et al., 2005). I adopt a sociologically informed conceptualisation of identity, drawing particularly on the work of Stryker (Stryker, 1968, 2001, 2008; Stryker & Burke, 2000; Stryker & Serpe, 1994; Stryker & Statham, 1985; Stryker & Vryan, 2003) and Burke (Burke, 2006; Burke & Cast, 1997; Burke & Reitzes, 1981; Burke & Stets, 1999; Stets & Burke, 2000, 2003).

Structural symbolic interactionism (SSI) is the ‘frame’ upon which this identity theory is built (Serpe & Stryker, 2011). The SSI approach to the study of identity emerged from a need to address critiques of other key theoretical frames; particularly traditional symbolic interactionism, which underlies the majority of sociological studies in identity (Gecas, 1982; Millward, 2006; Noor, 2004; Stets & Burke, 2003; Stryker & Burke, 2000) and role theory (Stryker, 2001; Stryker & Statham, 1985). SSI provides a frame which simultaneously acknowledges the ways in which both social structures and individuals can shape society: identity is viewed as being constructed through social interaction, rather than bestowed on persons through their position in society. From this perspective, individuals have the ability to shape their identities just as they are shaped by social situations. Thus SSI addresses critiques of symbolic interactionism regarding its failure to take into consideration the impact of social structures (Stryker, 2001; Stryker & Statham, 1985) and critiques of role theory regarding its inability to take into account the impact of individual choice (Stryker, 2001; Stryker & Statham, 1985).

**Stryker and Burke: Identity Theory**

Two strands of identity theory have developed from the SSI approach. The first strand focuses on how social structures impact on identity. Stryker has been particularly influential in this field. He purports that people possess a number of ‘selves’ which reflect their different roles in society. These social roles have attached expectations, which are internalised as a person’s identity. The identities are organised hierarchically to create a person’s ‘identity salience’, with the most important aspect of a person’s identity accorded the highest salience. Stryker defines ‘identity salience’ as ‘the probability, for a given person, of a given identity being invoked in a variety of situations’ (Stryker, 1968, p.560). Therefore, the higher the salience of an identity relative to others, the higher the probability that behaviours associated with that identity will be invoked (Katz-Wise, Priess, & Hyde, 2010; Stryker & Burke, 2000, p.286). The salience of a particular identity may differ
depending on the situation. Identity theorists propose that identity salience\(^3\) is determined by commitment to a role, with commitment defined as ‘the degree to which persons’ relationships to others in their networks depend on possessing a particular identity and role’ (Stryker & Burke, 2000, p.286). So, for example, the higher the commitment to the parent role (connection to people based on that identity), the higher the identity salience as ‘parent’ (Katz-Wise, et al., 2010).

The second strand of SSI informed identity theory draws the work of Burke and others (Burke, 2006, 2007; Burke & Cast, 1997; Stets & Burke, 2000, 2003) and focuses on how identities are developed internally and expressed through behavior which confirms the identity (Stryker & Burke, 2000, p.287). From this perspective individuals internally construct their identity and strive to ensure that their perception of their identity is congruent with how others see them (Burke, 2007; Stets & Burke, 2003). These theorists identify four inter-relating components of identity. The starting point is the ‘identity standards’ that people internalise about what specific roles mean – for example, what it means to be a ‘mother’. Next, are the ‘self-meanings’ which are the invoked perceptions about these identity standards, which occur in specific contexts. The third aspect of identity is how self-meanings are shaped by interactions with, and feedback from, others. Finally, identity is verified when identity standards and self-meanings (as invoked through perceptions of others) are congruent (Burke, 2007; Stets & Burke, 2003). Stets and Burke do concede that while identity shapes social behaviour, social structures also plays a role in shaping identity: ‘Individuals act, but those actions exist within the context of the full set of patterns of action, interaction, and resource transfers among all persons all of which constitute the structure of society’ (Stets & Burke, 2003, p.129).

Recently it has been argued that these two approaches (i.e. research that focuses on (i) the impact of social situation on identity and (ii) the internal development of identity, confirmed through behaviour) may not be mutually exclusive, with identity theorists utilising both perspectives (Stryker & Burke, 2000). It has been argued in fact, that ‘each provides a context for the other: the relation of social structures to identities influences the process of self-verification, while the process of self-verification creates and sustains social structures’ (Stryker & Burke, 2000, p.284). Importantly, it is argued that both approaches meet ‘at behavior that expresses identities – often in interaction with others’ (Stryker & Burke, 2000, p.288) and that:

\(^3\) The close association between role and identity theory means that some scholars have utilised both the concepts of ‘identity salience’ and ‘role salience’ interchangeably (Amatea, Cross, Clark, & Bobby, 1986; Biggs & Brough, 2005; Carlson & Kacmar, 2000; Hockey & Allen-Collinson, 2009; Mannon, Minnotte, & Brower, 2007; Martire, Stephens, & Townsend, 2000; Noor, 2004; Sanz-Vergel, et al.). For the purposes of this research the term identity salience will be utilised.
...the extent to which individuals can verify their identities depends on the identities of those others, on how the others respond to identity claims and on whether behaviours that could alter the situation to align perceptions with standards of self-meaning are in fact viable (Stryker & Burke, 2000, p.289).

Through processes of interaction individuals negotiate their identities with others in attempts for self-verification (Stets & Burke, 2003, p.137). For the purposes of this study, this approach will allow for an examination of how employees, supervisors and managers interact together to negotiate their identities.

This project therefore utilises an SSI approach which recognises both the role of social structures and cognitive processes in shaping identity and hence behaviour. In the context of this study, identity salience is a ‘situational measure of self’ and refers to the probability of invoking a specific identity in particular situations (Noor, 2004, p.235). Therefore I examine how respondents invoke their identities through specific actions. In particular I rely on evidence of how respondents articulate or express their identities and on the accounts they give of their behavior in particular contexts, especially in relation to work-family issues. This may include discussions about how central each role is to the person’s life, how they prioritise certain roles over others or how important they state specific roles are in defining who they are. The following section provides an overview of the literature which has utilised identity theory in the examination of the transition to parenthood and work-family balance, highlighting the suitability of such an approach for this research project.

**Employees and Parent Identity**

As mentioned, research into why employees prioritise one role over another is relatively scant. It could be argued that work-family conflict literature has failed to adequately examine the ‘internal mental work’ (to borrow a term from Acker) that individuals engage in. As early as 1968 Stryker noted the possibilities of utilising identity theory to examine parents’ responses to a first pregnancy (Stryker, 1968). However, while the transition to parenthood is now recognised as ‘one of the most significant role transitions in the life course of an individual’ (Cast, 2004, p.55) and as ‘one of the most salient markers of development in adults’ (Katz-Wise, et al., 2010, p.18), which will have implications for gender-role attitudes, identity salience and the division of labour, the field of research remains limited (Ladge, Greenberg, & Clair, 2011). Various researchers have applied identity theory to the study of the transition to parenthood in an organisational context, specifically focusing on how parents deal with competing demands of parenthood and employment (Stryker & Burke, 2000, pp.290-291). The body of research that has developed has examined a variety of
issues, including: processes of identity transition (Ladge, et al., 2011; Millward, 2006); the relationship between identity and work-family conflict and stress (Bagger, Li, & Gutke, 2008; Rothbard & Edwards, 2003); and the relationship between parent and professional identities and career outcomes (Bailey, 2000). A brief summary of the extant literature is provided below.

One of the first areas in which identity theory was applied was the examination of the transition to motherhood. For example, Nuttbrock and Freudiger’s 1991 study examined identity change among 132 women transitioning to motherhood, concluding that, despite requiring some conceptual refinement, identity theory was a useful conceptual tool for examining this issue (Nuttbrock & Freudiger, 1991, p.153). Some researchers have examined how identities are malleable and change over time. For example, Katz-Wise et al (2010) conducted a large scale study, undertaking interviews with first-time and experienced mothers and fathers to determine if differences existed between both groups with regard to identity salience. The results indicated that for first time parents family identity salience increased and work identity salience decreased. In my research I also examine identity changes across the transition to parenthood, specifically relating to parent and professional identities. I build on existing research by examining how changes in identity salience and conceptualisations about parent and professional identities compare amongst and between women and men.

Some researchers have identified distinct phases in identity transitions during parenthood. For example, Ladge et al (2011) argue that ‘soon to be’ mothers go through three phases of identity negotiation: first questioning who they want to be as professionals, second reconciling these issues with their future identity as mothers, and third reconstructing their professional identity by ‘making tentative commitments about who they hope to become as working mothers’ (Ladge, et al., 2011, pp.146-147). Similar research conducted by Millward (2006) examined the identity transitions of eight working women following pregnancy and also identified three phases of identity transition in relation to employment. First, feelings of invisibility as a valued employee in preparation for maternity leave whereby they were seen as ‘mothers-to-be’; second, the acquisition of an identity as ‘mother’; and third efforts to revalidate themselves as both a valued employee and mother on return to work (Millward, 2006). Millward argued that ‘the transition to motherhood in an organisational context is individually constructed through active sense making, which largely occurs in the process of interacting with others’ (Millward, 2006, p.318), highlighting the importance of interactions in shaping identity. My examination of family-adaptiveness across the ‘parental leave process’ lends itself well to a similar phased approach to the examination of identity and the transition to parenthood and my analysis of the transition to parenthood has parallels with the work discussed above in that I examine three key phases: the first phase is the period prior to maternity leave when
an employee informs their manager about their intention to take leave; next, the period of time when the employee is on leave (a key phase in the development of the parent identity); and finally the return to work phase (when the employee seeks to reconcile the professional and parent identities).

Researchers have noted the crucial role organisational context plays in determining how identities change and develop. For example, Lee et al (2005) note that organisational context contributes to identity transformation ‘not only through the kinds of alternative work arrangements or types of parental leaves offered, but also through the culture – the norms and values, co-worker experiences, boss responses and so on’ (Lee, et al., 2005, p.312). Similarly, a study by Haynes (2008) which examined how social, cultural and institutional factors impact on the identity formation of female accountants in the UK across the transition to motherhood found that women’s professional identities were undermined in the workplace when they became pregnant (Haynes, 2008, p.630). Some women were worried about not undertaking ‘macho maternity’ i.e. working right up to their due date and being available for clients when on leave. This research highlighted the different constructions of pregnancy and work that women undertake, and how they deal with pressure to conform to the ideal worker norm. The transition to motherhood while trying to maintain a professional identity was found to be a deeply emotional process, with women being pulled in both directions and feeling guilty when they neglected one role to pursue the other (Haynes, 2008). I also examine how organisational context can influence the identity transitions of new parents. In particular, I explore whether some organisational contexts (e.g. male-dominated versus female-dominated) are more receptive to employees who have a salient parent / professional identity.

In addition to the process of identity transition, the impact of identity transitions has also been examined. Researchers have studied both the (i) psychological well-being and (ii) career-related outcomes of identity transition. Rothbard and Edwards (2003) found that an individual’s identity influenced the extent to which enrichment was experienced between work and family roles. In relation to emotional well-being, a study of 163 employees at a small architecture firm examined the impact of family-interference-with-work on job satisfaction and job stress. The results of the study indicated that a high family identity salience had a buffering effect on the negative impact of family-interference-with-work on stress and job satisfaction (Bagger, et al., 2008, p.203). The authors suggested that ‘employers should create a culture that recognises the importance of family identity salience and promote balancing work and family’ (Bagger, et al., 2008, p.203). Similarly, Wiley (1991) applied an identity theory perspective to an examination of how stress may be caused by an inability to adequately perform behaviours to confirm a highly salient identity (Wiley, 1991). It was posited that differing stress levels between men and women would relate to their identity...
salience as parent or employee. A key strength of identity theory which was noted in this study is its ability to link ‘self’ to the larger social structure while concurrently allowing for individual variability in performances due to differences in understandings and to the possibility of negotiation’ (Wiley, 1991, p.496). Taking a similar approach in my research, I also examine whether the salience of professional and parent identities can act to insulate organisational actors from stresses associated with the combination of both roles.

With regard to the relationship between identity and career-related outcomes, one study highlighted a range of ways in which women could reframe their career goals following motherhood: some respondents professionalised their pregnancy (seeing pregnancy and motherhood as [unpaid] work); some stressed the continued importance of their employment role to their identity (and were ‘wary of being consumed by mothering’); and others reconceptualised their employment aims (Bailey, 2000, p.65). This is an issue which I seek to further explore in my research. In particular, I examine how both women and men reconceptualise their professional selves following parenthood and how this relates to their parent and professional identities.

Researchers have also identified a link between the salience of career identities and performance and reward. For example, one group of researchers found that a salient professional identity was associated with higher work effort (Lobel & St Clair, 1992). Another important finding from this research was that women who had preschoolers and a strong parent identity salience received greater merit increases than men with preschoolers and a high family orientation. In contrast, men with a high career orientation received higher merit increases than women with high career orientation. This may indicate that merit increases are related to the extent to which employees conform to role stereotypes (Lobel & St Clair, 1992). I also seek to further understanding of the ways in which professional and parent identities are rewarded in the workplace. A particular issue I explore relates to whether parenthood is associated with rewards or penalties in terms of career progression and whether this differs for men and women.

The final body of ‘identity’ focused research that has relevance for my work examines the importance of identity in determining the choices individuals make in managing work and family. One study of micro-transitions that occur between work and family roles explored the importance of role identity salience in determining the extent to which employees are willing to make these transitions (Winkel & Clayton, 2010). The authors found that a strong family identity salience and willingness to flex work and family boundaries would increase the likelihood that employees would engage in ‘family’ activities during work time (Winkel & Clayton, 2010). Similarly, in their study of boundary management, Kossek and Lautsch found that identity was a key factor in determining employees’ boundary crossing preferences (2012). This literature, although in its infancy, indicates
that identity is an important factor to consider when determining how individuals manage work and family life, and that decisions are not purely based on practical considerations. This research has some parallels with my work which will be explored through an examination of the various approaches employees take to managing work and family following the transition to parenthood.

This overview of research into identity transitions for new parents highlights the importance of identity in the time leading up to parenthood, in the initial transition phase and in the return to work phase. The literature shows how workplace interactions (Millward, 2006) and organisational context (Lee, et al., 2005) can shape identity. While social structures can constrain how individuals invoke their identities, they also have the potential to shape the development of social structures (Haynes, 2008). The discussion outlined how new mothers can adopt a variety of strategies to deal with the transition to motherhood (Bailey, 1999, 2000), which relate to the extent to which either the employee or mother role are prioritised. However, regardless of identity salience, women who seek to challenge gendered norms around work and care can suffer disadvantage in the workplace (Lobel & St Clair, 1992). These are issues which I seek to explore further in my research.

**Managers and Conflicting Identities**

Identity theory has also been successfully utilised in examining managerial decision making processes. The theory has been adopted in order to address critiques of traditional management literature regarding its failure to acknowledge managerial diversity and agency, treating managers as ‘homogenous, unitary and univocal’ (Linstead & Thomas, 2002, p.2). There is a dearth of empirical research which examines the specific contexts in which identity construction occurs in organisations, such that we know little about ‘the constructions of and struggle with various managerial and non-managerial identities in a complex, changing and multi-ordered organisation’ (Sveningsson & Alvesson, 2003, p.1165).

The managerial identity literature recognises the interplay between agency and structure in the creation of identity. In line with the theories of identity discussed earlier, the literature on managerial identity examines how both organisational context and individual identity work interact in creating managers’ identities (Sveningsson & Alvesson, 2003, p.1169). It is argued that ‘identities are constructed within discursive contexts, but individuals are able to influence and shape these contexts’ (Down & Reveley, 2009, p.383). Scholars who apply identity theory to an examination of management also warn of the importance of avoiding a reductionist view of identity, which focuses only on internal cognitive work, arguing that it is also important to examine ‘the part that is played by the social structures, cultures and discourses within which the individual is located’ (Watson, 2008, p.122). For managers, identity construction ‘is not a matter of resolving
ambiguity and making clear cut choices, but is often characterised by confusion and conflict within the individual as well as in the context’ (Linstead & Thomas, 2002, p.2). Clarke et al (2009) focus on the ‘antagonisms’ which are central to managers’ identity formation, whereby managers draw on competing views of themselves (e.g. as concerned with business versus concerned with people) in the construction of their identities (Clarke, et al., 2009, p.323). They must tread carefully between the role of authority figure and also be seen as personable, in order to foster appropriate relationships in the workplace (Watson, 2008). It is argued that they are on ‘a continuing quest to (re)-author their selves as moral beings subject to organisationally based disciplinary practices’ (Clarke, et al., 2009, p.324). Additionally, managers have to deal with the conflict between their role as manager and their other personal life roles. Middle managers ‘actively and constantly justify and reform their attachments with the organisation’ (Linstead & Thomas, 2002, p.4). Watson draws on early social constructionist work of Cooley and the ‘looking-glass self’ to state that ‘who we take ourselves to be is very much a matter of the person whom we see reflected in the eyes of others, and we ‘manage’ the image of that ‘person’ to influence how those others see us’ (Watson, 2008, p.127). This approach is similar to that of Burke and others (Burke, 2006, 2007; Burke & Stets, 1999). Similarly, Down and Reveley use an approach strongly influenced by Burke and Stets (1999), stating ‘neither self-narration nor dramaturgical performance is an adequate basis to account for the practical discursive work that constructs managerial ‘identity’’ (Down & Reveley, 2009, p.380). It is argued that positivist accounts of middle management (i.e. those which contend that certain ‘truths’ apply to all middle managers) prevent accurate analysis of how middle management has changed with the restructuring of organisations and that ‘functionalist analyses of middle management can be criticised for being ahistorical and decontextualised, serving to ignore, reinforce and promote systems of oppression in the organisation of class, gender and race’ (Thomas & Linstead, 2002, p.73). They state that by adopting a social constructionist perspective ‘essentialist notions of identity are rejected, rather, identity is in flux, in a permanent state of becoming as various social and linguistic constructs (or discourses) vie with one another for supremacy’ (Thomas & Linstead, 2002, p.75) The authors focus on how middle managers draw on prevailing discourses in the construction of their identities, including professionalism, expertise, gender, performance and commitment. Middle managers position themselves as ‘other’ to senior management and first line managers to create their identities.

This brief introduction to the management identity literature highlights the conflicts that managers can face between their professional and parent identities. In this thesis I aim to examine whether this conflict influences managers in their actions in the workplace, specifically in relation to the management of the parental leave process.
I am aware of the limitations of focusing on only a small number of the multiple identities that individuals are likely to possess, and recognise that individuals are likely to negotiate a multiplicity of identities which will not be examined in this study. However my focus on ‘parent’ and ‘professional/ employee’ and ‘managerial’ identities is necessary in order to conduct my research in a manageable and meaningful way. Having said that, while individuals possess a number of roles, the roles of employee and parent have been characterised as ‘two of the most common and valued roles’ (Wiley, 1991, p.503) and therefore many decisions are likely to be based on the level of identification individuals have with these roles. Additionally, it is not the case that individuals will experience their identities in isolation, but rather that they are woven together intricately, often working in harmony but also sometimes clashing.

While I employ identity theory as the major theoretical focus in determining how organisational actors approach work-family issues and thus contribute to the development of family-adaptiveness, it is also important to recognise that utilitarian concerns will also affect how work-family issues are managed at various levels within the organisation. Therefore throughout the thesis I will also allude to the influence of resource constraints on how individuals contribute to family supportiveness.

The discussion thus far has provided an introduction to the main concepts that inform the conceptual framework, outlining how these theoretical frames guide the research and how I propose to build on existing research in this area. In the following section of the chapter I draw together the aspects of the bodies of literature and theoretical perspectives covered thus far that will inform my theoretical framework. This framework is guided by my concern with the ways in which gendering processes and processes of identity negotiation can influence family-adaptiveness as well as my recognition that these effects will be shaped by resources constraints or their equivalent at all levels in the organisation. It is the intersection of these three influences that underpins my conceptual model, as I will now elaborate.

**The Family-Adaptive Framework**

The theory of gendered organisations will provide the theoretical foundation for the conceptual framework. In particular, I will draw heavily on Acker’s ‘points of entry’: processes; images, symbols and forms of consciousness; interaction between groups; and internal mental work (Acker, 1992b, 1999)\(^4\) and subsequent theorisation which builds on Acker’s work (Ely & Meyerson, 2000a, 2000b). Acker further developed her theory to focus not only on gender, but also on its intersection with class and race. Her ‘inequality regimes’ also outlined key points of entry through which inequality is created in organisations, specifically through: the general requirements of work; class hierarchies; recruitment and hiring; wage setting and supervisory practices; and informal interactions (Acker, 2006b). However for the purposes of this research I will focus specifically on her earlier theory.
2000b; Meyerson & Kolb, 2000; Meyerson, et al., 2000) to identify six key processes which I will use to examine the extent to which organisations can be considered family-adaptive:

1. Formal policies and processes;
2. Images, symbols, language and rhetoric;
3. Formal interactions;
4. Informal work practices, norms and patterns of work;
5. Informal interactions; and
6. Internal mental work

Drawing on my review of the literature on ‘family supportive work environments’ discussed earlier in this chapter I have identified a number of ‘indicators’ of family-adaptiveness. In general they focus on the types of formal and informal supports which are available within an organisation (Chesterman, et al., 2005b; McDonald, Guthrie, et al., 2005; Newman & Mathews, 1999; Sagaria & Johnsrud, 1992; Smith, 1997; Thompson, et al., 1999; Waters & Bardoel, 2006). The indicators include, for example, formal support structures (work-family policies, parental leave, breastfeeding facilities, flexible work arrangements); patterns of communication about policies (knowledge about work-family benefits among staff); informal support structures (support of colleagues, mentors); work culture (time expectations, normalised working hours, culture of overtime); actual/ perceived managerial support of parenthood; actual/ perceived career consequences associated with parenthood; and sense of entitlement (policy utilisation). In Figure 1, I outline how these indicators are linked to the six gendering processes discussed above and which particular indicators will be examined at each level of analysis.

The conceptual framework aims to build on, and thus extend, the theory of gendered organisations by examining how the gendering of organisations occurs through interactions across organisational hierarchies, specifically through individuals’ identity work and their management of resources. By incorporating identity theory and resource constraints as factors in the conceptual framework I aim to address some limitations of the theory of gendered organisations, specifically in relation to the lack of focus on the agency of individuals and how they can shape gendering processes in organisations. I also recognise that gendering of organisational practices and processes may differ depending on the perspective that is taken. So, for example, gendering processes at the macro level (senior management), which is strongly influenced by broader societal rules and norms may differ significantly from gendering processes at the meso (middle management) and micro (employee) levels, which are more likely to be influenced by localised rules which implicitly and explicitly teach members about norms of acceptable behaviour (Mills, 1992). I therefore argue that gendering of organisations is observable, although perhaps to greater and lesser extents, at different levels
within the organisation. I aim to determine how these levels interact to create environments which are adaptive to meeting the needs of workers with family responsibilities. The three levels of analysis which will be used to frame the research are: a) senior management at the organisational level; b) middle management at the work unit level; and c) non-managerial employees at the work unit level. For simplicity, these levels of analysis will be referred to throughout the thesis as the ‘senior management’, ‘middle management’ and ‘employee’ levels. In adopting an approach which examines the interaction of gendering processes across different levels within the organisation I hope to address critiques of the theory of gendered organisation regarding its inability to examine the specific contexts in which gendering processes occur.

The outcome I am concerned with is a concept I term ‘family-adaptiveness’. This concept is built on the theory of gendered organisations and identity and is designed to address the gaps in knowledge outlined earlier in this chapter in order to provide a holistic framework for examining the extent to which organisations are supportive of those with caring responsibilities. I define organisational family-adaptiveness as the extent to which:

- a) organisations can adapt to facilitate the changed working conditions of new parents associated with childbirth, and
- b) employees can find ways, through the use of formal entitlements and informal arrangements, to adapt to their new role as parents while maintaining their professional identities and career goals.

Therefore, family-adaptiveness refers on the one hand to the policies and processes the organisation and its managers put in place to deal with the immediate impacts of parenthood on the organisation. This includes formal leave provisions and any strategies the organisation employs to deal with staff absences from the workplace associated with childbirth. On the other hand, family-adaptiveness also focuses on how employees themselves can determine the extent to which they make a smooth transition to parenthood, through their use of formal and informal processes available within the work environment (e.g. reintegration strategies, flexible work arrangements and opportunities for career progression) and through their interactions with managers and colleagues. While the term ‘family-adaptive strategies’ has previously been used to describe ‘the actions families devise for coping with, if not overcoming, the challenges of living, and for achieving their goals in the face of structural barriers’ (Moen & Wethington, 1992, p.234), recent research has shown that strategies to prevent work-family conflict may be more effective if they are instigated by organisations rather than by employees (Kelly, et al., 2011). I aim to bring both of these strands together.
As outlined in Chapter 1, the key research question to be addressed in this thesis is ‘what factors contribute to the development of family-adaptive environments?’ and key issues which were identified for examination included the influence of gendering processes and identity. Building on the initial research question, in this chapter I have developed a framework for examining family-adaptiveness. The rationale underpinning the conceptual framework is that family-adaptiveness results from the interaction of gendering processes with identity and resource constraints in a range of formal and informal processes that occur across and between organisational hierarchies. Consequently, three further research questions emerge. First,

How do gendering processes in organisations interact with identity and resource constraints to contribute to the development of family-adaptive environments?

And

How do these processes operate at, and between, different organisational levels?

And finally,

What role does the gendered composition of workplaces (in terms of gender segregation and gendered perceptions about work) play in shaping these processes and the subsequent level of family-adaptiveness?

Figure 1 below is an illustration of the conceptual framework. As discussed, gendering processes interact with identity and resource constraints in different ways at different levels in the organisation. The framework outlines the specific gendering processes that are under examination at each level of observation. At the employee level I focus on the gendering of ‘informal interactions’ and ‘internal mental work’, specifically relating to the uptake of parental leave entitlements. At the middle management level I examine gendering of ‘informal work practices’ and ‘formal interactions’. I explore the role of middle managers in the implementation of policy and informal work arrangements. I examine how these processes differ in organisational contexts that are ‘gendered’ in different ways. At the senior management level, the gendering of formal parental leave policy development is explored through the lenses of ‘formal policy and processes’ and ‘images, symbols language and rhetoric’. At the senior management level I also examine how the gendered understructure influences policy development.

At each level of analysis I focus on particular aspects of the parental leave process, rather than examining the process from start to finish at each level. The choice to focus on particular aspects of the parental leave process is primarily due to the fact that some issues are more pertinent at one level than another. So, for example, at the senior management level I focus predominantly on the development of formal parental leave policy, whereas at middle management level the focus is
broadened to examine return to work. At the employee level the focus spans the entire process, from when an employee informs their supervisor about their leave intentions to when they return to work. It is important to note that throughout my analysis my focus is on identity salience rather than identity per se. Identity salience is the probability of invoking identity in particular situations. Therefore I rely on respondents’ accounts of how they invoked their identities in their management of work and family. Finally, resource constraints are examined as they apply at each level of analysis. Figure 1 shows the specific indicators that will be used to examine family-adaptive at each level of analysis.
Figure 1: The Family-Adaptive Framework
Conclusion

The first section of this chapter highlighted some important gaps in the literature relating to the development of family supportive workplaces. Broadly speaking gaps in knowledge be found at three levels of analysis, namely a) senior management, b) middle management and c) employee levels. There is also a dearth of research into how these three levels interact in shaping organisational family supportiveness. The conceptual framework, outlined in subsequent sections of the chapter aims to address these limitations. The framework draws on the theory of gendered organisations and identity theory to outline how a range of formal and informal organisational and individual factors interact to create environments in which it is possible to successfully combine career and caring. The theory of gendered organisations will allow for the examination of how a range of organisational factors can be gendered and the implications for family-adaptiveness. By examining the intricacies of how identities are negotiated, I aim to gain a better understanding of how individuals have the potential to shape gendering processes. I focus on the influence of top-down as well as bottom-up pressures on the development of work-family policy. I add a further layer of analysis by examining how resource constraints at each level within the organisation influence the management of the parental leave process.

At the employee level, literature has failed to examine the role employees can play in shaping family supportiveness. While I briefly examine the impact of resource constraints on employees’ work-family choices my key focus is on the influence of identity on the decisions employees make. I examine how identity salience in the transition to parenthood (focusing on ‘employee/professional’ and ‘parent’ identities) impacts on their management of parental leave and their contribution to the development of a family-adaptive workplace. I examine whether employees who articulate identities that challenge gendered norms have the potential to bring about workplace change. I focus in particular on whether women can challenge norms which limit opportunities for career progression following parenthood by invoking a prominent professional identity. Similarly, I explore whether men who invoke a salient parent identity can challenge the ‘ideal worker’ norm, thereby opening up opportunities for alternative work and care practices.

At the middle management level, I argue that current literature fails to take into account the diversity amongst middle managers and how their approaches to managing the implementation of parental leave policy is shaped by the gendered composition of workplaces and organisational resource constraints as well as their own identities. A central focus at this level is on the potential for middle managers to challenge gendering processes and to develop a family-adaptive environment within their own work unit and the broader organisation. I investigate the extent to
which resource constraints (relating to budgeting, personnel and work patterns) place limitations on managers in their potential to develop family-adaptive environments. I also examine whether managers deal with conflicts between meeting organisational goals and at the work-family needs of their staff. I analyse whether the approach managers take to parental leave policy implementation is related to their own identity, and specifically how they invoke their managerial and/or parent identity in the workplace.

At the senior management level a further layer of complexity is added, where in addition to being influenced by managerial and other identities as well as resource constraints in terms of organisational finances, senior management are also strongly influenced by the organisational understructure. The discussion of senior management focuses predominately on how resource constraints and a ‘negative’ business case approach influence policy development. Additionally, an examination of the impact of the gendered understructure on policy development will be central to the discussion of the role of senior managers in the development of family-adaptiveness.

The next chapter goes on to discuss the methodology employed for the research, focusing on the selection of the case study and the specific methodologies to be utilised for each level of analysis outlined above.
Chapter 3: Research Methodology

Introduction

The central objective of this thesis is to further understanding of the factors that contribute to the development of family-adaptive work environments. A secondary objective is the advancement of a new approach to the examination of these issues, through the development of a theoretical frame that incorporates the theory of gendered organisations and identity in an innovative way to examine organisational family-adaptiveness across a range of organisational contexts. The previous chapter outlined the development of the family-adaptive framework that guides the research. In this chapter I detail the methodology used to apply the conceptual framework in practice. In choosing the methodology I took three key issues into account, namely, the need to: a) address the broad aims of the study; b) be consistent with the paradigmatic approach which informs the study; and c) ensure rigour and quality in the research.

I adopted a single organisational case study methodology, basing the research in an Australian university. A mixed method approach was utilised, using qualitative interviews as the primary research method, supplemented with quantitative data and documentary analysis. The application of the conceptual framework in a practical, real-world context allowed me identify the specific ways in which a range of factors contribute to the development of family-adaptiveness, and how these factors operate at and between different levels of analysis, as identified in the previous chapter.

The research examines family-adaptiveness at the transition to parenthood, specifically during the ‘parental leave process’. I define the parental leave process as the period from when a staff member informs the organisation about their intention to go on leave, through the parental leave period and following their return to work while they avail of entitlements e.g. to flexible work hours associated with parental leave (as laid out in formal policy). Therefore, the research centres on an examination of parental leave policy development and implementation rather than the broad range of work-family provisions which may be available in organisations. In line with the conceptual framework, outlined in Chapter 2, I identified three levels of analysis at which to examine the interaction of gendering processes with identity and resource constraints in the development of ‘family-adaptive’ environments: a) senior management; b) middle management; and c) employee. At each of these levels I focus on specific aspects of this process which will be outlined later in this chapter.

The specific focus of the research is on general staff in an Australian university. Research was conducted in two phases. Phase 1 involved the collection and analysis of quantitative data on parental leave provisions across the university sector in Australia, with a specific focus on the case...
study university. Analysis was carried out on the ‘Parental Leave’ provisions as outlined in the collective agreements for Australia’s 37 publicly funded universities. At Phase 2, qualitative interviews were carried out with individuals at various levels and in variety of roles throughout the university. The main participant group was male and female general staff employees who had had children in the previous five years. At the middle management level, interviews were conducted with middle managers and HR managers in two contrasting organisational settings. Finally, at the senior management level, a senior HR manager, trade union officials and an equity and diversity office representative participated in qualitative interviews. In line with the aim to examine differences in family-adaptiveness across varying organisational contexts one traditionally ‘feminised’ occupation (Library Services) and one traditionally ‘masculinised’ occupation (Computing Centres) were chosen.

In the first part of this chapter I outline the justifications for the particular approach I have taken to the research, linking it to the conceptual framework outlined in Chapter 2. I describe data collection and analysis techniques, including a discussion of the ways in which quality and rigour are ensured. Next, I provide details of the case study utilised in the research, outlining the specific reasons for choosing the case study and the appropriateness of the specific methodology for achieving the research aims.

**Justifying the Case Study Approach: Theoretical and Practical Aims of the Thesis**

I utilised a single organisational case study, using an embedded design (Yin, 2009). The organisation is the primary unit of analysis and individuals at different levels within the organisation comprise the subunits of analysis (Yin, 2009). The thesis aims to make substantive and theoretical contributions to the scholarship on the intersection of career progression and parenthood in an organisational context. On a practical level, I aim to develop and apply a framework for exploring and understanding the specific ways in which a range of organisational and individual factors intersect to contribute to the development of family-adaptive environments. I also hope build on key theoretical bodies of literature that inform the research – the theory of gendered organisations and identity theory – addressing limitations of these theories and applying them in a novel way to the examination of organisational family supportiveness. The discussion below outlines why a case study approach was chosen as a suitable method for fulfilling the practical and theoretical aims of the study.
Substantive Aims

The broad objective of the thesis is to further understanding of the factors that contribute to the development of family-adaptive working environments, through the application of a comprehensive framework that incorporates a wider range of factors than evident in existing research. Family-adaptiveness is a phenomenon that applies most broadly at the organisational level and consequently the organisation is the specific unit of analysis. However, I have identified a) the gendering of a range of organisational processes at various levels within the organisation and b) the role of individual processes of identity negotiation as key factors in shaping family-adaptiveness. Thus the use of an embedded case study design, where the organisation is the key unit of analysis and individuals within specific work units are subunits of analysis, allowed for an examination of the impact of macro level as well as meso and micro level factors on the development of family-adaptiveness. This approach (where a number of levels of analysis are examined) addresses limitations of the holistic case study design, which can be overly abstract and not provide scope for examining ‘specific phenomenon in operational detail’ (Yin, 2009, p.51).

The research took place in a university setting. The university sector was chosen due to its reputation as a leader in the provision of parental leave entitlements (Baird, Frino, et al., 2009) and the case study university was found to be broadly representative of the sector in terms of parental leave provisions (including duration and model of provision). A large scale organisation such as a university also provided scope for the multilevel analysis I planned to undertake. I focused particularly on the experiences of general staff. The general staff population is becoming increasingly female-dominated and research suggests that they face a number of barriers to career progression (Castleman & Allen, 1995; Chesterman, et al., 2005b; Corral, 2009; Glover, 2009; McLean, 1996; Wootton, 2006). General staff are found across a diverse range of occupations, but generally operate under the same collective agreements. For these reasons, general staff were considered to be suitable for a case study examination of parenthood and career progression. I focused particularly on those employed between Higher Education Worker (HEW) levels 4 and 7. While some research has been conducted into those in higher, managerial levels (Schuster, 2010; Wallace, 2006, 2007; Wallace & Marchant, 2009) less is known about those at lower levels. Due to declining numbers employed at HEW levels 1-3 (partially due to the outsourcing of these level positions) this group was also excluded from analysis (Dobson, 2010).

Several researchers have asserted that relatively little research has been carried out into the work-family experiences of new parents in the period immediately following childbirth and that this is an area that needs to be addressed (Brough, et al., 2009, p.71; Coulson, Skouteris, Milgrom, Noblet, & Dissanayake, 2010, p.1). Certainly, the work-family preferences of new parents is an area of
research which would benefit from further exploration (Brough, et al., 2009; Gault & Lovell, 2006), as it is argued that the experiences of parents immediately following childbirth may be ‘qualitatively different’ from the experiences of parents of older children (Brough, et al., 2009, p.72). I therefore focused my study on employees who had become parents in the previous five years.

In undertaking embedded design case studies, Yin notes the importance of ensuring that analysis at the subunit level (in this case, individuals at each level within the organisation) is linked back to the overall unit of analysis (the organisation) (Yin, 2009). Therefore, throughout the thesis links are established between the specific focus of the analysis and the broader organisational level. The single organisational embedded case study methodology enables me to identify specific organisational processes and practices that contribute to (or detract from) the development of family-adaptiveness, how these processes operate across different levels in the organisation and thus identify possible avenues to address current organisational processes which discriminate against those with parenting responsibilities.

Theoretical Aims

The thesis builds on existing theory (the theory of gendered organisations and identity theory) to provide a comprehensive theoretical framework for examining ‘family-adaptiveness’. Case studies can be used for theory development or theory testing (George & Bennett, 2005). In fact it is argued that the development or testing of theory is a crucial stage in any case study research and sets case study research apart from other research methods in the social sciences (Yin, 2009). Lynham’s (2002) method of theory building, referred to by a number of theorists (Dooley, 2002; Turnbull, 2002; Upton & Egan, 2010), provided a useful starting point for structuring the research methodology. Lynham notes that the theory building process will result in two types of knowledge for the ‘researcher-theorist’. First, the outcome from the theorising component of the process will be a ‘coherent and informed’ theoretical framework. The second outcome, which results from the application of the theoretical framework, will be findings which will help further develop the theory and ‘enhance the utility of the theory in practice’ (Lynham, 2002, p.230). The previous chapter has largely dealt with the first stage of this process, where a theoretical framework was put forward for examining family-adaptiveness. In outlining the research methodology in this chapter I fulfil the second step (operationalisation) and outline the process for the application of the theory in practice.

The identification of the theoretical approach guiding the research is key to establishing external validity or transferability in the research process, whereby the generalisability of the research findings beyond the immediate case study is established (Yin, 2009). It is therefore important to
outline the proposed scope of the case study findings. In this thesis ‘contingent generalisations’ will be made based on the findings, as the theory being tested is what is commonly known as ‘typological theory’ (i.e. one which is applicable only within a limited set of parameters) (George & Bennett, 2005). In this research project the specific context which is being examined is the Australian university sector. A recognised benefit of this approach is that:

…it can move beyond earlier debates between structural and agency-centred theories by including, within a single typological framework, hypotheses on mechanisms leading from agents to structures and those leading from structures to agents. (George & Bennett, 2005, p.245)

This approach is particularly suited to this research project, where I aim to examine the impact both of organisational processes in shaping family-adaptiveness as well as examining the impact of individuals in shaping broader organisational processes.

**Research Methods**

I adopted a mixed method approach, employing both qualitative and quantitative methods. The method falls into what Johnson et al (2007) classified as ‘qualitative dominant’ research (i.e. it leans heavily towards the ‘qualitative’ end of the spectrum, but also incorporates some quantitative aspects). The primary method of data collection consisted of qualitative interviews conducted with selected actors in the case study university. These interviews were supplemented with quantitative data which mainly served the purpose of situating the research within the policy and sectoral contexts.

In carrying out empirical research it is important to ensure that the mode of inquiry is consistent with the philosophical underpinnings of the research (Johnson, Buehring, Cassell, & Symon, 2006). Both the theory of gendered organisations and identity theory have their roots in the broad constructivist paradigm and the research methodology has been designed to be consistent with this paradigmatic approach. Although it is common for research conducted from a constructivist perspective to utilise qualitative methodologies, this does not preclude the use of quantitative research methods. The value in using a variety of methods has been noted by a number of scholars (Guba & Lincoln, 2005, p.200; Mackenzie & Knipe, 2006; Stryker & Vryan, 2003) and triangulation is identified as a key method of ensuring construct validity or confirmability in data collection (Golafshani, 2003; Yin, 2009). Further, it is argued that because of the diverse constructions of reality, in order ‘to acquire valid and reliable multiple and diverse realities, multiple methods of searching or gathering data are in order’ (Golafshani, 2003, p.604). The use of a mixed method case study approach therefore matches the paradigmatic approach of this thesis.
As noted earlier, the research was comprised of two distinct phases. The first phase was largely quantitative, involving the analysis of parental leave policy provision across the Australian university sector. This was followed by the second, and main, data collection phase, consisting of qualitative interviews with participants across a range of levels and functions within the university, including those at senior management, middle management and employees. I took various measures to ensure quality and rigour in the methodology at each stage of the research process, from research design through to data collection and onto data analysis (Johnson, et al., 2006; Riege, 2003; Rolfe, 2006). In particular I was mindful of employing methodological procedures that ensured construct validity, internal validity, external validity and reliability (Yin, 2009). Data collection and analysis procedures for both phases are described below. I address quality and rigour issues throughout the chapter as they apply to the specific stage of the research process.

**Phase 1: Quantitative Component**

Phase 1 consisted of a review of parental leave entitlements across the Australian university sector, with specific focus on the case study university. This provided the context to the research, outlining where the case study university lay in terms of duration of leave and also the extent to which the leave model was gendered (i.e. whether it assumed a male-breadwinner/female-carer family).

**Data Collection**

Parental leave policy provisions were collated from the enterprise agreements of each of Australia’s 37 publicly funded universities, as finalised at December 2012. Provisions were systematically reviewed. Data was collected on the duration of each component of leave, including maternity, primary caregiver, partner and prenatal leave and return to work provisions. The model of provision was also examined in order to determine the extent to which leave was available solely to the birth mother or to either parent. In cases where there was a lack of clarity about the entitlements, university websites were examined, where more detailed descriptions of parental leave policies were generally available. Consultation with representatives from the largest trade union involved in bargaining for parental leave in the university sector helped clarify any remaining uncertainties. In addition to the examination of parental leave provisions, employment profile data specific to the case study occupational groups (including staff size and gender breakdown), drawn from Australian Government statistics was utilised. Statistics on parental leave usage and return to work rates were also collated from annual reports published by the case study university.

**Data Analysis**

Analysis of parental leave provisions was facilitated through the use of the SPSS statistical software program. In addition to basic variables derived directly from the parental leave policies (including
the type and duration of leave offered), other variables were developed to order the data based on duration and model of leave provision. Regarding the duration of leave (for the main caregiver), universities were categorised as having ‘token’, ‘common’ or ‘progressive’ leave provisions (Baird, Frino, et al., 2009). Three distinct models of provision were identified, including universities that provided leave: (i) solely to the birth mother; (ii) that could be shared between the birth mother and partner, where both were employed by the university and (iii) to either the birth mother or other parent, regardless of the employment of the birth mother. After inputting data into the SPSS program, basic statistical analysis was carried out, including frequencies and crosstabs. The analysis provided an insight into the case study university’s parental leave provisions, both in terms of duration of leave and the extent to which the model was gendered. The analysis also served to situate the case study university’s parental leave provision within the broader sectoral context.

At Phase 1, I used a method of data triangulation whereby a number of different sources of data were drawn upon to ensure that the findings I reported were accurate. Data triangulation is an important aspect of case study research as ‘the need to use multiple sources of evidence far exceeds that in other research methods’ (Yin, 2009, p.115). Thus, in addition to collating information directly from enterprise agreements, I also drew on online data available on universities’ websites. Additionally, I sought clarification from a trade union representative who had detailed information on enterprise negotiations.

**Phase 2: Qualitative Component**

The principal research method consisted of qualitative interviews with individuals in a range of positions in the university. These interviews provided a rich source of data on the factors that influenced organisational actors’ approaches to work-family issues. From a constructivist perspective, it has been noted that ‘the research scholar who is concerned with the social action of a given individual or group… must see that action from the position of whoever is forming the action’ (Blumer, 1969, p.56) and that ‘large-scale organisation has to be seen, studied and explained in terms of the process of interpretation engaged in by the acting participants as they handle the situations at their respective positions in the organisation’ (Blumer, 1969, p.58). This implies a methodological approach which places research subjects at the centre of analysis and allows the participant an active voice. Qualitative interviews do just this; participants can give detailed accounts of their experiences and inferences can be drawn about the impact they have on broader organisational processes. I examined the specific contexts in which individuals at various levels within the organisation (employees, supervisors and management) approached negotiations surrounding parenthood and career progression. By examining how negotiations differed between individuals and organisational contexts it was possible to gain an understanding of the specific
conditions (both related to the organisational actor and the organisational context) that contributed towards the development of workplaces which are family-adaptive.

The use of in-depth interviews is consistent with existing scholarship in the area of gendered organisations (Britton, 1997; Holt & Lewis, 2011; Kantola, 2008; Manville, 1997; Price, 2008; Smithson & Stokoe, 2005; Swanberg, 2004), allowing an examination of the ‘relational and interactional’ nature of gender (Crawford & Pini, 2011, p.85). Proponents of identity theory also advocate the use of interviews. It has been argued that research ‘must incorporate the point of view of actors engaged in the behaviour’ (Stryker & Vryan, 2003, p.5) and interviews have ‘been a preferred method for those... interested in researching identities empirically’ (Halford & Leonard, 2006, p.39). Researchers in this area have sought multiple perspectives (Lee, et al., 2005, p.293) in recognition that the context in which people negotiate their identities ‘provides the resources through which identities can be negotiated’ (Halford & Leonard, 2006, p.10). This highlights the importance of utilising a number of locations in order to determine how context impacts on identity negotiation and whether this differs between occupational groups which gendered in different ways (Ladge, et al., 2011).

**Data Collection**

In line with the conceptual framework, qualitative interviews were carried out at three levels in the organisation: senior management (Group 1), middle management (Group 2) and non-managerial employees (Group 3). Two occupational groups were identified for inclusion in the research: Library Services and Computing Centres. These particular occupational groups were chosen in order to address one of the key research questions outlined in Chapter 2: namely, to examine whether family-adaptiveness varies across occupations that are gendered in contrasting ways. Library professions and computing occupations are gendered both in terms of conceptualisations about work as well as in terms of horizontal and vertical segregation, as discussed in Chapter 1. The gendered nature of employment in both occupational groups in the case study university is elaborated on later in the chapter where I describe the case study university in detail.

Both occupational groups are comprised of a number of separate work units responsible for specific functions (as illustrated in Figures 10 and 11). In order to identify specific work units to target for participation, I developed organisational charts for both occupational groups, based on information available on the university’s website. These organisational charts enabled me to determine the size and gender breakdown of work units. I aimed to recruit (i) a combination of male and female-dominated units, (ii) a mix of male and female managers (iii) at least two staff members from each
work unit. These criteria were chosen to ensure that a comprehensive and diverse sample was obtained. This was achieved with some success, as outlined below.

In order to gain a range of perspectives at the senior management level (Group 1), I approached individuals who represented key groups involved in enterprise bargaining. The contact details for all Group 1 participants were publicly available on the university’s website. These participants were contacted directly (initially by e-mail and followed up by telephone). This resulted in the recruitment of one senior HR manager, a representative of the equity and diversity office employed in a senior management position and two trade union officials who had been involved in recent enterprise bargaining rounds (see Table 2). Group 1 interviews examined parental leave development and implementation, examining the approach taken by different parties involved in the negotiations.

Table 2: Group 1 Participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Position</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Children</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Angela</td>
<td>Senior HR Manager</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tania</td>
<td>Equity and Diversity Office Manager</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Richard</td>
<td>Trade Union Branch Manager</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kevin</td>
<td>Trade Union Branch Organiser</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>no</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

At the middle management level (Group 2), I adopted a phased approach to recruitment, establishing the research in one occupational group before approaching the next. In Group 2, a total of 11 interviews were conducted, consisting of eight interviews with work unit managers, and three interviews with HR managers (Table 3). The Library Services interviews included three female (75 percent) and one male (25 percent) managers which was representative of the overall gender breakdown among HEW 8-10 positions in the university Library Services (female 71 percent/ male 29 percent). In Computing Centres, one (25 percent) female and three (75 percent) male managers were interviewed. The Computing Centres gender breakdown across the university stood at 18 percent female/ 82 percent male in 2010. Group 2 interviews examined managers’ perceptions about work-family policy implementation at the middle management level, focusing on interactions between managers, HR and employees in the parental leave process. Table 3 summarises this information.

3 I use pseudonyms throughout to protect the respondents’ confidentiality.
### Table 3: Group 2 Participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Position</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Length in Position</th>
<th>Number of employees</th>
<th>Children</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Jane</td>
<td>Library Services Manager</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>6 months</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>no</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sharon</td>
<td>Library Services Manager</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>1 year</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thomas</td>
<td>Library Services Manager</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>1 year</td>
<td>85</td>
<td>yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Catherine</td>
<td>Library Services Manager</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>1 year</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brian</td>
<td>Library Services HR Manager</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>no</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>John</td>
<td>Library Services HR Manager</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>David</td>
<td>Computing Centres Manager</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>6 years</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adam</td>
<td>Computing Centres Manager</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>4 years</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gary</td>
<td>Computing Centres Manager</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>1 year</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sandra</td>
<td>Computing Centres Manager</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>2 months</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Janice</td>
<td>Computing Centres HR manager</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>no</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Middle managers acted as gatekeepers in providing access to employees within their work unit (Group 3). Group 3 was the key participant group, and was comprised of general staff employed between HEW levels 4 and 7. A combination of newsletter advertisements and e-mail contact from managers to employees was utilised to recruit Group 3 respondents. Following this initial recruitment process, snowballing enabled me to increase respondent numbers. This snowballing technique was particularly helpful, as it enabled me to gain contact with people who had specific experiences that I was interested in finding out more about. In particular, I was able to recruit additional male respondents through my initial contacts, which proved invaluable, as the number of men usually included in research of this type is quite low.

I initially proposed to interview at least two staff members plus a manager from each occupational group. However a series of structural changes in both the Computing Centres and Library Services meant that I was unable to achieve the mix of respondents I initially planned. However, the sample is broad and includes a mix of male and female employees and managers across both occupational
groups (Table 4). In Group 3, a total of 13 employees participated, including eight women and five men. All had had a child in the previous five years, with the majority (n=12) having a child three years or younger. In Library Services there were five (71 percent) female and two (29 percent) male participants. This is largely representative of the gender breakdown between HEW 4-7 in Library Services as a whole, where it is 76 percent female/ 24 percent male. In Computing Centres there were three male and three female participants. This sample is slightly biased when compared to the gender breakdown of the Computing Centres across the university, which is 26 percent female/ 74 percent male. This is perhaps not surprising given the fact that mothers generally take on more caring responsibilities. An overview of Group 3 participants is provided in Table 4 below.
I sought to examine how organisational policies as well as localised unit-specific policies and practices impact on ‘family-adaptiveness’ from the point of view of employees. The interviews focused on employee perceptions about work-life balance, their ‘identity salience’ (i.e. as employee/parent/manager) and how this changed in transitioning to parenthood, perceptions about the support which is available to help them combine work and parental roles, and relationships with supervisors and colleagues. In recognising that barriers exist for both men and women in accessing

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6 The higher education worker (HEW) system is used to classify general staff pay grades and runs from Level 1 (lowest pay grade) to 10+ (highest)

7 Interview schedules for all three participant groups are provided as appendices.
parental leave and other entitlements (e.g. flexible work options during a child’s infancy), the research focused on the experiences of both new mothers and new fathers.

**Data Analysis**

At Phase 2, interviews were audio recorded to ensure accuracy. The recording of ‘reflective comments’ immediately following interviews allowed me to maintain a record of any immediate observations about the interview, including the respondent’s demeanour, the interview setting and any other factors that may have affected the quality of the interview. Interviews were transcribed verbatim. Following transcription I re-listened to the interviews to ensure they had been transcribed correctly. Respondents were given the opportunity to check any quotes used to ensure they had been represented accurately.

Analysis of the qualitative interviews was facilitated through the use of NVivo qualitative data analysis software. When analysing case study data it is important to establish and follow a general analytic strategy (Yin, 2009). The data analysis process is outlined below. I began with systematic coding of the data. First, basic codes were developed based on the themes outlined in the conceptual framework. These pre-defined codes were used to code individual cases within the case study in line with the approach outlined by Miles and Huberman (1994). Additionally at this stage ‘new’ codes that emerge from the data were recorded. This process resulted in the emergence of 11 main codes (and various sub-codes). Next, a process of pattern coding or matching was used in order to categorise initial codes into themes (Miles & Huberman, 1994, p.69; Yin, 2009). Miles and Huberman describe pattern codes as ‘explanatory or inferential codes, ones that identify an emergent theme, configuration, or explanation. They pull together a lot of information into more meaningful and parsimonious units of analysis’ (1994, p.69). These themes, which were developed systematically over the course of data collection, formed the basis for the topics covered in each of the analytic chapters. Following the pattern matching process, cross-case comparisons were used to identify links between cases (Yin, 1981). This was facilitated with the NVivo matrix coding function. Memos were utilised to record links between codes and develop conceptualisations about causal links. ‘Memoing’ is described as the process of ‘the theorising write-up of ideas about codes and their relationships as they strike the analyst while coding’ (Glaser, 1978, p.83). While the coding process followed a more-or-less linear process, memoing occurred throughout the coding process and helped identify new links between different themes. Maintaining a chain of evidence is a crucial element of good data collection practice (Yin, 2009). The development of the NVivo database ensured that data was recorded in a logical and accessible way. The NVivo data base allowed for key themes and subthemes to be linked to data sources, thereby ensuring that it is possible to easily follow the chain of evidence between the data sources and the claims made in the
thesis. Ensuring the traceability of evidence from research question to conclusion also addresses the need for construct validity and thus increase the overall quality of the case study (Yin, 2009).

Figure 2 below illustrates how the data collection procedures fits into the overall conceptual framework. At each level of analysis I examine specific aspects of the parental leave process (delimited as the period from when an employee first informs their manager about their intention to take leave until they finish availing of any flexible work options following their return to work). At the senior management level I focus predominantly on the provisions laid out in the parental leave policy and how these provisions can contribute to family-adaptiveness. The focus at the middle management level is broadened to include an examination of the return to work phase, and specifically how managers influence family-adaptiveness in their facilitation of employees’ return to work. At the employee level I examine the entire parental leave process, focusing on employees’ experiences of family-adaptiveness from when they initially inform managers about their intention to avail of parental leave, through the parental leave process and following their return to work.
Figure 2: Conceptual Framework Outlining Data Sources

**Levels of Analysis**
- Senior Management / Organisational Level
- Middle Managers / Work Unit Level
- Non-Managerial Employees / Work Unit Level

**Gender Understructure and Gendering Processes**
- Formal policies and processes
- Images, symbols, language and rhetoric
- Formal interactions
- Informal work practices, norms and patterns of work
- Internal mental work
- Informal interactions

**Identity and Resource Constraints**
- Parental leave and related entitlements, return to work processes
- Visible messages about parenthood in the workplace, rhetoric in formal policy documents
- Implementation of formal entitlements, facilitation of return to work process
- Work culture (long hours, out of hours work etc.), informal support structures, informal family friendly practices (e.g. re. children in the
  - Perceptions about return to work, career consequences of parenthood, preferences for and conflict re. career/caring
- Informal support networks, informal interactions with managers

**Data Collection Techniques**
- University policy documents and interviews with senior management, HR and trade union
- Middle manager interviews
- Employee interviews
The Case Study University

A large and diverse Australian university was chosen as the case study location. The university has a broad range of general staff occupations. Recent trends in the size and gender breakdown of general staff in the case study university have followed patterns across the broader university sector. General staff have accounted for 57 percent to 59 percent of all staff in the case study university over the past decade, consistent with sector-wide figures reported in Chapter 1. The feminisation trend that was highlighted across the sector is also mirrored in the case study university, with the proportion of general staff who are female rising from 58 percent to 62 percent over the decade from 2000 to 2010. I illustrate these and related trends below.

General Staff in the Case Study University

In this section I provide a brief descriptive overview of general staff in the case study university, drawing on Australian Government statistics (Department of Education Employment and Workplace Relations, 2009, 2010, 2011, 2012; Department of Education Science and Training, 2005, 2006, 2007, 2008; Department of Industry Innovation Science Research and Tertiary Education, 2013). Occupational groups were chosen on the basis of gender breakdown and potential sample size. As the research is concerned with examining the gendering of the parental leave process across different organisational contexts, I focused on occupations which differed in terms of function and gender breakdown. This approach also addresses concerns that research on work-family issues tends to be ‘conducted in relatively homogenous populations and organisational settings’ (Anderson, et al., 2002, p.789). Detailed statistics were only available between 2005 and 2010 and as a result the overview is primarily based on this timeframe.

In the data presented below, Higher Education Worker (HEW) Levels 1-10 are collapsed into three distinct groupings of HEW Level 1-3, HEW Level 4-7 and HEW level 8-10, in order to examine broader trends at the top, middle and bottom of the pay scale. Positions above HEW Level 10 are excluded as they comprise high level management positions, which are not a target of this research. Positions below HEW Level 1 were excluded from the analysis as the numbers employed in these roles are negligible. These HEW classification groupings are based on the level of skill, educational level and level of autonomy, as outlined in Table 5.
Table 5: HEW Groupings

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>HEW Group</th>
<th>Description of skill and qualification levels</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>LEVELS 1-3</td>
<td>Unskilled to junior-skilled; trainees, junior administration, up to certificate III level</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LEVELS 4-7</td>
<td>Semi-skilled; mid-level administration, diploma level upwards</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LEVELS 8-10</td>
<td>Skilled, high-level administration, post-graduate degree and higher qualifications</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The general staff population is female-dominated and is becoming increasingly so. Between 2005 and 2010 there was an average increase from 59 percent to 62 percent in the proportion of women among the general staff population. While the proportion of employees at HEW level 1-3 who are women has declined from 58 percent to 55 percent during this period, the proportion of HEW level 8-10 employees who are women increased from 47 percent to 50 percent. This is illustrated in Figure 3 below. These statistics are promising, indicating that the proportion of women employed at higher levels is increasing at a faster rate than the overall growth in general positions. However, while a degree of convergence has occurred over recent years, vertical segregation remains an issue, with the number of women employed at HEW Level 8 and higher disproportionately low when compared to the total number of women employed in general positions.

Figure 3: Gender Breakdown by HEW Grouping, Case Study University 2005-2010
An examination of the concentration of female and male staff in each HEW grouping indicates that females are more highly concentrated in mid-level positions than men, while men and more highly concentrated in both high and low level positions than women, with 13 percent of women found in HEW 8-10 compared to 21 percent of men, and 76 percent of women in HEW 4-7 positions compared to 67 percent of men. These figures are broadly consistent with the average across all Australian universities where 16 percent of women found in HEW 8-10 compared to 26 percent of men, and 75 percent of women in HEW 4-7 positions compared to 61 percent of men, as indicated in Figure 4 below.

**Figure 4: Female and Male Concentration, HEW Groupings, Case Study University 2010**

There is also a pattern of horizontal segregation across the occupational groups in the case study university, with some groups highly feminised while others are highly masculinised. For example, among the 12 general staff occupational groupings identified by the Australian Government, three are more than 70 percent male, while four are more than 70 percent female, as indicated in Figure 5. This is consistent with trends across the university sector.
Overall, the characteristics of general staff in the case study university are broadly representative of the university sector as a whole. The university is therefore is a suitable for utilising a single organisational case study methodology (Yin, 2009), thus enhancing the extent to which results can be generalised across the sector.

**Selection of Occupational Groups: Gendered Professions**

As discussed previously, a key concern in choosing occupational groups for inclusion in the research was the need to examine family-adaptiveness in contrasting organisational contexts. In order to ensure an adequate sample size, occupational groups with fewer than 100 employees were excluded from further examination, leaving six possible groups for inclusion. While there is a broad pattern of feminisation across the general staff population, there is a lot of variation within this diverse group. Of these six occupational groups, two are highly masculinised, with the remaining four highly feminised. The gender breakdown is outlined in Figure 6 below.
Both library and computing professions are traditionally gendered and an examination of Library Services and Computing Centres in the case study university reveals gendered patterns in terms of horizontal and vertical segregation, as discussed below.

In terms of gender breakdown across occupational groups in the case study university, Library Services fall on one end of the spectrum, with a higher than average level of feminisation. In the case study university 72 percent of employees in Library Services are women. This is in line with scholarship which identifies librarianship – and academic librarianship in particular – as a feminised occupation (Bird, 2007; Ivy, 1984). In contrast, the computing and IT sector is dominated by men (Crump, et al., 2007; Roan & Whitehouse, 2007; Whitehouse & Diamond, 2006). Men account for 76 percent of the employees in Computing Centres in the case study university, well above the average across all general staff. Figure 7 indicates the level of feminisation in both of the occupational groups compared to the university average over the period 2005 – 2010.
The vertical segregation among general staff depicted earlier can also be identified both in library and computing professions. While libraries are feminised, gender inequalities exist, with men continuing to dominate in the highest level positions (Moran, Leonard, & Zellers, 2009; Record & Green, 2008). Where women are employed in the computing sector, they have generally been restricted to lower paid, low status and low skilled occupations (Whitehouse & Diamond, 2006). In line with previous research, in the case study organisation there is evidence of vertical segregation within both of the occupational groups, with females over-represented in lower earning brackets (HEW 1-3) while males are over-represented in higher earnings brackets. For example, in the case study university Library Services, while women accounted for 72 percent of all employees between HEW 1-10, they were slightly underrepresented in Level 8-10 positions, accounting for 71 percent of employees. Similarly, while women made up 24 percent of the case study university’s computing centre workforce, they were underrepresented in higher positions, accounting for 18 percent of HEW 8-10 positions. This follows broadly similar patterns in the university sector.

An examination of the concentration of women and men across different earning bands reveals an additional perspective on these divisions. In the library sector, 10 percent of both women and men are found in HEW 8-10 positions, but there is a higher concentration of women in HEW 4-7 positions (67 percent) than men (53 percent), while a greater proportion of men (36 percent) are employed at HEW 1-3 than women (24 percent). This indicates a greater degree of gender equity.

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Footnote: HEW level 1-3 figures may not reflect trends in the sector accurately, given that the proportion of staff employed at HEW level 1-3 has declined significantly in recent years, as discussed previously.
than in the sector as a whole, where there is a higher concentration of men in HEW 8-10 positions (in the library sector across all Australian universities 11 percent of women are employed at HEW 8-10 compared to 15 percent of men). This is illustrated in Figure 8 below.

**Figure 8: Gender Concentration, Library Services, Case Study University and University Sector, 2010**

In contrast to Library Services in the case study university, in Computing Centres, 19 percent of women are employed at HEW 8-10 compared to 28 percent of men. This is a greater degree of gender inequality than in computing centres in the broader university sector, where 33 percent of women are employed in HEW 8-10 compared to 35 percent of men, as illustrated in Figure 9.
A final point to note is that there is a considerably higher proportion of women (and a higher proportion of men) employed at higher levels (i.e. HEW 8-10) in Computing Centres than in Library Services. This may reflect the relative ‘value’ put on the skills associated with computing occupations compared to library professions.

The discussion above has outlined the rationale for choosing the particular occupational groups included in the research, highlighting and contrasting the gendered patterns in each. In order to frame my analysis in the following chapters, which examine (among other things) how organisational context impacts on family-adaptiveness and whether gender differences are evident in the occupational groups, the simplified organisational charts below (Figures 10 and 11) plot the respondents according to their positions within the occupational groups.
Ethics

Ethical procedures were followed at all stages of the research. Ethical approval was sought from and granted by the research ethics committee of the School of Political Science and International Studies at the University of Queensland. Consent packages were developed for all participants outlining the aims of the research, what participation would involve and seeking formal written consent to participate. Participant responses have been anonymised throughout the following analytic chapters. Any potential identifying information about the case study university and participants has been removed. In the following chapters I endeavour to represent participants accurately and have been mindful of how my own preconceptions could influence my interpretation of responses.

Conclusion

This chapter has outlined the research methodology, from conception of the research plan to completion of data analysis. I have outlined why the particular case study methodology was employed in order to fulfil the theoretical and substantive aims of the research. I have shown how the research methodology is consistent with the paradigmatic approach of the thesis, which has its roots in constructivism. The chapter has detailed the steps taken to ensure the research methodology was rigorous in order to ensure quality of the research. The discussion of the case study university outlines how the university is broadly representative of the university sector and thus is suitable for this research project. The occupational groups included in the research are sufficiently diverse in terms of occupational type and gender breakdown to facilitate comparative analysis of the influence of organisational context on gendering processes.

The following three chapters will discuss the key findings that emerged from the research. In line with the conceptual framework each of the three analytic chapters focuses on the interaction of gendering processes with identity and resource constraints at distinct levels within the organisation. As mentioned, each analytic chapter focuses on specific elements of the parental leave process. The next chapter, Chapter 4, examines how formal parental leave policy development contributes to family adaptiveness at the senior management level. Following that, Chapter 5 focuses on the role middle managers play in developing family adaptive work environments, focusing on the implementation of formal policy and the management of the return to work phase. Finally, Chapter 6 takes the perspective of employees, examining their role in shaping family adaptiveness for themselves, within their own work unit and potentially in the organisation more widely. The focus broadens in Chapter 6 to examine the entire parental leave process.
Chapter 4: Paid Parental Leave: Rhetoric and Reality in Policy Provision

Introduction

This chapter reports on the first level of analysis in my research design, as outlined in Chapter 2. It explores the macro-organisational processes which contribute to the development of family-adaptiveness, through an in-depth examination of formal parental leave entitilements in one Australian university. I analyse the complex interaction of a range of factors in shaping parental leave policy (and hence family-adaptiveness) by charting policy development from negotiation, through implementation to evaluation.

As mentioned in Chapter 2, each of the analytic chapters places emphasis on particular aspects of the parental leave process. In this chapter I focus on the development of formal parental leave policy. A detailed examination of the development and implementation of return to work entitlements is beyond the scope of this chapter. However, I do briefly discuss formal return to work entitlements in the context of the discussion of formal parental leave policy in the university sector. I also touch on issues relating to return to work in the context of a discussion of the evaluation of parental leave policy effectiveness in the case study university.

At the senior management level I examine how key stakeholders – particularly senior managers – shape policy development and how their actions can contribute to (or detract from) the development of a family-adaptive environment. Aligning the chapter with Acker’s theory (discussed in detail in Chapter 2), I examine how gendering processes interact with identity and resource constraints through two ‘points of entry’. The primary ‘point of entry’ I examine is formal policy and processes, focusing on parental leave policy development. I examine how gendering is evident in a) the processes that contribute towards current policy (particularly enterprise negotiations) and b) the resultant formal parental leave policy. ‘Images, symbols, language and rhetoric’ constitutes the secondary point of entry which I incorporate in my investigation of the parental leave process in order to examine how gendered language and rhetoric is used to frame policy development. Acker stated that the gendering of organisations is evident in ‘symbols and images that explain, express, reinforce, or sometimes oppose’ (Acker, 1990) divisions along gender lines. I argue that symbols, images, language and rhetoric can also be used to mask gendering processes in organisations. I will examine this issue with particular reference to the development of formal parental leave policy. In this chapter I also incorporate an examination of the ‘gender understructure’, illustrating how deeply engrained gendered notions have shaped parental leave policy development.
The first issue I examine in this chapter is the extent to which business case, social justice and institutional rationales have shaped parental leave policy development and the consequences for the potential for policy to contribute to family-adaptiveness. These three rationales are commonly identified as key motivations for the introduction of work-family policy (Brough, et al., 2008; Charlesworth & Probert, 2005; Forsyth & Polzer-Debruyne, 2007; Whitehouse, Haynes, et al., 2007). I illustrate how these rationales are used to varying degrees by senior management to rationalise and defend specific approaches to the provision of parental leave entitlements. I argue that underlying business case, social justice and institutional motivations, resource constraints have been a driving force behind policy development in the case study university. Throughout the chapter I will examine (i) how the university’s reputation as an employer with a strong concern for social justice translates into the provision of parental leave entitlements (ii) how institutional pressures, including broader sectoral trends and trade union influence, shaped policy development and (iii) the extent to which business case arguments were utilised either to support or oppose improvements to parental leave entitlements in recent enterprise bargaining negotiations. I argue that while institutional pressures have contributed to the case study university’s policy development (including trends in the sector and trade union influence) and social justice arguments have shaped the rhetoric around policy provision (including a focus on ‘family friendliness’ and gender equity), a narrow business focus has been a more significant driver in shaping policy development and that this has consequences for the potential of policy to address gender equity aims. Thus, the first major proposition I put forward in this chapter is that the development of a ‘family-adaptive’ parental leave policy is dependent on the rationale underpinning policy development, with a ‘social justice’ rationale more likely to contribute towards, and a narrow business focus likely to detract from, the development of family-adaptive environments.

The second issue to be addressed relates to the influence of the gendered understructure on the potential development of a ‘family-adaptive’ parental leave policy in the case study university. I examine how a gendered logic has influenced senior management’s approach to policy development in the case study university and the extent to which this has resulted in a gendered policy which serves to maintain gender inequalities. Acker conceptualises the organisational understructure as a broad phenomenon underlying organisational processes which espouses the values and assumptions that guide the organisation (Acker, 1992b). The gendered understructure can explain how assumptions are so deeply engrained in organisational policies, practices and processes that they often appear gender neutral. Due to managerial strategy being closely aligned with the vision and mission of the organisation, I contend that managers are likely to be influenced by the deeply engrained beliefs and values that the organisation holds – the gendered understructure – in their
approach to policy development. Thus, the organisational logic will be apparent in the types of policies that are put in place. Where a gendered organisational logic based around the ‘male-breadwinner’ norm exists the types of policies that develop are likely to result in gendered outcomes. Conversely, if the organisational logic is centered on gender equity, policies that develop are more likely to contribute to family-adaptiveness. Thus, the second proposition I put forward is that the potential for the development of family-adaptive parental leave policy will be enhanced to the extent that the organisational logic underpinning policy is based around a concern with gender equity rather than the male-breadwinner norm.

The chapter is divided into two main sections, drawing on two key data sources. First, I present an overview of policy provision in the case study university, contrasting it with the university sector as a whole. This section draws on quantitative analysis of parental leave policy across the university sector in Australia, with a particular focus on the case study university. In discussing the results of the analysis, I provide an overview of the extent to which policy at the case study university is gendered. Next, I conduct an in-depth examination of parental leave policy development and implementation. This section draws on qualitative interviews conducted with HR officers, an equity and diversity manager and trade union representatives. Finally, I offer some conclusions, outlining the implications of the findings for the development of a family-adaptive environment, highlighting in particular the role senior management and other stakeholders can play in this process.

**Parental Leave Policy Provision in the Case Study University**

Formal policies and processes are identified as a key ‘point of entry’ through which organisations can facilitate (or impede) gender equality (Acker, 1992a, 1992b, 1999; Ely & Meyerson, 2000b). Gendering is evident in a range of formal organisational processes, including gendered divisions of ‘labour, of allowed behaviour, of locations in physical space, of power, including the institutionalised means of maintaining the divisions in the structures of labour markets, the family, the state’ (Acker, 1990, p.146). Parental leave policy development is one such formal process and is this focus of this chapter, whereby formal parental leave policy development is examined as a key point of entry through which gendering processes occur. Parental leave policy development impacts on both the labour market and the family. Thus, the gendering of parental leave policies will influence the extent to which gender divisions in both work and care are reproduced. A gender equitable parental leave policy should both a) provide adequate leave to mothers to recover from childbirth and ensure maternal and infant health and b) facilitate parents’ choices regarding the provision of care to infants and the management of work responsibilities in the period following birth. Therefore a thorough examination of parental leave provision must focus not only on the
duration of leave but also on the extent to which the model of leave provision is gendered and thus facilitates or impedes gender egalitarian patterns of work and care.

The following section provides a comprehensive review of parental leave entitlements in the Australian university sector, which is at the forefront in the provision of parental leave entitlements in Australia (Baird, 2009; Baird, Frino, et al., 2009; Baird, Whelan, & Page, 2009). The analysis examines the extent to which parental leave policy is gendered. I focus on the case study university in particular, within the context of a discussion of broader patterns across the 37 universities in the sector.

**Leave Duration**

An examination of parental leave provision in Australia’s publicly funded universities revealed a variety of patterns of provision. Universities generally provided a combination of pre-natal entitlements, maternity leave, primary caregiver leave, return to work entitlements and partner leave. Focusing on entitlements for the main caregiver, leave ranged from 24.4 weeks to 38.48 weeks across the 37 universities, with an average of 29.4 weeks (when pre-natal, maternity, primary caregiver and return to work entitlements were combined). The case study university provided 27 weeks’ leave. However, as mentioned, the composition of leave entitlements varied between universities, as the discussion below will show.

**Maternity Leave**

It is generally accepted that mothers require time off work in the period immediately surrounding childbirth to protect their health and the health of their child (Robeyns, 2012). In line with this principle, under Fair Work Australia employers may ask pregnant employees to provide medical certification if they continue to work within six weeks prior to or following birth (Fair Work Ombudsman, 2009). Therefore it is not surprising that the majority of universities (n=28, 75.7 percent) did provide a portion of dedicated maternity leave. However, the amount of dedicated maternity leave varied between these universities. So, for example, while some universities (n=5) provided six weeks dedicated maternity leave (in line with the Fair Work principle), others dedicated up to 36.8 weeks solely for use of the birth mother. The average duration of dedicated maternity leave was 16.2 weeks. The case study university included six weeks’ maternity leave.

**Primary Caregiver Leave**

Primary caregiver leave was included as an entitlement that either a) was provided directly the mother and could be shared with her partner if s/he was also employed by the university or b) was a universal entitlement given to all parents, regardless of their partner’s employment. The majority of parental leave policies included primary caregiver leave (n=25, 67.6 percent). Among universities
that provided primary caregiver leave, the duration of leave ranged from four weeks (n=1, 4 percent) to 36 weeks (n=2, 8 percent). The average duration of primary caregiver leave was 20 weeks. In all but one case where primary caregiver leave was a universal entitlement, the total amount of leave could not exceed the stated entitlement for one employee. In one university, however, when both parents were employed by the university both could avail of their full entitlement. The case study university provided 20 weeks’ primary caregiver leave.

Universities were categorised as having ‘token’, ‘common’ or ‘progressive’ leave provisions, based on the duration of leave. These categories were utilised by Baird et al to refer to the generosity of provision of parental leave (Baird, Frino, et al., 2009), with token provision referring to provision that represented a ‘gesture of goodwill … rather than a standard period of paid leave’ (Baird, Frino, et al., 2009, p.683), common referring to leave provisions that are in line with ‘general paid maternity leave entitlements’, ranging from four weeks to 12 weeks (Baird, Frino, et al., 2009, p.684) and progressive referring to ‘more generous monetary entitlements’ and leave ranging from 12 weeks to 26 weeks or more (Baird, Frino, et al., 2009, p.684). I use an adapted version of Baird et al’s classification of leave generosity. As I am concerned only with an examination of the duration of leave in the context of Australian universities I apply the typology as follows: universities that provide less than the 26 week standard leave entitlement that is evident across the sector are defined as ‘token’; those that provide the generally accepted standard of leave (26 weeks) are labelled ‘common’; and universities that provide more than 26 weeks’ leave are categorised as ‘progressive’. Using these categories, there are 13 universities (35.1 percent) that provided ‘token’, 16 (43.2 percent) that provided ‘common’, and eight (21.6 percent) that provided ‘progressive’ leave entitlements. The case study university fell into the ‘common’ category.

**Pre-natal and Return to Work Entitlements**

While a number of universities allowed employees to use personal leave or special leave for the purposes of pre-natal appointments or sickness associated with pregnancy, only seven universities (18.9 percent) provided additional paid leave specifically intended for pre-natal appointments. Paid pre-natal leave ranged from two days to eight days, with an average of just under five days. The case study university provided five days pre-natal leave. Around two-thirds of universities (n=22, 59.5 percent) provided return to work assistance. Return to work assistance generally comprised of a number of weeks leave which could be used either as an extension to parental leave or as a method of re-entry to the workforce, including, for example, graduated return to work, career development opportunities or time release for conferences attendance. Assistance was either

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9 In cases where a university stipulated that there was a period of ‘compulsory’ maternity leave, the amount of primary caregiver leave has been reduced by that amount.
provided in addition to paid leave entitlements (n=14) or as a portion of leave that could be converted into a return to work entitlement (n=8). For universities that provided return to work assistance in addition to the leave entitlement, the average equivalent weeks’ leave was 8.4 weeks, ranging from one week to 18.4 weeks. The high proportion of universities that provide return to work assistance is consistent with findings by Baird et al. who found that return to work schemes were common in the higher education sector (Baird, Frino, et al., 2009).

The case study university did not outline any provisions for a return to work scheme in the collective agreement. The National Employment Standards (NES), as outlined in the Fair Work Act, make provisions for an entitlement to request flexible work arrangements on return to work following parental leave. The case study university’s statement on flexible work arrangements is closely aligned to the NES entitlement, providing an assurance that the university will endeavour to meet requests for flexibility and will only deny such requests on reasonable business grounds. The case study university does, however, exceed the basic entitlement inscribed in the NES by stating that where it is not possible to provide part-time work in the person’s original role, an alternative position will be sought. A transfer period of 25 days applies within which an alternative position must be found. In cases where no position is found, the employee is expected to move back to their substantive position.

Figure 12 below shows the leave entitlement for each university, including pre-natal, maternity, primary caregiver leave, and return to work. As illustrated, the majority of universities (n=19, 51.4 percent) provided 26 weeks leave, and all universities except one provided at least 26 weeks leave. These statistics are consistent with National Tertiary Education Union (NTEU) reports that universities provide at least the equivalent of 26 weeks’ leave to the primary caregiver (NTEU, 2008).

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10 For universities that allowed a portion of paid leave to be converted into a return to work scheme, the entitlement has been included in the main paid leave entitlement section, reflecting its primary classification as paid leave in the Enterprise Agreement.
In addition to the entitlement for the main caregiver, most universities provided a shorter leave period to partners. In fact only one university \(^{11}\) did not provide paid partner leave. The maximum entitlement was for four weeks leave (n=3, 8.1 percent). The majority of universities (n=17, 45.9 percent) provided two weeks paid partner leave. This figure is consistent with findings of recent research into the provision of paid parental leave in various industries in Australia (Baird, 2009; Baird, Frino, et al., 2009). The case study university provided two weeks’ paid partner leave.

The discussion above illustrates that while entitlements varied across the sector in terms of how leave was composed, there was not a huge variation in the overall duration of leave available. However, this is only one side of the coin. It is important not only to examine the duration of leave, but also the extent to which the model of leave is gendered (Ray, et al., 2010). Making leave available to both parents is an important way in which to enable both parents to maintain attachment to the workforce and also to be involved in the care of their children. It is thus a key factor in ensuring that parental leave can help achieve gender equity goals.

**Model of Leave Provision**

In addition to my classification of leave generosity into three categories, my research uncovered three distinct models of ‘gendered’ leave provisions within the university sector in Australia. These models vary in the extent to which they make implicit distinctions between ‘male and female,

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\(^{11}\) Another university allowed special leave to be used as partner leave and this was included in the parental leave clause.
masculine and feminine’ (Acker, 1990, p.146) roles. The first model of leave provision, entitled ‘Model A’, provides leave solely to the birth mother (n=11, 29.7 percent). This approach is consistent with a traditional gendered approach to the provision of parental leave, following the male-breadwinner/ female-carer model and assuming that mothers are the primary caregivers in all instances. Next, ‘Model B’ universities allow some or all of the leave entitlement to be shared between partners, but only when both are employed by the university (n=17, 45.9 percent). In these universities, the entitlement goes to the mother to share with her partner if she chooses to. Model B, while allowing leave to be shared between parents, also assumes the mother to be the primary caregiver and therefore maintains a gendered approach to provision, albeit somewhat less aligned with the traditional male-breadwinner perspective than Model A. Finally, ‘Model C’ universities provide primary caregiver entitlements to all employees, regardless of whether the birth mother is employed by the university (n=9, 24.3 percent). Although this is not a completely ‘gender balanced’ approach (as would be the case for example is every parent had an equivalent and non-transferable period of leave), these universities do to some extent challenge traditional gendered norms surrounding work and care by acknowledging more explicitly that both men and women can and do take on primary caregiving roles. Model C parental leave provisions have the greatest potential to address gender equity goals by providing opportunities to both mothers and fathers to participate in work and care.

Figure 13 below illustrates the composition of the three models of leave provision. Universities within each group are ordered from left to right based on duration of leave. As illustrated, the case study university provides the most common form of leave, ‘Model B’, which includes both maternity leave, reserved for the mother and primary caregiver leave, which can be shared between parents when both are employed by the university. The majority of universities (n=17, 45.9 percent) currently provide this moderately gendered model of leave. The case study university’s model of provision thus was thus unexceptional.12

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12 Reasons for variation in models of parental leave across the sector are beyond the scope of this analysis but are examined in Farrelly, B., & Whitehouse, G. (2013). Equality enabling parental leave: prevalence and distribution in Australian universities. Labour & Industry, 23(3), 245-257.
The Case Study University in Summary

Provision of paid parental leave in the case study university is broadly consistent with sector wide patterns. The combined entitlement to 27 weeks’ leave for the main caregiver in the case study university, including pre-natal, maternity and primary caregiver leave is slightly lower than the average 29.4 weeks across the sector. An examination of each of the elements of parental leave illustrates further how the case study university conforms to patterns of provision across the sector. With regard to maternity leave, the case study university’s parental leave policy includes a clause stating that there is an expectation that ‘a minimum period of six weeks leave will be taken by the employee member who gives birth immediately after the child’s date of birth’ *(Parental Leave Policy, Case Study University)*. This is significantly lower than the average across the sector of 16.2 weeks. In addition to the six week period of maternity leave, the case study university provides 20 weeks primary caregiver leave. This is consistent with the average duration of primary caregiver leave across the sector. The provision of five days pre-natal leave is slightly above the sector average. However, the university’s policy does not make provisions for a return to work scheme, which was common in other universities. The inclusion of two weeks’ partner leave also was in line with the sector average.

Examination of the model of provision indicates that the case study university conforms to the norm across the sector, providing a moderately gendered model of leave whereby leave can be shared between parents only when both are employed by the university. The university has moved beyond the most traditional model of provision, where leave is reserved solely for mothers, and goes some
way to recognising the role fathers play in caregiving. However there is room for further moves towards a less traditionally gendered parental leave policy.

While this discussion indicates that parental leave provision in the case study university is gendered, this descriptive account does little to explain why the university has adopted the model that is currently in place and what the implications might be for gender equity in work and care. It has been argued that when policies are introduced ‘for symbolic rather than substantive reasons’ they may not be implemented properly and therefore fail to achieve their targets (Blair-Loy & Wharton, 2002, p.816). Therefore, if the rationale that has shaped policy is not congruent with the goal of family-adaptiveness then it is unlikely that it will be achieved. The next section comprises an in-depth examination of parental leave policy development in the case study university, which explores how gendering processes have influenced the rationale behind policy provision and implications for family-adaptiveness.

**Development of Parental Leave Policy in the Case Study University**

The discussion that follows examines key events in recent enterprise negotiations that have significantly shaped the case study university’s parental leave policy. I examine negotiations over a) the duration of leave and b) the model of leave adopted. I examine in particular the role senior management has played in influencing the extent to which parental leave policy is gendered and identify potential strategies for the adoption of a more gender equitable model of leave in future enterprise negotiations. I draw on interviews conducted with key actors involved in these negotiations, including two trade union officials, a senior equity and diversity manager, a senior HR manager and three unit managers within the HR department. As mentioned earlier, a detailed examination of return to work entitlements is outside the scope of this chapter.

Interview findings suggested that motivations underlying the development of parental leave provisions were complex: while particular arguments were put forward to support the model of leave provided, an in-depth examination revealed that underlying motivations may not have matched the rhetoric that was put forward by management. The first major issue that emerged related to the stated rationales senior management put forward for policy provision. I illustrate how a combination of business case, social justice and institutional factors interacted to influence parental leave policy development. While senior management stressed the business case and social justice motivations for policy provision, I argue that how these factors influenced policy development was largely dependent on senior management’s underlying concern about resource constraints. Therefore, a narrow business focus (centring on the costs rather than the benefits of such policies) was the key driver in shaping policy. I apply the gendering lenses of ‘formal policies
and processes’ and ‘images, symbols language and rhetoric’ throughout my analysis of the development, implementation and evaluation of formal parental leave policy.

The second issue to be addressed related to how an unstated, imperceptible rationale – the deeply engrained gendered values of the university – has shaped university management’s approach to parental leave policy. Evidence suggests that senior management’s negotiating strategy in recent bargaining rounds has served to reproduce gendered policies. I examine this issue through the lens of the gendered understructure. Following this discussion I outline the implications for the achievement of a family-adaptive environment.

The ‘Narrow Business Focus’, Resource Constraints and Parental Leave Policy Development

Although business case, social justice and institutional concerns shaped policy development, none of these rationales was employed to their fullest extent by university management. I argue that underlying the adoption of these rationales, senior management’s narrow business focus – shaped by their concern about resource constraints and the bottom line – has been the prominent driver in shaping their approach to policy provision. The discussion that follows examines these issues in detail by focusing on the three common rationales underlying policy provision.

Social Justice – Rhetoric not Matched by Action

In recent years the case study university has had a reputation for having a strong social justice focus. In the past decade the university has been awarded the EOWA (Equal Opportunity for Women in the Workplace Agency) Employer of Choice for Women award a number of times and the university’s strategic plan identifies equity and diversity as one of its core principles. It was therefore expected that social justice concerns would strongly influence policy. Contrary to expectations, university management did not seem to be motivated by social justice concerns and there was no evidence of senior management actively pursuing improvements to parental leave policy. A key point of entry through which organisations are gendered is ‘images, symbols, language and rhetoric’. I argue that rhetoric can be used to reinforce, challenge or mask gendering processes in organisations. My analysis below illustrates how, in the case study university, social justice rhetoric was used to mask the underlying rationale for policy provision and problems with policy provision which could serve to reinforce gender equality.

While senior management placed little emphasis on ‘social justice’ in the bargaining process, social justice arguments were often adopted in a post-hoc fashion to promote the university’s equity and diversity credentials. This is highlighted in the university’s initial opposition to increasing leave and the strategy they subsequently adopted following the trade union’s success in pushing through the
increase in leave to 26 weeks via a nationally coordinated campaign. The Equity and Diversity Manager noted that when the university increased the entitlement it then used its provision of 26 weeks’ parental leave as a key selling point for the university:

*I know the University was very resistant to 26 weeks, but when they did agree to it they made it... a point of difference, like 'we are an employer of choice, we provide 26 weeks paid parental leave'. It's one of the few things that they would talk about when they were advertising for jobs. So once they did agree to it they really pushed it as something like 'look what we are doing'.* (Tania, Senior Equity and Diversity Manager, 3rd May 2012)

As the previous section has outlined, primary caregiver leave in the case study university can only be shared between parents when both are employed by the university. One HR manager noted:

*There is an odd anomaly in the policy which says that if the parental leave is to be shared between the two parents unless both parents are working at [the university] then one of the parents can't get it for the full period, it's an odd anomaly. In EBA [enterprise bargaining agreement] negotiations last time it was tried to take that out but it was unsuccessful.* (John, Library Services HR Manager, 19th November 2012)

The university’s reluctance to extend primary caregiver leave to include all parents (regardless of whether the mother is employed by the university) is further evidence of the lack of focus on social justice. A trade union representative highlighted the university’s opposition to the change:

*...the university was willing to agree to splitting the 26 weeks between the birth mother... and someone who was primary caregiver other than the birth mother, but only if both partners worked at [the case study university]. So that issue we weren't able to overcome in the last round...* (Richard, Trade Union Branch Manager, 19th March 2012)

From a social justice perspective, ensuring both parents have equitable access to leave should be a key consideration. Failing to provide this seems to go against the university’s identity as an organisation that places equity in employment as a key strategic goal. Acker notes how organisational rhetoric can obscure gender inequalities and that portraying an image of the organisation as an abstract, gender neutral arrangement of jobs...

*‘plays an ideological role in both obscuring gender and in embedding an image of a male worker or manager in assumptions about how organisations should be put together’* (Acker, 1999, p.182).
In the case study university the provision of ‘primary caregiver’ leave and the associated family friendly rhetoric masks the fact that the policy is gendered, appearing on the surface to apply to both parents.

The absence of a social justice focus is further illustrated in the university’s approach to one particular professional development policy targeted specifically at parents. At the time the interviews were conducted the university had in place a fund to provide professional development opportunities to those with caring responsibilities. However there was an acute lack of awareness of the policy amongst interview respondents. When it was put to a manager in the office for equity and diversity that there was limited awareness about the program, she stated:

No they’re not aware of it because it's got hardly any money in it... because it is not funded properly... if the University was to let everybody know about it I think the implications would be tens of thousands of dollars and the fund doesn't have that - I think it's only got about five thousand or something. So we really need to re-think that and have a look at that... (Tania, Senior Equity and Diversity Manager, 3rd May 2012)

Similarly, the Computing Centre HR manager mentioned how although the policy was in place there was little knowledge about how it operated:

...there was something on the website about training for people returning from maternity leave, so equity has obviously put that in place and said ‘this would be lovely’ but nobody has actually looked at if people are doing it. (Janice, Computing Centre HR Manager, 5th March 2012)

As mentioned previously, if policies are introduced for symbolic reasons and are not fully supported they are unlikely to be successful. In the case of this particular policy – which looked good on paper but was ineffective in practice – it seems that the social justice rhetoric was not matched with any concrete investment. This highlights how ‘images, symbols language and rhetoric’ can be used to mask gendering processes in organisations. It also illustrates how even when policies are in operation, resource constraints can limit their effectiveness.

The evidence above illustrates how social justice concerns have a limited influence on the university’s approach to parental leave policy. Acker states that the formulation of equal opportunity policies and procedures, rather than leading to gender equality, may allow organisations to claim that inequalities do not exist (Acker, 1999). Therefore the presence of policies which may appear comprehensive does not equate to the achievement of equality. The findings suggest that some policies in the case study university were tokenistic and ineffective to the extent that the level

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13 This has since been rescinded.
of investment was inadequate to achieve their stated objectives. This supports the contention that the university is concerned with profitability and competitiveness above gender equality outcomes. If the key concern of policy provision is to promote gender equality it is necessary to be explicit about why and how the policies seek to address equality so that they can be implemented correctly. In the case study university, the rhetoric of gender equality was not mirrored in a concrete way in policy provision.

**Institutional Pressures – The Power of a Strong Trade Union**

The significant resistance at the senior management level to improvements in parental leave entitlements indicates that other factors were at play in pushing policy development. Acker states that ‘Managers in organisations may alter their procedures in response to outside pressures, such as Affirmative Action requirements, laws on parental leave, or … labour union demands’ (Acker, 1999, p.180). My research suggested that this was the case and that institutional pressures, rather than an overt ‘social justice’ concern on behalf of management, were stronger drivers for policy development. Institutional drivers included (i) pressure to meet standards set in other universities, (ii) the significant impact of the sector-wide trade union movement that organised around the principle of achieving equal minimum standards across all Australian universities, and to a lesser extent (iii) the oversight of the office for equity and diversity.

A trade union official indicated how the case study university was incentivised to increase leave to 26 weeks in order to meet gender equity expectations and ‘to live up to their policies on social equity and opportunity and equal opportunity’ (Richard, Trade Union Branch Manager, 19th March 2012). Similarly, an HR manager noted how the University ‘has a self-interest in assisting with these arrangements as much as possible and it’s a community expectation’ (Brian, Library Services HR Manager, 19th November 2012). One trade union representative noted how the ‘standard’ of 26 weeks had already been achieved in other universities and that the case study university was under pressure to conform to this norm:

> It was partly the strength of the unions’ coordinated bargaining strategy, that once we'd established a standard in one University other universities were challenged to meet that standard. (Richard, Trade Union Branch Manager, 19th March 2012)

The manager for equity and diversity also highlighted the important role the union played in achieving 26 weeks leave, in the face of significant resistance from senior management:

> ... the unions had a huge part to play in the... gaining of the 26 weeks; that would not have happened without the union: I know that for a fact... Having that push coming from the
union was very important because I know the University was very resistant to 26 weeks.

(Tania, Senior Equity and Diversity Manager, 3rd May 2012)

The university’s office for equity and diversity also played an indirect role in influencing university management’s stance on parental leave, particularly in the early stages of bargaining for parental leave. The office for equity and diversity was instrumental in organising a symposium on balancing work and family, which offered opportunities for women to speak about their experiences. The equity and diversity manager stated that the symposium was ‘really effective’ in bringing the issues to the attention of management.

However, evidence suggested that moves towards corporatisation or the increasingly ‘economistic and managerial ethos’ (Currie, et al., 2000, p.269) that has resulted in part from decreased public funding across the sector has led to a decreased influence of the office for equity and diversity on policy development. The manager from the office for equity and diversity noted how the office took a step back from dealing with instances of sexual harassment and gender equality issues to take on an oversight role, becoming more closely aligned with the university’s broad strategic function:

Just to clarify our role, we have a purely strategic role and not an operational role, we no longer handle complaints of sexual harassment but what we do do is that we coordinate the discrimination and harassment contact officer network and we do do a lot of that awareness raising... but we don't actually manage grievances. (Tania, Senior Equity and Diversity Manager, 3rd May 2012)

The hands-off ‘awareness raising’ approach to equality and diversity has been criticised for its failure to tackle real problems with real solutions. For example, with regard to the ‘valuing diversity’ rhetoric, it is argued that ‘there is no evidence that simply recognising something as valuable will make it so’ (Ely & Meyerson, 2000b, p.109).

In the case study university, the role of the office for equity and diversity has changed in recent years, as gender equity has become packaged with other issues relating to equity and diversity. Scholars have noted the analytical difference between ‘equal employment opportunity’ and ‘diversity management’ (Burgess, French, & Strachan, 2010; Strachan, Burgess, & Sullivan, 2004, p.200). For example, Pringle et al state that:

…they are underpinned by two different rationales: ‘equal opportunities’ by the social justice (or moral) case and ‘managing diversity’ by the business case. (Pringle, Konrad, & Greene, 2009)

Equal Opportunity (EO) practitioners face difficulties in addressing both issues simultaneously, as they ‘exist in a position of uneasy tension’ within diversity discourses (Pringle, et al., 2009, p.299).
Organisational resource constraints also put added pressure on EO practitioners. Discussion with the equity and diversity manager echoed the argument made by Pringle et al., revealing how the office aimed to strike a balance between the business concerns of the organisation and the welfare of employees:

...we work gently with and against the University at the same time to try and have change. And so it can't be our role [to advocate for employees] if we are sort of up against the University, because we are part of it, we've got to work with the people. (Tania, Senior Equity and Diversity Manager, 3rd May 2012)

The effect of the issues discussed above is that the equity and diversity office has become less well placed to police gender equity issues, as the balance of responsibility has shifted to individuals and to the trade unions to a larger extent.

The discussion above highlights how the university has been reluctant to bring about improvements in parental leave and that the impetus for the improvements thus far has largely come from trade unions. I now go on to explore the driving force behind the university’s policy stance. I argue that senior management’s adoption of a very narrow business focus, combined with ideological beliefs about the role of parental leave, has shaped the university’s approach to policy provision.

**The Business Case – A Narrow and Short-term Focus**

While it is common for organisations to employ business case arguments in their approach to the provision of parental leave entitlements, in the case study university management took a very narrow focus, emphasising resource-pressures and largely disregarding the potential long-term benefits. Discussions with senior HR indicated that there was an explicit business approach to the provision of parental leave entitlements:

It’s a competitive environment so I am looking at it from a business sense. From a female and a male perspective who are having children, they might have a notion of what would be useful for them in terms of whatever we can provide, but I guess I am just looking at it from... we need to get employees here; I need this to be at a competitive advantage. (Angela, Senior HR Manager, 26th Oct 2011)

The quote above suggests that profitability and competitiveness took precedence over concerns about employee outcomes and echoes Acker’s contention that organisations are ‘lean, mean, aggressive, goal oriented, efficient and competitive but rarely empathetic, supportive, kind and caring’ (Acker, 1992b, p.253). The preeminence of the business perspective – and particularly a narrow view that prioritised resource constraints – is further evidenced in discussions about the university’s stance on parental leave in recent enterprise bargaining. As mentioned previously, the
university was strongly opposed to an increase in duration of leave and their resistance was generally framed in terms of business arguments.

According to a trade union representative, university management was concerned with ensuring that it did not give too many concessions and parental leave was in effect seen as one of a range of bargaining chips that had to be weighed up against one another.

> There was a sense, well you know, that management didn’t want to give us more than they needed to on anything and anything was going to become ‘well, you know, if we do this what are you going to do?’. We often hear this idea that this was about, you know, a quid pro quo whereby if University management give a benefit to a staff then the union would have to be willing to give something up in exchange. (Richard, Trade Union Branch Manager, 19th March 2012)

The trade union’s perspective on the bargaining process differed significantly from that of senior management:

> But we were trying to argue that this wasn’t an appropriate way to look at it: that rather than constructing it as a zero sum game – whereby management give something and then we therefore have to lose something – that this is about making... the University providing the best conditions it can afford to its staff to help attract and retain the best staff and the best working environment. (Richard, Trade Union Branch Manager, 19th March 2012)

The comment above illustrates how both business and social justice concerns influenced the union’s approach to bargaining. The union recognised both the need to meet the university’s needs as well as those of employees. In contrast, university management’s ‘zero sum’ approach to negotiations indicates a focus which is strongly based on resources and how they can be best allocated.

Evidence suggested that particular individuals at the senior management level who were opposed to increasing leave duration had a significant effect on the stance taken to parental leave negotiations. In particular, it was noted that opposition from an ‘old guard male HR director’ was a significant stumbling block. After leave duration was increased this manager ‘privately complained that a female PVC gave in too easily on it’ (Richard, Trade Union Branch Manager, 19th March 2012). It was also noted how, in instances where there was opposition to policies, there was ‘potential for… recalcitrant HR people to exercise a drag on the implementation side’ (Richard, Trade Union Branch Manager, 19th March 2012). This indicates that individuals in powerful positions can have a significant influence on the ways in which policies develop and are implemented. The perception of the trade union officials that I interviewed was that a subsequent HR director was more amenable to increasing the duration of leave and to issues relating to work-family balance more generally,
although the trade union did still face an uphill battle in attempting to bring about other improvements to parental leave.

One trade union representative discussed how the university used business grounds as a reason for opposing the sharing of leave:

_There was this sort of attitude that the University is very focused on their bottom line and this will cost us and this is... possibly cross-subsidising benefits to people who are employed elsewhere. For example... if the birth mother is working for another organisation that doesn't provide the 26 weeks that the University provided but other employers didn't at that time, then the University was just sort of cross subsidising another employer’s child-care arrangements or something if the partner who worked at [the case study university] took over the primary carer giving role._ (Richard, Trade Union Branch Manager, 19th March 2012)

Similarly, the manager from the office for equity and diversity noted the failure of bargaining to achieve a more egalitarian model of provision, again emphasising the university’s opposition to the move on business grounds:

_They have not agreed to sharing the leave because they then feel like they are funding another organisation's leave so they have not agreed to that._ (Tania, Senior Equity and Diversity Manager, 3rd May 2012)

While the university’s stance on the extension of primary caregiver leave may be informed by business concerns and management could argue that their approach is not intentionally gendered, it nevertheless has gendered outcomes. Acker highlights how policies can have gendered outcomes, regardless of the intention they are informed by, as gendering processes are continually recreated when organisations ‘either by default or through intentional policy create caring needs as peripheral, invisible and someone else’s (women’s) responsibilities’ (Acker, 1998, p.202).

The contention that senior management’s approach is restricted by its narrow business focus and its concerns about potential financial implications is further evidenced in an examination of the evaluation processes for parental leave. Discussions with various stakeholders revealed little evidence of comprehensive evaluation of parental leave policies. A senior HR manager stated that while statistics were gathered about the numbers of staff who availed of leave entitlements, only ‘anecdotal feedback’ was available with regard to how well leave entitlements met employees’ needs (Angela, Senior HR Manager, 26th Oct 2011). This echoes research that has shown that very few organisations had systematic processes for reviewing or assessing diversity action policies and initiatives (Burgess, et al., 2010; Charlesworth, et al., 2005; Charlesworth & Probert, 2005) and that
a lack of clearly stated goals or objectives makes it difficult to evaluate the success of diversity management plans (Strachan, et al., 2004). Discussions with one HR manager indicated that some policies that looked good on paper were not pursued with any great energy or enthusiasm:

...so there is never any, ‘here is a policy, can you now implement it and tell us if you have any issues or a problem with it and feed it back to us’, I don't really get the sense that they have the time or the energy to really care to that level. (Janice, Computing Centre HR Manager, 5th March 2012)

Evaluation of the success of parental leave policy was linked to return to work rates. Discussions with the senior HR manager indicated that maintaining high ‘return to work’ rates was important from a business perspective:

... that is an important business objective for us, so it's not just about being nice or it's the right thing to do, I think if you didn't get your head across this matter and didn't continuously look to see what you can do for your employees you are not going to run a good business. (Angela, Senior HR Manager, 26th Oct 2011)

There was a general perception among respondents that the university had a high return to work rate; one trade union official stated that while he didn’t have statistics he ‘would imagine’ that a lot of those who took leave returned to work (Kevin, Trade Union Branch Organiser, 19th March 2012). Similarly, the other trade union official stated that he thought the return to work figures would support the contention that longer leave resulted in better workforce attachment (Richard, Trade Union Branch Manager, 19th March 2012). The HR manager was more familiar with the statistics and said that the university:

… can proudly brag that... something like 94 percent of the women who go off to have kids or adopt kids return. (Angela, Senior HR Manager, 26th Oct 2011)

Return to work rates can be a useful indicator of the contribution of parental leave to on-going labour force participation and broader gender equality goals. However, it is important not only to focus on statistical data, but also on broader organisational supports for parents during the transition back to work, such as return to work schemes, which encourage parents to maintain meaningful attachment to the workforce (Brough, et al., 2009; Coulson, et al., 2010; Houston & Marks, 2003; Whitehouse, Romaniuk, Lucas, & Nicholson, 2012; Wiese & Heidemeier, 2012). While the university management had a keen interest in the return to work rate and was concerned with the need ‘to attract and retain good female employees’ (Richard, Trade Union Branch Manager, 19th March 2012), this was not followed through with any investment in formal return to work programs to ensure employees maintained connection to the workforce. Statistics from the office for equity
and diversity’s annual report show that in 2011, 118 female general staff availed of maternity leave and that 7 percent of these employees resigned while on leave, equating to a return to work rate of 93 percent. This rate surpasses the 89 percent return to work rate reported by the Diversity Council Australia in a survey of its member organisations (Diversity Council Australia, 2012), which are characterised as being Australia’s leading businesses in the area of diversity. However, in the case study university a further 10 percent of employees resigned within three months of return. This equates to a retention rate of 83 percent at three months following return (Office for Equity and Diversity Annual Report, 2012). This high rate of resignation following return to work is somewhat concerning and highlights the importance of putting structures and processes in place that encourage employees to retain their attachment to the workforce. As one respondent noted, employees often faced significant difficulties in reentering work:

...even though they have a longer period away they still have the same difficulties by and large when they come back. And it's partly this culture of ‘well this is a very high performance competitive environment and you just do the work, whatever needs to be done’... (Richard, Trade Union Branch Manager, 19th March 2012)

The lack of concern about the experience of returning to work is also evident in the response of the senior HR manager when asked whether there were any training or professional development opportunities for employees returning from leave, who stated ‘Oh, some options are offered and some places in the University do it better than others’ (Angela, Senior HR Manager, 26th Oct 2011). This indicates that return to work was managed at the local level, rather than being coordinated at the level of the university.

The dominance of the business case was summarised by Kevin, a trade union representative, who argued that while there might be a concern about gender equality there was little initiative within management to bring about change:

... senior managers will shed tears ... if you said that women are being denied their place in the work force because of the ... parenting policies, they would say that that's shocking, that we've got these skilled women who can't come back to work. But they don't want to actually... bear the costs of bringing them back to the workforce. (Kevin, Trade Union Branch Organiser, 19th March 2012)

The discussion above has shown that while business case, social justice and institutional rationales can be applied with various degrees of accuracy to an examination of policy development in the case study university, concern about the impact of policy changes on the university’s financial and other resources emerged as the key driver that shaped senior management’s approach to parental
leave policy. Thus, the approach senior management took to parental leave policy was predominantly shaped by a narrow business focus driven by a concern about resource constraints. There was no indication that senior management actively pursued reform to parental leave policy, despite the presence of social justice rhetoric in key university policy documents that refer to parental leave. Rather than coming about as a result of senior management’s initiative, significant pressure for improvements to parental leave policy came as a result of institutional pressure, predominantly from the trade union movement within the university. While positive business case arguments were used to justify the provision of entitlements it seemed that in reality a narrow business focus dominated, and there was little focus on actual measurement of business outcomes.

An important issue that follows from this finding is that the rationale behind the introduction of work-family policy may have implications for the extent to which policies successfully enable employees to combine work and caring roles. For example, research has indicated that when a business case rationale influences the introduction of policies, it is possible that costly options such as childcare may be sacrificed for less costly (and perhaps less effective) options (Whitehouse & Zetlin, 1999). Therefore it may be that when a very narrow business focus which focuses solely on short-term budget implications is adopted, the model of provision that emerges may not adequately meet employees’ needs. Later chapters will examine this issue through an investigation of the extent to which employees feel that the current model of provision in the case study university enables them to achieve work-family balance.

**The Gendered Understructure and Family-Adaptive Parental Leave**

Beyond business arguments, a concern for social justice, or any institutional pressures faced by the university, a fundamental resistance to the provision of gender egalitarian parental leave exists in the case study university. I argue that a ‘gendered understructure’ that sees women’s role as primary caregivers is important in shaping policy. Acker argued that a gendered understructure operates within organisations, indicating the deeply held assumptions about work held by the organisation and by wider society (Acker, 1990). The gendered understructure of organisation ‘links the more surface gender arrangements [points of entry] with the gender relations in other parts of the society’ (Acker, 1992b, p.259). Thus, the gendered understructure can be described as the ‘set of fundamental, ongoing processes that encompass and influence the other …[gendering] processes’ (Dye & Mills, 2006, p.11). In the discussion that follows I illustrate how both the gendered organisational logic and gender subtext in the case study university are evident in senior management’s stance on parental leave. As discussed in Chapter 2, the gendered organisational logic is evident in discourse used in the organisation while the gender subtext emerges through an examination of the implicit and explicit texts and subtexts in the organisation.
In the case study university, the gendered logic is based on a conceptualisation of family friendliness that sees caregiving as primarily the mother’s role. This has resulted in a parental leave policy that addresses gender equity concerns to a moderate degree, in that fathers have only limited access to leave. The discourse employed by senior management to oppose an increase to the duration of leave highlighted how gendered perceptions influenced their perspective. There was a perception that career ambition equated to working long hours and that career progression passed people by if they interrupted their careers to care for children:

There were people in senior management who didn't realise how hard it was for women lower down... and sometimes too even talking to women senior managers in the University, I mean some of these women had... already risen through the male power structures by being superwoman and having a family and a high-powered job and working ridiculous hours...But there was a bit of that attitude even from women executives that ‘oh well, this is a very... tough, competitive environment and if you're out of it for too long you don't catch up’, and we heard that from women as well as from men. (Richard, Trade Union Branch Manager, 19th March 2012)

The quote above illustrates how the gendered understructure governs workplace behaviour and regulates relationships between work and home (Acker, 1992b). There was a perception amongst managers that in order to succeed (in terms of career progression) in the organisation it was necessary to act as the ‘disembodied’ worker, free from obligations outside of work. The assumption that work has ‘first claim’ on the worker and that work and life are separate spheres is the foundation of the gendered understructure (Acker, 1992b, p.255).

As with the debate surrounding the introduction of 26 weeks’ paid parental leave, there was again evidence of subtle gendered influences on policy development. A trade union official stated that the business case that management put forward to oppose primary caregiver leave was in fact a ‘fallback argument’ (Richard, Trade Union Branch Manager, 19th March 2012). Instead, the impression this respondent got was that senior management could not comprehend why a male employee would want to avail of a policy that they perceived to be solely for the benefit of mothers:

I think initially it was some of the men... they had difficulty getting their heads around the very concept that somebody other than the birth mother could be the primary caregiver. I think some people have a conceptual difficulty with that. (Richard, Trade Union Branch Manager, 19th March 2012)

There appeared to be an ‘attitudinal issue’ that if fathers availed of leave they would be ‘getting some kind of extra benefit that they mightn't really be entitled to’ (Richard, Trade Union Branch
Manager, 19th March 2012). Senior management’s approach to bargaining for parental leave thus suggests an organisational logic which is based on the traditional male-breadwinner model.

Examination of the parental leave policy document illustrates how gendering processes can subtly operate through a policy that on the surface appears gender neutral. As previously discussed, the policy discusses leave for the ‘primary caregiver’, which implies that the carer can be either parent. However, the gender subtext of the policy implies that the primary caregiver is in fact the birth mother. Additionally, while the policy is focused on enabling women to spend time with their children as the ‘appropriate’ caregivers, it does not place similar emphasis on enabling mothers to make a smooth transition back to work or to pursue career progression after motherhood. Similarly, the work-family preferences of fathers are largely ignored.

While senior management took a gendered approach to policy provision and the dominant discourse appeared to centre on the ideal worker norm, there was some evidence that trade union activism and the voices of individuals within the organisation who were struggling with work-family balance helped to slowly shift gendered attitudes by introducing alternative discourses around work and care. Speaking about a local symposium on work family balance, one trade union representative stated that ‘it was quite an eye-opener for lots of people’:

*There were women in tears when they stood up and talked about their experiences about how hard it was to return to work after three months off, and the lack of adequate breastfeeding facilities, and just... the lack of adjustment for people coming back and wanting to have staggered hours and so on. And I think that sort of helped us quite a bit in shifting management attitudes when it came to going from 12 weeks to 26 weeks. (Richard, Trade Union Branch Manager, 19th March 2012)*

The equity and diversity manager also noted the impact of the symposium on shifting gendered attitudes. She stated that it was ‘really effective’ in bringing these issues to the attention of senior managers, including the HR director and Pro Vice-Chancellor:

*they got to hear directly from mostly women – and there were some men there – about their experiences of parental leave. And that I think had a profound effect, because there were some pretty emotional people there, talking about their experiences. And I think while our office could say things, when they actually heard from someone it made a difference: hearing from the person and seeing the emotion – it certainly made a difference to the people involved. (Tania, Senior Equity and Diversity Manager, 3rd May 2012)*

The comments above indicate that although the gendered understructure shaped policy, when sufficient pressure was exerted from below, it was possible to change senior management’s thinking.
on these issues and thus potentially alter the gendered understructure. Acker notes that change is often difficult due to the fact that ‘managerial interests and the power of those interests can mobilise, usually outweigh the interests of those who suffer inequality’ (Acker, 2009, p.212). In order to challenge gendering processes it is important that there is a significant social movement pushing for change, which has support both outside and within the organisation (Acker, 2006b). In the case study university, the external pressure caused by trade union activism across the sector supported by the mobilisation of individuals within the university was necessary to challenge management’s gendered attitudes.

**Discussion and Conclusions**

A family-adaptive organisation promotes a work environment in which those with caring responsibilities can excel both in their professional and personal lives. It is imperative that adequate structures and processes are put in place that guide and enable managers and employees to successfully achieve this goal. The provision of formal policies which facilitate the reconciliation of work and family life thus is a key issue which needs to be considered. This chapter has provided a comprehensive analysis of parental leave policy provision in the case study university, examining the potential for the current policy to contribute to a family-adaptive environment. I have provided a detailed overview of current leave entitlements and the senior management level factors that have contributed to the development of the current policy, focusing specifically on the role of key stakeholders in shaping how policies are conceptualised, developed and evaluated. The findings revealed that the case study university’s provision of parental leave is largely characteristic of provision across the sector. It could be argued that from this perspective the case study university has similar potential to achieve a family-adaptive environment as many other universities in the sector. However, this is not a sufficient indicator of family-adaptiveness, as this chapter has shown.

A key contention put forward in this chapter was that rationale underpinning policy provision would have implications for the extent to which policy could contribute towards family-adaptiveness, with a social justice rationale likely to bolster and business case approach likely to undermine family-adaptiveness. My findings revealed how various, often conflicting, factors affected policy provision and implementation, with concerns about profitability and competitiveness crucial drivers in shaping policy. Discussions with HR representatives and the equity and diversity manager revealed a significant strategic focus with regard to the provision of leave entitlements, where the emphasis was on attracting and retaining staff. The prominence of the business case was evident in enterprise bargaining where, according to respondents, senior management was predominantly concerned with ‘the bottom line’ and viewed parental leave as a bargaining chip to be pitched against other workplace entitlements. This was particularly evident in the university’s stance on increasing
parental leave from 12 to 26 weeks. The university management’s arguments against increasing the leave were largely centered on the financial burden of such a policy and when the university management did concede to increasing leave, evidence from the interviews indicated that this was predominantly due to pressure to conform to standards already set in the sector, rather than as a result of an intrinsic concern with gender egalitarianism. The increased leave was then used as a selling point and cornerstone of the university’s egalitarian image. The emphasis on business strategy also extended to the return to work phase, where the primary concern was on maintaining a high return to work rate. The lack of resources allocated to the evaluation of the extent to which parental leave and return to work programs meet employee needs is another indication of the prioritisation of budgeting concerns over employee outcomes.

I illustrated how senior management’s approach to parental leave policy is ultimately guided by a narrow business case focus, which emphasises the short-term costs, but not the long-term benefits, of improvements to parental leave. A consequence of this approach is that investment in work-family entitlements is limited and as a result some aspects of the policies are not adequate to meet employees’ needs. I contend that resource constraints have been the predominant driving force influencing policy development, which is illustrated in senior management’s use of these kinds of arguments as a way to justify their opposition to both a) an increase in duration of leave and b) the extension of primary caregiver leave to all parents. While the university’s provision of parental leave is framed in terms of social justice concerns and while university portrays an image of being concerned with gender equity, evidence suggests that social justice motivations have only played a small part in influencing policy provision. Where social justice concerns are evident, these motivations were strongly entangled with strategic business motivations. I contend that recent improvements to parental leave policy have resulted from pressure to conform to accepted standards across the university sector, rather than being actively pursued by the university. Trade union activism has played a particularly important role in bringing about improvements to parental leave entitlements over the past number of years.

The second issue I examined was how the gendered understructure has shaped the organisational conceptualisation of ‘family friendliness’. The findings indicated that, the gendered understructure in the case study university was based on traditional understandings about the roles of women and men, with family friendliness informed by a logic that sees caring role as predominantly the mother’s responsibility. Gendered conceptualisations of the purpose of parental leave policy led to a policy design that reinforces the male-breadwinner/ female-carer norm. The structure of leave entitlements, whereby the majority of leave is reserved for the mother (except in cases where both parents are employed by the university) means that it is likely that mothers will continue to take on
primary caregiving roles and thus militates against gender equitable patterns of work and care. This is supported by the earlier discussion on the development of current parental leave policy, where senior management were strongly opposed to extending primary caregiver leave to fathers and had ‘conceptual difficulties’ in understanding why the mother might not be the primary caregiver. The perspective taken by the trade union to negotiations on parental leave contrasted with management’s perspective, whereby the concern was with outcomes for employees in terms of gender equity rather than business concerns. These findings support the proposition put forward at the start of this chapter that the organisation’s underlying ideology (viewed through Acker’s lens of the gendered understructure) would have implications for the extent to which parental leave policy is family-adaptive, with an ideology based on male-breadwinner norm likely to limit possibilities for family-adaptiveness.

Senior management’s stance on parental leave in recent bargaining rounds has served to reproduce gendered policies and reinforce the gendered understructure. The reliance on a narrow business focus in policy provision coupled with an organisational logic based on the male-breadwinner/female-carer model means that policy cannot comprehensively address gender equity goals and hence contribute effectively to the development of a family-adaptive environment. I therefore argue that the approach management has until now taken to parental leave provision is not conducive to the creation of a family-adaptive environment. A gendered approach to policy provision at the senior management level may also have broader implications, for example by influencing policy implementation in specific work units. While a policy may be designed with the aim of achieving particular outcomes (e.g. gender equality), gendered messages which are filtered down to middle managers may influence how they implement policy. I contend that policies may have a greater chance of success in achieving gender equality if there is a genuine social justice impetus for their introduction and the logic underlying their introduction is based on gender equity, rather than being based on traditional gendered conceptualisations of family friendliness.

While the discussion above paints a somewhat depressing picture, I contend that there is room for cautious optimism in the case study university. While resource constraints and the gendered understructure influence policy development, it is possible to alter and transform gendered processes and the gendered understructure over time (Acker, 1998). Senior management play a key role in this process, through a) the strategies they employ to manage resource constraints and b) the logic they adopt to provision. Through these processes senior managers have the potential to lead to the development of a family-adaptive environment. Discussions with union representatives who have been involved in various bargaining rounds highlighted how small but significant gains were

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14 Based on parental leave provisions as outlined in the Collective Agreement current at December 2012.
made over time and how personnel changes at the senior management level have resulted in different approaches to bargaining which may be more conducive to extending support for parents and achieving more gender egalitarian outcomes. Additionally, the discussion has highlighted that individuals in key positions, including management, HR and trade unions play an important role in determining how family-adaptive the organisation is.

While policy development is important in shaping family-adaptiveness, it is also important to examine the role individuals at different levels within the organisation play in shaping family-adaptiveness through policy implementation and uptake. It has been argued that in order to facilitate organisational change, there is a need to move beyond policy formulation and implementation towards ‘systemic changes in workplace structures, cultures, and practices’ (Lewis & Humbert, 2010, p.349). Efforts to bring about organisational change will be more successful ‘when structural and cultural supports are integrated and linked in the organisational social system’ (Kossek, et al., 2010, p.5). A key issue to consider in this context is how the gendering of formal policy filters down to managers in their implementation of policies and to employees in their uptake of entitlements. These issues will be examined in the following two chapters. Chapter 5 focuses on the role middle managers play in implementing policy and the extent to which they are informed by formal policy (or have the potential to implement less formal arrangements). Chapter 6 then examines how employees contribute to the development of a family-adaptive workplace by challenging gendered organisational practices.
Chapter 5: Managing from the middle: Organisational context, conflicting identities and gendered approaches to parental leave policy implementation

Introduction

This chapter focuses on the second level of analysis outlined in the conceptual framework, namely the role of middle managers in creating family-adaptive environments. My overall aim in the chapter is to provide insight into the complex array of factors that influence managers in the decisions they make regarding policy implementation across the parental leave process and the consequences of these decisions for family-adaptiveness. I examine how managers respond to the competing pressures they face in attempting to simultaneously meet their obligations to the university and to staff. In particular, I explore how managers straddle the line between implementing the organisation’s formal policy and instigating informal workplace practices to best meet staff needs. In the previous chapter I outlined how the organisation’s underlying gendered logic strongly influenced senior managers’ approaches to parental leave policy development. In contrast, in this chapter I argue that middle managers, being somewhat removed from the central operation of the university, are more likely to be influenced by their own identity as manager/parent in their implementation of parental leave policy.

Drawing on the conceptual framework discussed in Chapter 2, I focus in particular on the ways in which family-adaptiveness can be fostered (or hindered) through two gendering processes: informal work practices, norms and patterns of work (Ely & Meyerson, 2000b) and formal interactions (Acker, 1990, 1992b, 1999; Britton & Logan, 2008; Ely & Meyerson, 2000b). Acker states that interactions in the workplace occur in a ‘multiplicity of forms that enact dominance and subordination and create alliances and exclusions’ (Acker, 1992b, p.253). In this chapter I examine how middle managers can reinforce or contest gendering processes through their interactions with subordinates, and what implications this has for family-adaptiveness. I illustrate how contrasting approaches managers take to informal work practices and interactions can result in gendered outcomes for employees. As discussed, specific aspects of the parental leave process are examined in each of the analytic chapters. In this chapter I examine these gendering processes specifically as they relate to middle managers’ implementation of parental leave policy and the management of return to work.

Middle managers deal with the day to day implementation of organisational policy and thus have a significant influence over staff members’ experiences of parental leave and their subsequent return
to work. However, despite recognition of the important role played by managers in developing family supportive workplaces (Brough, et al., 2009; Brunetto, et al., 2010; Lapierre, et al., 2008), much of the research surrounding supportive work environments to date has relied on accounts given by employees (Allen, 2001; Cook, 2009) while little attention is given to managers’ perspectives on the extent to which they perceive themselves to be supportive. Thus we know little about managers’ own conceptualisations of supportiveness and about the factors that determine how supportive managers can (or want to) be. Two issues in particular which have been neglected in the literature are a) the influence of organisational context on managerial supportiveness and b) how managers’ identities influence their personal approaches to work-family management.

With regard to the first gap in knowledge, I address both the impact of the gendered composition of workplaces and organisational resource constraints on family-adaptiveness. I examine the extent to which family-adaptiveness is associated with the gendered characteristics of particular occupational groups (i.e. gender breakdown and gendered perceptions about work). Previous research has shown that female-dominated work environments are more likely to be supportive than male-dominated work environments (Glauber, 2011). Therefore the first proposition I put forward in this chapter is that the gendered nature of employment in particular occupational groups will have implications for the level of family-adaptiveness, with an expectation that female-dominated occupations will be more likely to be family-adaptive than male-dominated occupations.

I also examine how work unit resources (in terms of staff size, function and work patterns) play a role in influencing family-adaptiveness. My review of the literature has not uncovered research that examines how budgeting and staffing restrictions mandated by the organisation may limit the options middle managers can offer to staff members to enable them to balance work and home responsibilities at the time around childbirth. In this chapter I aim to address this gap in knowledge by examining how organisational and work unit resource constraints influence managers in their implementation of policy. The second contention I put forward is that organisational context, in terms of resources such as personnel, job types and patterns of work, will influence the extent to which managers can foster family-adaptive work environments.

With regard to the second gap in knowledge identified above, the managerial literature has generally ‘lumped together’ managers as an homogeneous group and has neglected to examine how managers can differ in the choices they make regarding work-family policy implementation (Linstead & Thomas, 2002; Thomas & Davies, 2002; Thomas & Linstead, 2002). Little is known about why, regardless of organisational context, some managers are perceived as supportive while others are not. I argue that managers can differ significantly in their approaches to policy implementation and that these differences relate to the salience of their managerial and parental
identities. While a significant body of literature has developed around the concept of managerial identity, only a small body of research has empirically examined how managers cope with their own multiple, sometimes conflicting, identities in the workplace (Clarke, et al., 2009; Linstead & Thomas, 2002; Sveningsson & Alvesson, 2003). The third key argument put forward in this chapter is that the salience of managers’ managerial and parent identities influences their approach to the parental leave process, with managers who have a salient parent identity more likely to adopt a gender equitable approach to policy implementation and thus more likely to contribute towards the development of a family-adaptive work environment.

The discussion is based predominantly on interviews carried out with middle managers. The interviews explored how middle managers coordinated the parental leave process, from the point when a staff member informed them about a planned absence on parental leave, through the leave period and following their return to work. The discussions focused in particular on formal interactions between managers and employees regarding the uptake of parental leave as well as the informal practices (including informal work arrangements and patterns of work, training and up-skilling opportunities) that were in place in to manage the parental leave process in specific occupational groups. The way in which these formal interactions and informal practices was approached by management was a key factor influencing family-adaptiveness.

The chapter draws on qualitative interviews with 28 respondents in total. The focus is primarily on eight managers who participated in the research. This consisted of four female and four male managers. All but one of the managers who participated were parents themselves. The chapter also draws on interviews with some of the 13 employees who participated in the research as well as seven representatives from the equity and diversity office, HR and the largest trade union in the university.

The discussion below is comprised of three main sections. First I provide a brief discussion of the pivotal role middle managers play in implementing parental leave policy in the case study university, drawing on interviews with managers and employees in the case study university. Next, I focus on the two key factors that influence managers in their management of the parental leave process: first, organisational context and resource constraints within the work unit and second, managers’ personal approaches to parental leave management linked to their identity as manager and/or parent. Following the discussion I draw together some conclusions about how organisational context and managerial identity can influence managers in their approach to parental leave policy implementation and the management of the return to work phase.
Middle Managers and the Implementation of Parental Leave Policy

Managers play a central role in the gendering of organisations. As Acker states, ‘managers’ decisions often initiate gender divisions, and organisational practices maintain them’ (1990, p.146). Middle managers act as gatekeepers in determining access to parental leave entitlements and I argue that the approach managers take to ‘gatekeeping’ influences family-adaptiveness. In particular, managers can contribute to (or detract from) family-adaptiveness through their formal interactions with employees regarding parental leave policy as well as in the informal arrangements put in place for managing work and family.

A number of respondents noted how, regardless of what policies were in place, implementation practices at the local level were a key determinant of staff members’ access to entitlements. A senior HR manager stated:

- The policies are pretty. Whether people access them or not is what the real question is. (Angela, Senior HR Manager, 26th Oct 2011)

- I think generally it is [a family supportive environment] but obviously you know at the local level that you are always going to have some variations. (Janice, Computing Centre HR Manager, 5th March 2012)

The HR manager asserted that the university’s policies were comprehensive (at least on paper) and that difficulties in accessing entitlements were generally related to shortcomings in policy implementation. As discussed in the previous chapter, I argue that the rationale underpinning policy provision is gendered, thus limiting the possibilities for gender equitable uptake and outcomes. Therefore, while at a glance the policies may look ‘pretty’, an in-depth examination may reveal that they are not conducive to the development of a family-adaptive work environment. Nevertheless, it is also true that managerial discretion is also a key factor than can influence uptake. Echoing previous research (Brough & O'Driscoll, 2010; Brunetto, et al., 2010), a number of respondents noted that managers played a role in determining how accessible policies were. The findings suggested that a lack of understanding of policy may have impeded managers in offering some options to staff members:

- I think ... that we can always do more in terms of people understanding the policy. I think generally speaking that's an issue with [the university] as a whole; that we often have quite tidy policies but it's the implementation of the policy. (Tania, Senior Equity and Diversity Manager, 3rd May 2012)
However, even when middle managers were aware of policy intentions they could face difficulties in implementing policies in a way that suited staff members’ needs:

*I think the issue that most of us have struggled with, me included, [is] it's easy to say yes and it's hard to say no. And... saying no at an individual level is often required organisationally.* (Thomas, Library Services Manager, 6th December 2011)

The quote above encapsulates a sentiment that emerged a number of times through the interviews regarding the conflicts managers faced in balancing the work-family needs of staff with broader organisational goals. Organisational constraints sometimes meant that managers were prevented from granting staff requests for flexibility following parental leave even when they would like to do so. On the other hand, however, in some cases managers were resistant to implementing policies as they were intended:

*We are still running up against some of the same implementation issues at the local level around return to work. And... that is often hardest to capture in policy because the policy can say one thing and you have a manager who would say ‘I know what University policy is but this office wouldn’t work on that basis’. (Richard, Trade Union Branch Manager, 19th March 2012)*

*I think in terms of [the university] having policies and options in place for its employees then it is a... family friendly environment, very much so, but yes just making sure that everybody at the local level has that same philosophy is not always, it's not always easy.* (Janice, Computing Centre HR Manager, 5th March 2012)

The discussion above highlights the gap that exists between policy availability and accessibility, echoing research that has examined the conflict between the rhetoric of policy provision and reality of policy implementation (Pringle, et al., 2009) and the role of managerial discretion in interpreting and implementing policy (Brunetto, et al., 2010; Kirby & Krone, 2002) and in some cases sustaining the provision-utilisation gap (McDonald, Brown, et al., 2005).

While a variety of informal supports were available for parents following return from parental leave, including the option of teleworking, flexible work hours and rostering on to suitable shifts, these supports were provided in an ad hoc fashion, differing from work unit to work unit. As discussed, I argue that the approach managers took to policy implementation across the parental leave process was related to a) their specific organisational context and b) their own preferences, influenced by the salience of their managerial and/ or parental identities. I now examine both of these issues in turn.
Organisational Context and Resource Constraints

It is common for parents coming back to work following parental leave to return to reduced hours and/or avail of flexible work options (Buddelmeyer & Fok, 2007; Coulson, Skouteris, & Dissanayake, 2012; Coulson, et al., 2010; Houston & Marks, 2003; Kossek, et al., 2010; Kossek, et al., 1999; McDonald, 2008; McDonald, Guthrie, et al., 2005; Renda, et al., 2009; Thornthwaite, 2004; Wierda-Boer, et al., 2008). However, my research findings indicated that the extent to which these options were accessible differed depending on organisational context.

The first aspect of organisational context I examined was gendered patterns of employment. I explored whether the extent to which work units were family-adaptive was related to the gender profile of the work unit, or the broader occupational group. In undertaking the analysis I had an expectation that female-dominated work units may be more family-adaptive than male-dominated units, as the utilisation of parental leave and related entitlements would be more prevalent and hence the norm in female-dominated work environments. Overall, there were no stark differences in family-adaptiveness between work units that were categorically related to gendered characteristics. While some work units in Library Services appeared to be family-adaptive so too were some of the Computing Centre work units. Similarly, there was also evidence that work units in both occupational groups could have a low degree of family-adaptiveness. Having said that, the two examples of the most ‘family-adaptive’ managers discussed later in this chapter come from Library Services and one of the least ‘family-adaptive’ managers is from the Computing Centre (with the other a Library Services) manager. While this may indicate on the surface that the Library Services were ‘more’ family-adaptive, discussions with employees (see Chapter 6) illustrate that both men and women could face barriers in balancing their career and caring roles. The analysis also showed that family-adaptiveness was not dependent on the gender of the work unit’s manager, with male and female managers both likely to foster family-adaptive environments. The next section, which deals with specific managerial approaches to work-family issues will explore in further detail how managerial identity influenced family-adaptiveness.

The second aspect of organisational context I examined related to resources available to managers in their work units. Resource constraints that I identified related to a number of issues, including: size of the work unit; duties staff were required to fulfill; specific work patterns; and staff demographics. Limited labour resources could impact on managers’ ability to manage staff absences and to accommodate staff requests for flexibility associated with parental leave. A number of respondents (managers and staff members) discussed how it was easier to provide the types of supports staff members required (such as suitable shifts) in larger work units:
I mean with the team sizes that we have we have flexibility to be able to do that. (Thomas, Library Services Manager, 6th December 2011)

I think it is a really good place to work if you have kids because it's quite a large staff so there are a few opportunities that they can juggle around. (Jane, Library Services Manager, 11th November 2011)

Limited labour resources in smaller work units meant that some managers struggled to meet requests for flexibility on return from parental leave.

So it depends; in the smaller branch libraries it can be tricky to be too flexible. (Jane, Library Services Manager, 11th November 2011)

If... a section you're looking after is big enough you can make the adjustments and they work. It's very hard if you're, say, in a small school office and have only got three people; you don't have that flexibility. (Thomas, Library Services Manager, 6th December 2011)

The difficulties faced in small work units were sometimes compounded by the types of duties associated with specific roles. Interview findings indicated that the extent to which flexibility was available often related to the functions performed within particular work units. Many of the participants in this research were employed in positions with a strong focus on service provision. Some positions required staff to be constantly available throughout the week, in the case of IT support, for example. In smaller work units where face to face or telephone support was a key operational function, managers could face difficulty in managing labour resources so as to avoid gaps in service provision. In these occupations there was often little scope to provide flexibility:

It's not like you've got 12 staff in a branch all sitting there, waiting to go on their turn at the desk; it is a matter of being able to jostle... sometimes you can have half the staff out at meetings and you might have a few staff on leave on top of that and then suddenly you've got a rostering problem because there is nobody actually left to man the service point and so you have to pull back. So it's a very complicated equation. (Sharon, Library Services Manager, 28th November 2011)

One manager spoke about how, while it was difficult to offer part-time positions in small branch libraries, it was possible for some positions:

In this environment [one staff member] has flexibility... the type of work she does can flex around her needs so in that situation yes, she is in the right role for where she is at the moment (Jane, Library Services Manager, 11th November 2011)
The staff member mentioned above was able to maintain a part-time position because the role responsibilities were sufficiently flexible. However this was not the case for many staff members. When asked about opportunities for part-time work, one manager referred to the difficulties in offering such options in certain support-related positions:

    Well that is something that would need to fit in with how the group works. There are certain positions in the group that it might fit, other types of positions it wouldn’t. It would be difficult because we provide operational support throughout the week, not just a couple of days a week then gone... so we have to have a process there to smooth out the support and have a balanced skill set... so that can create some overhead if that's a part-time position. So then yes we would need to look really closely at how experienced the staff member is to provide that coverage. (David, Computing Centre Manager, 27th February 2012)

A common theme that emerged from the research (which the comments above allude to) was a perception that there were limited opportunities for careers based on part-time or flexible work hours in positions that were service-based. It seemed that positions in both occupational groups were modeled on the ‘ideal worker’ who is available for full-time work, unencumbered by childcare or other responsibilities (Kelly, et al., 2010; Kossek, et al., 2010; Mescher, Benschop, & Doorewaard, 2010; Sallee, 2012). In many cases managers were not able to see how positions could be modeled to suit those working part-time.

Relating to the previous point, work patterns in the two occupational groups also impacted on the extent to which managers were able to provide flexible work opportunities to their staff. Both occupational groups were involved in customer or client support activities which often required staff to work non-standard hours. While this could provide flexibility for staff, it seemed that opportunities for flexibility were only available insofar as the work unit required specific patterns of work. For example, shift work offered flexibility for some staff members in the Library Service to work non-standard hours, but while staff could be required to work evenings and weekends, they did not have a right only to work those hours:

    If somebody comes back and wants to work three hours at night we can't accommodate that and I have to say no, because if the job actually involves coming out and meeting people and they want to come three hours at night then they can't do it. (Sharon, Library Services Manager, 28th November 2011)

A manager in the Computing Centre spoke about how productivity was measured on outputs rather than actual ‘face time’ and that this provided a level of flexibility in the work unit.
It's pretty flexible yes... so if I have to go to an appointment during the day I'll generally try to make up for it at night-time or whatever... I don't know what it's like in other positions but for me and my staff, we are mostly... measured based on our outputs... so as long as we deliver on our objectives there is not so much pressure about how we deliver. (Gary, Computing Centre Manager, 23rd February 2012)

However, this arrangement could have negative consequences as staff could be required to work long hours in order to meet targets or fix problems. So, while telecommuting was available in some work units it had the dual purpose of offering flexibility as well as ensuring a staff member would be available outside of standard work hours in case of emergencies.

We’ve only got one person who’s got a work at home arrangement. But because we’re trying to run sort of core systems for the university that have got to be available 24 hours we quite often work after hours from home to maintain all of the systems. (Gary, Computing Centre Manager, 23rd February 2012)

These examples highlight how work patterns in some work units were more resource intensive, in terms of the requirements placed on staff to be available non-standard hours. The requirement to work non-standard hours could impact negatively on all staff, but arguably the effects were more pronounced on those with caring responsibilities. The discussion illustrates how working arrangements that appear gender neutral can have gendering effects, reflecting the ideal worker norm that assumes a disembodied worker, free of responsibilities outside of work.

Some managers spoke about the way in which the demographic breakdown of work units allowed them overcome some of these difficulties. For example, having a ‘balance’ between staff in terms of their caring responsibilities was beneficial:

So we are often required to work outside business hours because [with] IT systems... you can't make big changes during business hours. So what I find is that we've got a reasonable balance between staff with families and staff without, so that a lot of those after-hours duties are performed by staff that don't have family commitments. And that just happens on a voluntary basis... excluding on-call, it's all voluntary. And it's that balance – I think if we were to lose that balance it would become an issue, yes... We need to do after hours work and that is quite difficult for a lot of people with families. So yes, we kind of... have just ended up with the reasonable balance. (Adam, Computing Centre Manager, 24th March 2012)

Formal policies – such as out of hours work – while seeming gender neutral, can serve to reproduce gendered divisions in organisations. The quote above illustrates, however, that managers can utilise
informal strategies to manage work schedules such that the family responsibilities of particular staff could be accommodated. Thus, informal arrangements can be used to combat the potential gendering effects of such policies. Discussions with managers illustrated a variety of ways in which informal practices could be used to negate the gendering effects of formal policy, or to address work-family issues where no formal policy was in place. Some specific examples will be discussed later in this chapter, particularly in relation to ‘family first’ managers.

Resource constraints varied across work units, but generally related to staffing levels, with smaller work units having greater potential to feel stretched when staff were absent on parental leave or accessing flexible work arrangements. Work units that had particular position types that required constant staff availability (for example, customer and operational support) could also face difficulties in providing flexibility.

Managers noted how they could face difficulty in balancing the needs of staff with the broader work unit’s operational needs:

... sometimes it is hard is to balance what is best for the workplace and trying to accommodate what people want. And one has to remember that we are performing a function. (Sharon, Library Services Manager, 28th November 2011)

It's hard for workplaces though because I think sometimes people take advantage, so for a manager it’s striking the balance between this is a good person, you know they know the job, you know they are good at the job and they are committed to work, then you need to be very supportive of them as an individual, and in one area that might be with their parenting responsibilities… (Sandra, Computing Centre Manager, 20th February 2012)

One manager summed up the difficulty that faced managers in implementing policies within the constraints of their specific work unit’s needs, stating:

What undermines good policy often is resource constraints and the fact that areas become understaffed and then ... in order to accommodate parents somebody has to pick up the slack. (Adam, Computing Centre Manager, 24th March 2012)

Thus, while broad university policy guided managers, specific workplace needs dictated how policy was implemented within work units. Managers of smaller work units could face significant challenges in accommodating flexible work arrangements in a way that did not impact negatively on the operation of the work unit or the work loads of other staff in the unit. Additionally, role responsibilities of specific positions could place constraints on managers’ ability to grant requests for flexible work arrangements. In positions that involved high levels of customer support or client...
facing activities there was often little scope to provide flexibility. These factors combined meant that family-adaptiveness was more easily achievable in some work units than others.

However, regardless of the resource constraints faced, managers had the potential to influence accessibility of informal work arrangements for their staff members. The findings suggested that there were opportunities in both the male and female-dominated work units to implement family-adaptive strategies. Managers’ personal preferences regarding the implementation of informal work practices were a more significant determinant of family-adaptiveness than broader organisational demographics. The way in which managers dealt with the parental leave process differed from person to person, with findings indicating that there were differences in the types of informal supports available between work units with broadly similar characteristics (in terms of size, gender breakdown and function). Managers exercised discretion both in their interpretation of formal policy and in their willingness to put informal arrangements in place. The second part of my analysis (reported in the next section) investigates this further, with an examination of the extent to which the salience of managers’ identities – particularly their managerial and parental identities – influenced their approach to managing the parental leave process.

**Middle Managers, Identity and the Development of Family-Adaptiveness through Informal Practices and Interactions**

The approach managers took to informal workplace practices and interactions with staff members played an important part in shaping family-adaptiveness. Workplace interactions have been identified as a key site for the gendering of organisations (Acker, 1999, 2006a; Dye & Mills, 2006; Ely & Meyerson, 2000b; Lester, 2008; Meyerson & Kolb, 2000). A range of interactions ‘between women and men, women and women, men and men, including all those patterns that enact dominance and submission’ can be gendered (Acker, 1990, pp.146-147). Through these interactions ‘policies that create divisions are developed and images of gender are created and affirmed’ (Acker, 1992b, p.251). While the literature on organisational family supportiveness recognises the key role managers play in implementing policy, scholarship to date has neglected to address why managers differ in the approach they take to interactions in the workplace and their approach to informal work practices. I aim to address this gap in knowledge in the remainder of this chapter.

My central argument is that identity salience is a key factor in explaining the approach managers take to the management of the parental leave process. It is important to note that the focus of the research is on identity salience, rather than on ‘identity’ per se. Identity salience refers to the probability of invoking a specific identity in particular situations (Katz-Wise, et al., 2010; Stryker & Burke, 2000). Thus, parenthood in itself does not necessarily equate to having a highly salient
parent identity. I examine how identity salience impacted on managers’ approaches to parental leave policy implementation. Managers can produce and reinforce gendering processes in their work units through their interactions with staff members. In the discussion I focus in particular on the interpretation of formal policy and the extent to which managers were willing to put in place informal work arrangements relating to parental leave. I examine how managers invoked different identities in their management of parental leave – focusing specifically on managerial and parental identities. Next, I illustrate how managers could, through their identity work, influence family-adaptiveness, arguing that the presence of a strong parent identity was associated with positive outcomes for staff and the creation of a ‘family-adaptive’ environment.

While all but one of the managers were parents, the ways in which they invoked managerial and parent identities wasn’t simply dependent on their parenthood status. Evidence from the research indicated that there was a variety of ways in which managers invoked their identities in the workplace. This emerged explicitly in their discussions of their management of work-family balance, and specifically the parental leave process. It was common for managers who had children to invoke their parent identity in their management of the parental leave process. However, differences were evident even between managers who were parents, with some managers seeming to display a more salient parent identity than others. Importantly, there did not appear to be gender-based differences in the salience of either managerial or parent identities, with both male and female respondents displaying salient managerial and parent identities. A contention put forward at the start of this chapter was that differences in family-adaptiveness would be apparent between work units gendered in different ways. The previous section discussed how there were no obvious differences between male and female-dominated units. Similarly, there were no stark differences between male and female led units. In fact, the examples of the two most ‘family-adaptive’ managers include both a male manager and female manager. Both of these managers are employed in Library Services. The examples of the two ‘least’ family-adaptive managers also include a male and a female manager, one in Library Services and one the Computing Centre. I now move on to a more in-depth examination of the way in which managers could influence the gendering of the parental leave process, specifically focusing on how they invoked their identities in interactions with staff members who availed of parental leave entitlements.

‘Family First’, ‘Family Fair’ and ‘Family Blind’: Managerial Identity Salience and Family-Adaptiveness

Three distinct managerial typologies emerged from the research: managers who invoked a particularly strong parent identity, others who invoked a strong managerial identity and a third group who straddled a line between the two invoking both managerial and parent identities in their
interactions in the workplace and in their implementation of informal work practices. Corresponding to these typologies were discrete approaches to managing work family issues. Some respondents took a restrictive approach to the interpretation of formal policy whereas others were lenient in their interpretation. Similarly, some respondents relied only on formal policy while others were willing to put informal practices in place to meet the unique needs of the staff in their work unit. The approach managers took had implications for the extent to which gendering effects were evident in policy implementation and hence the extent to which family-adaptiveness was achieved.

In line with the distinctions discussed above, I have developed three categories of the approaches managers took to the management of parental leave: the ‘family first’ approach; the ‘family fair’ approach and the ‘family blind’ approach. The ‘family first’ approach was characterised by managers who recognised the particular needs of new parents and were willing to put in place informal work practices to meet these needs. These managers displayed highly salient parent identities. Next, the ‘family fair’ approach applied to managers who followed policy to the tee, recognising the needs of parents but not going beyond formal policy to facilitate requests. Managers who took this approach generally invoked both their managerial and parental identities in their management of the parental leave process. Finally, the ‘family blind’ approach – whereby managers’ primary concerns were with the organisation’s goals and needs and the family situation of staff members was largely accorded a low priority – was most common in managers with a strong managerial identity. I argue that managers who displayed a more highly salient parent identity were more likely to have developed family-adaptive work environments. The discussion below of each of these approaches draws on specific examples of manager-staff interactions to illustrate why this is the case.

The Family First Approach

Managers who took a family first approach acknowledged the impact of parenthood on employees’ ability to participate in work as ‘ideal workers’. These managers recognised that new parents can have specific needs that formal policy may not adequately cater for; they discriminated positively towards those with family responsibilities and were willing to put in place informal workplace arrangements that went beyond the scope of formal policy. The family first approach had limited gendered effects: both women and men could benefit, as it was easier for both to avail of entitlements and to maintain attachment to the workforce. This approach has the greatest potential to contribute positively towards the development of a family-adaptive environment and was most likely to lead to gender equal outcomes in work and care. Managers who took this approach tended to display a highly salient parent identity. As previously mentioned, all but one of the managers were parents. The managers who fell into the family first approach were all parents themselves. The
evidence suggested that the approach these managers took had the potential to challenge gendered organisational processes through the informal supports they made available to staff and their approach to formal interactions around the parental leave process.

Managers who followed a ‘family first’ approach viewed work-family issues as an integral and inevitable part of management. One manager simply stated ‘It's life, you know?’ (Thomas, Library Services Manager, 6th December 2011) while another said ‘You just have to… have the attitude that “this is not hard, it is just the way it is”’. (Catherine, Librarian and Manager, 30th November 2011). They generally felt it was quite easy to manage the process and saw the benefits of part-time work:

It’s generally been pretty easy… and because we have got quite a few people who are working part-time having returned from maternity leave we have been able to kind of put them together… and… have them covering one position… So yes… I don’t think it's too difficult. (Catherine, Librarian and Manager, 30th November 2011)

It’s actually… quite a positive thing to have two people working part-time and sharing a job, because it gives you more flexibility. If somebody is on leave then there is still somebody there doing half the job so it's not like you lose the whole person for two weeks – you just lose half of them. (Catherine, Librarian and Manager, 30th November 2011)

This contrasts with a ‘family blind’ manager, discussed later, who noted the difficulties of managing part-time staff.

These managers felt that it was their responsibility to inform staff about entitlements. For example, one manager stated that there was ‘a legal and moral obligation to tell people their rights, I don't think there's any ifs or buts there’ (Thomas, Library Services Manager, 6th December 2011). This manager actively made suggestions to staff about how they could maximise their entitlements:

You work within the policies and guidelines that are there and then try to maximise what will work and get the balance between the organisation needs – not wants – the needs… and what the individual needs as well to be able to cope. (Thomas, Library Services Manager, 6th December 2011)

By taking a proactive approach to informing staff about their entitlements this manager could combat reluctance amongst employees to avail of policies; an issue which is common when negative messages are conveyed from their managers (Swody & Powell, 2007). He noted that beyond formal rights there are options that can be offered to staff members:

...there are things that go beyond rights that are options, and I think a responsible manager thinks about what options there are in relation to the individual, try to think outside the box
a bit... you have a moral obligation to give people the maximum information that you can. It's no skin off your nose and I think it's just the right thing to do. (Thomas, Library Services Manager, 6th December 2011)

The comment above indicates that the manager focused not on the policy, but on the person, and endeavoured to offer whatever options he could within reason. He did not adhere strictly to the rules if he felt that it would have negative implications for staff:

And there are notice periods that people are supposed to give and that type of stuff but we really look at the person and if that person is coming in and they need to do it and it has to be two weeks you just do it, work with them. (Thomas, Library Services Manager, 6th December 2011)

This highlights how the manager was willing to go beyond the scope of policy if required by instigating informal work practices. The approach this manager took illustrates how informal work practices can be used to avoid gendering effects, contrary to much of the literature on gendered organisations that stresses how informal work practices and patterns of work can exacerbate gender inequality (Acker, 2006b; Ely & Meyerson, 2000b). By taking into account the staff member’s particular circumstances the manager avoided gendering effects that could have resulted from applying formal policy in a uniform way.

Managers can, to a significant extent, determine how policies are instigated within their work units and can take a restrictive or enabling approach to policy implementation. This manager noted that policy wording is open to interpretation:

The way the policy is written out; it gives the option to say no... I have never said no to a request and some of them have not been particularly reasonable. But when you know where the person is coming from... we may know a little bit about your personal circumstances, needing to come back early and everything else because of financial pressures, you try and work with this... and as long as their philosophy has been an open communication one, you put it on the table with no judgements. (Thomas, Library Services Manager, 6th December 2011)

This manager regularly employed informal work practices to facilitate the work-family needs of staff, particularly in the period prior to a staff member going on maternity leave, when limited formal supports are available. He noted how he would ‘work with [staff members] all the way through the pregnancy’, ensuring they weren’t ‘loaded up with work’. Staff members were also given ‘special consideration’, including choosing the shifts that best suited them (e.g. late shifts if they were experiencing sickness that was particularly bad in the morning) (Thomas, Library
Services Manager, 6th December 2011). This followed through to when staff members returned to work:

Some people have children that might have a bit of colic or something else and it really stresses you... we can work around you; if you need to change hours or whatever and when day care doesn’t work or something else we can work around that. (Thomas, Library Services Manager, 6th December 2011)

We don’t put people in situations where it puts extra pressure on... If we know that they've had sleepless nights, we will make sure that we have backup, sometimes we do it without putting pressure on them, just making sure we have somebody there who can step in... and then if they are looking really poorly just saying to them ‘you know if you're not getting sleep and you are supposed to... do Thursday if you want to switch to Friday that's okay, somebody can do Thursday night, that's not a problem’, and that works pretty well. (Thomas, Library Services Manager, 6th December 2011)

Overall, this manager had an approach that focused on staff outcomes and stated that he aimed to ‘find the solutions for them that work and they are happy. If they are happy their life is in balance’ (Thomas, Library Services Manager, 6th December 2011). The approach taken by this manager to informal work practices is again indicative of the ways in which gendering processes can be challenged when the work-family needs of employees are acknowledged and valued.

As mentioned, managers who took a ‘family first’ approach displayed highly salient parental identities. This was evident in how these managers spoke about parenthood in the workplace and established links between work and home rather than seeing both as separate spheres. One manager noted how staff could bring their children in to work at times:

Now... often... somebody else's kids might be sitting in here and we clear the table down and plonk them on here and we've had TVs... and we put a kid aside for half the day. They might be waiting for mum to come or sometimes... I remember when there was a [case where a staff member had] breast cancer, you know, they needed to be away, they didn't want the child to be with them at the doctors and stuff so yes... it's like a family, you just make adjustments. (Thomas, Library Services Manager, 6th December 2011)

The manager’s comments that ‘it’s like a family’ highlights how the lines between work and family are blurred in his work unit.

A female manager who had recently become a mother also took a family first approach and displayed a highly salient parental identity in her interactions with staff. She spoke about how she had developed a relationship with a staff member which provided an outlet for her to discuss issues
she faced in her new role as a mother and made it easier for the staff member to approach her with work-related problems. In a sense, she was a mentor for the member of staff when it came to work-related issues, and the staff member was a mentor for her in relation to parenting.

... one of the staff that I manage who is a more experienced mother than I am – it’s been quite an interesting way for our relationship to develop because in a work situation she turns to me, but in a parenting situation I quite often say ‘What did you do? Give me some advice’. And I actually think that that has positively benefitted our working relationship because we now... it's almost like I have shown to her my vulnerability, so she is not afraid now to come and ask me questions about work and our communication is far more open than it ever used to be, which I think has only got to be a good thing in the workplace. (Catherine, Librarian and Manager, 30th November 2011)

By acknowledging family responsibilities and breaking down the boundary between work and family this manager had the potential to avoid gendered outcomes that can result from organisational environments where gendered notions of the ideal worker dominate.

The research revealed that managers who took a ‘family first’ approach could face conflict while invoking their parent identity in the workplace. For example, one respondent noted the importance of maintaining a professional distance. Despite frequently giving advice to staff members about their management of work-family balance he stressed that his role should not become a paternal one:

...that's not my prerogative to do that, I'm not her father. (Thomas, Library Services Manager, 6th December 2011)

You listen, you can offer advice, but... I don't think it's a paternal relationship; it should never be a paternal relationship. And it's a really easy trap to fall into, very easy. (Thomas, Library Services Manager, 6th December 2011)

Another manager indicated her uncertainty about the extent to which professional boundaries should be maintained in the workplace. Having recently become a new mother, she spoke about the benefits of informal supports for new parents, but questioned whether it is appropriate for the workplace to be involved in providing that support:

Even if it was simply an opportunity to provide some kind of support in a lunch hour, just to get together and have a chat. And maybe the workplace – it shouldn't be participating in that – but I just think that it would be something very positive that could be done to have a network maybe, at the University, of parents who wanted to participate. (Catherine, Librarian and Manager, 30th November 2011)
Thus, while managers who took a family first approach invoked their parent identities at work, they were sometimes unsure about the extent to which the boundary between work and home should be maintained in the workplace. This illustrates how, despite their strong support of those with family responsibilities, traditional gendered norms surrounding the separation of work and family spheres could still influence these ‘family first’ managers to some extent.

The positive impact of the family first managerial approach was evident in staff members’ perceptions about these managers. One staff member stated that:

*Discussions with [Catherine] were always very open and very easy and she was very considerate of the condition I was in and very understanding as well and supportive.* (Kate, Library Services Employee, 7th February 2012)

A number of staff who worked in Thomas’s unit also noted how his approach impacted positively on them. Stating that his work unit was supportive, one respondent said: ‘But I really think that’s mostly down to [Thomas]’ (Frank, Library Services Employee, 28th November 2011). Another staff member stated that he ‘is great, he is fantastic, he is very supportive’ (Denise, Library Services Employee, 1st December 2011). One respondent spoke about an informal arrangement that was put in place when his child was born:

*He was very encouraging of taking the time and he was happy for me to… build up some extra hours and that avoided paper work and mucking around my contract… So he was very accommodating… I think in the contract there is the maximum number of hours that you can build up, which I think is nine hours, but I had to build up 11… it's not like I was abusing the system… it was just something that we had worked out… then the following week I just chewed into it and then it levelled back out to zero.* (Nick, Library Services Employee, 30th November 2011)

In another case, a staff member noted how the manager told ‘roster makers’ not to put him on the nightshift because the manager was aware how it would be disruptive to his family routine. According to the staff member, he did not instigate the change to rosters himself. He stated:

*He kind of did it on my behalf. Maybe we had a discussion but I can't remember overtly asking him not to be put on the night rosters. So things could have been dramatically different if my manager had changed or the roster makers kicked up a fuss… So I'm very grateful to my manager for doing that. He said there are other people in the library who have had similar breaks in the past and so you should have your opportunity as well. So he does tend to play fair but I’m just wondering how different things would have been if it hadn’t been for his influence.* (Frank, Library Services Employee, 28th November 2011)
In general, feedback from staff indicated that this manager saw the ‘bigger picture’ and was of the opinion that ‘family comes first’:

As [my manager] has taught me on numerous occasions... family comes first, you've got to do what's right for you and them regardless of how you feel about the university. (Frank, Library Services Employee, 28th November 2011)

He... genuinely cares about the people on his team. He is a really good guy, he is a really, really good guy and he does still have the bigger picture... and he understands all the budget limitations and stuff but he is still always trying to work for the best results for everybody and he balances that pretty well I think. (Rachel, Library Services Employee, 29th Nov 2011)

It has been argued that ‘narratives, and the social interactions within which people construct and convey them, can... take oppressive forms and play a crucial role in the gendering process in organisations’ (Ely & Meyerson, 2000b, p.116). The comments above are illustrative of the ways in which organisational narratives, fostered through interactions in the workplace, can challenge gendering processes. In this case, the ‘family first’ narrative that this manager promoted in his interactions with staff contributed towards family-adaptiveness. The manager himself noted how, over time, he had become more aware of the need to address work-family issues up front:

So over the years I have gotten progressively more putting it on the table because I am a parent, I have two children ... I just think it's easier to be clear up front and say everybody is different. (Thomas, Library Services Manager, 6th December 2011)

The discussion has highlighted how a ‘family first’ approach to the interactions and informal work practices can have positive outcomes for staff in terms of their attitudes towards work, the extent to which they feel valued in their role and in their outcomes in terms of career goals. Managerial support – provided in concrete and less visible ways – had the potential to avoid the gendered effects that can result from implementing policy strictly. In some cases, simply communicating to staff members that their work-family needs are supported can have positive outcomes in terms of their experiences in the workplace; portraying positive messages about work-family balance can reduce stress among staff with caring responsibilities. For those staff members who do require special arrangements to enable them to manage work and family, this may only involve minor changes to working patterns, but can have significant positive outcomes.

While it is true that the managers who were most supportive were parents themselves, it is important to note that the majority (seven out of eight managers interviewed) were parents, so it is not surprising that this is the case. I argue that parenthood in itself does not predict family-
adaptiveness: rather, the salience of managers’ identities (i.e. the extent to which managers invoked their managerial or parent identity) was a more accurate predictor of family supportiveness. The managers discussed above displayed salient parent identities. However, there were frequent examples of managers who were parents who displayed salient managerial identities. The following sections will illustrate cases where managers (both those who were and were not parents) invoked their managerial identities to greater degrees and the impact on family supportiveness.

**The Family Fair Approach**

The majority of managers took a ‘family fair’ approach to policy implementation. They acknowledged that parents may have specific work-family needs and made allowances accordingly within the boundaries of formal policy provisions. This approach has the potential to have both positive and negative outcomes for staff and the development of family friendly work environments, with outcomes largely dependent on what the boundaries of formal policy allowed. While formal policy provided a safeguard for employees in their application for parental leave, it could be argued that by relying on the formal policy (which is gendered in its focus on mothers as primary caregivers) managers could contribute to the reproduction of gendered outcomes for employees.

These managers invoked both their parent and managerial identities in their implementation of policy. They were aware of the impact of parenthood on the working lives of staff, but also were cognisant of their managerial responsibilities to the organisation. Managers who fell into this category generally accepted the work-family balance process as a ‘fact of life’ and something that was not too difficult to manage:

_I wouldn’t say it’s hard, I think it's just a fact of life so it something that you just have to do, it is the nature of the beast._ (Sharon, Library Services Manager, 28th November 2011)

Some managers spoke about having a ‘family comes first’ philosophy:

_I guess family comes first ... is one of the values... of our whole team_ (Adam, Computing Centre Manager, 24th March 2012)

_I always say ‘family comes first’ at work._ (David, Computing Centre Manager, 27th February 2012)

While these managers recognised, and were responsive to, the needs of parents they would only make allowances as far as formal policy allowed them. Therefore, they do not go as far as what I have classified as ‘family first’ managers who occasionally circumvent formal policy to meet staff members’ needs.
Family fair managers saw part-time staff as an asset to organisation and stressed the need to accommodate part-time staff:

*Generally our part-timers work incredibly hard because they have got such limited time and they come in with a very fresh brain and so I would argue that part-timers work very hard, and they really earn their place and that is why I would possibly go to a further extreme than other people to ensure that we can accommodate them as much as we can because if they work very hard for us I think it's only fair that we work hard for them too.* (Sharon, Library Services Manager, 28th November 2011)

This perception about part-time work contrasts with the ‘family blind’ managers discussed in the next section. Considering the fact that part-time work is utilised by a significant proportion of employees returning from parental leave (in fact, all the female employees included in this research worked part-time), the perception that managers have about this working arrangement, and how this is communicated to employees, is of critical concern.

Family fair managers saw the management of work-family issues as a two-way process, in which managers and employees took responsibility:

*It is a 50-50, if they treat us with the respect and courtesy of doing things that they are meant to do then the manager also would give them the courtesy of ensuring that things are happening so that they are coping... So I really think it's sharing; it is a partnership operation.* (Sharon, Library Services Manager, 28th November 2011)

*I think it's a two-way street: the workplace needs to be right but I think the individual needs to be right as well, so it is a partnership in that respect.* (Sandra, Computing Centre Manager, 20th February 2012)

However, while recognising that staff may have specific work-family needs, these managers were wary of moving outside the scope of policy. One manager stated that ‘the University decides the policy and then we live within the policy’ (Sharon, Library Services Manager, 28th November 2011). Similarly, another manager stated that he hadn’t ‘really needed to go too far outside the policy’ (Adam, Computing Centre Manager, 24th March 2012). This is in contrast to ‘family first’ managers who were more likely to instigate informal arrangements where their work unit required.

A number of managers noted how they would refer staff members to formal policy documents and / or HR if there were issues they were uncertain about:

*...when there [is] something that we can't quite resolve that's where we go to the HR manager to sort it out. But yes I definitely should know the rules to a fairly medium level I...*
would think... you need to know what the rules are that the staff are working within. (David, Computing Centre Manager, 27th February 2012)

If I'm ever uncertain about something, yes I would go to HR. I mean I also have consulted the policies myself... (Adam, Computing Centre Manager, 24th March 2012)

Generally what I would then do is direct them to policy documents, so explain to them that this is the link on the webpage and you might like to go away and have a read of this before we then meet again to discuss how you see you would then apply for that leave and discuss which dates and what might happen. So generally you operate to policy, is my advice, otherwise you get yourself into trouble [laughter]. (Sharon, Library Services Manager, 28th November 2011)

While there was a reluctance to move outside formal policy, there was evidence that there were ‘grey areas’ that gave scope to some managers to instigate informal arrangements. In particular flexible work arrangements were identified as an option for those with parenting responsibilities. One manager stated that flexibility was ‘not really defined within the policy; no policy can probably really define that’ (Adam, Computing Centre Manager, 24th March 2012) and went on to discuss how flexibility can be used:

Some of them want to start work a bit later so they can drop kids off in the morning and some want to finish a bit early so that they can pick the kids up so it's often that they will ask for hours that are a bit outside of the normal... eight to four ideal business hours... But that is something that we do for staff which I think helps them quite a lot when they have to juggle family responsibilities. (Adam, Computing Centre Manager, 24th March 2012)

Another manager also noted how flexibility could be used to manage work and family:

We could look at working either longer hours and have time off later in the week or maybe working part-time could be an option and then looking at bringing someone else in half-time to cover the other half. So there is a combination of things we could look at... (David, Computing Centre Manager, 27th February 2012)

This approach is in contrast to ‘family blind’ managers (discussed below) who would not consider any informal ways of assisting staff in achieving work-family balance. However, while the ‘family fair’ approach had the potential to benefit staff, in some cases it could also work against them. This was particularly the case when managers stuck strictly to policy. One manager spoke about two instances where she employed formal policy to deny flexible work requests on return from maternity leave. In one case a staff member wanted to work weekends and nights but it was not possible:
...we had to say 'look I'm sorry', and it was because she couldn't afford the childcare and she wanted her husband to be able to do the childcare because she had no other family in [the city]. So I felt really bad but I had to say no, because I would love to be able to assist her but equally there is a job to do, and if your work requires you to be here... and we do say that you may be required to work evenings and at weekends but we don’t say you are only going to be working nights and weekends. (Sharon, Library Services Manager, 28th November 2011)

In another case, a staff member wanted to come back to work early from maternity leave but the manager was unable to grant her request:

... she was desperate to come back to work before her maternity leave was due to expire and because she had already applied for that leave and that leave was on the books if you like, she wasn't enjoying being at home and she wanted to come back early and the policy has to be flexible for those things too. But in fact what she was trying to do was outside the policy and we couldn't change. (Sharon, Library Services Manager, 28th November 2011)

This manager’s use of formal policy provisions to deny a staff member’s request for an early return from maternity leave contrasts with the ‘family first’ manager discussed earlier who ‘looked at the person’ and endeavoured to offer options that worked for them, regardless of what formal policy dictated. This indicates how a strict approach to policy implementation can impact negatively on employees.

I argue that these managers displayed both salient managerial and parental identities in their implementation of policy and how managers invoked their identities was not simply dependent on their parenthood status. In general these managers took a balanced approach when conflict arose between the staff member’s needs and those of the work unit, invoking their managerial identity when the needs of the work unit were deemed to outweigh the staff member’s needs (for example, using formal policy to deny requests for flexibility which were not manageable) and, vice versa, invoking their parental identity when the staff member’s needs outweighed the work unit’s needs (for example in exploiting ‘grey areas’ of policy to the benefit of a staff member). Thus, this approach had the potential to lead to gendered outcomes, depending on the specific circumstances.

**The Family Blind Approach**

The third approach I have identified is the ‘family blind’ approach to policy implementation. These managers adopted a ‘gender blind’ approach to policy implementation. Stating that a policy or practice is gendered means that ‘although it may be gender-neutral on its face, it reproduces and sustains gender stratification and/or gender-based inequality in an organisational or occupational
context (Britton, 1997, p.798). It is widely recognised that a gender neutral approach to organisational analysis can hide gender-based inequalities (Mills, 1988) and that gender neutral policies and approaches to the management of work-family issues can have gendering effects (Acker, 1990, 1992b, 1999; Britton, 1997, 2000; Britton & Logan, 2008; Eriksson, 2011; Quinn, 1996; Smithson & Stokoe, 2005). As Acker states:

The gender-neutral model of the organisation assumes a male worker and manager as well as a gendered division of labour in which women do the tasks of life maintenance and renewal, usually in a private sector removed from the organisation. (Acker, 1999, p.183)

A move away from women-focused policies to broader gender-neutral policies brings with it a risk that there will be a perception ‘that workplaces are no longer gendered in themselves, and that both women and men have equal choices and opportunities about participation in paid work, non-work commitments and preferences’ (Smithson & Stokoe, 2005, p.150). A gender blind approach to parental leave implementation thus can result in gendered outcomes in access to leave and associated entitlements and to longer-term gendered outcomes in terms of career progression. Therefore it is imperative that gender-based issues are recognised in organisational policy development and implementation.

The family blind approach was characterised by managers who displayed negative or neutral attitudes towards the management of family responsibilities in their day-to-day management practices and who took a minimalist approach to parental leave policy implementation (in terms of their formal interactions with employees about parental leave and in their informal work practices). In these work units there was little scope for informal work practices which were not mandated by parental leave policy; all staff members were treated ‘equal and the same’ and no concessions were made for those with family responsibilities. This approach posed particular difficulties for staff members who were employed in occupations which frequently required out of hours work and rostering over non-standard hours.

Managers who followed this approach modelled work patterns on the ‘ideal worker’ norm, assuming that staff were available to work without the restriction of family or other responsibilities (Sallee, 2012; Smith, 2006; Whitehouse & Preston, 2005). The ideal worker norm can impact negatively on mothers (Correll, et al., 2007) and on fathers wishing to avail of work-family policies (Allard, et al., 2011). However, while the ‘family blind’ approach has the potential to impact negatively on both men and women with family responsibilities, it is more likely to have a negative impact on women due to their predominant role in caregiving (Ely & Meyerson, 2000b, p.120). Research has shown that a gender blind approach can result in women being pushed out of the
workforce for long periods of time (Cahusac & Kanji, 2013) thus leading to long-term gendered outcomes in employment.

Managers who fell into this category included a male manager in the Computing Centre who had teenage children and a female manager in Library Services who was not a parent. Both managers displayed strong managerial identities. In the context of the management of parental leave, the male manager displayed a weak parent identity.

Both managers were of the impression that the management of parental leave was a difficult process. From the Library Services Manager’s perspective it was difficult to manage maternity leave, especially when people came back part-time:

\[ \text{Yes difficult to manage. But I think it's just difficult all round when you have part-time people; it's very rare to have them all there at once and it can be difficult to cover. (Jane, Library Services Manager, 11th November 2011)} \]

The comment above indicates that this ‘family blind’ manager saw part-time work as a problem that needed to be dealt with and is in contrast with managers who took the ‘family first’ and ‘family fair’ approaches and saw part-time workers as an asset to the organisation. The Computing Centre manager also indicated that facilitating requests for flexible work arrangements can be difficult following maternity leave. Giving one example, he stated:

\[ \text{Well to start with we've got to go through the process of changing her... work arrangements, all the admin stuff associated with that and the permissions and so on. Then we've got to change her responsibilities. And then because she is working from home one day a week it's the extra challenge of her managing work when she is at home. (Gary, Computing Centre Manager, 23rd February 2012)} \]

This manager’s contention that it is difficult to manage a working from home arrangement seems to be in contradiction with his previous discussion of how staff were required to work out-of-hours as the work necessitated: working from home is not seen as a problem when the work unit requires it, but is seen as problematic when it results from a staff member’s request for flexibility. This is indicative of a negative attitude towards caring responsibilities.

When asked where the responsibility lay for ensuring that staff members could achieve work-family balance, the Library Services Manager felt that it was up to individuals themselves, and that the broader university also had a role to play, but that her role was as a ‘go-between’:

\[ \text{I don't think I'm responsible but I can facilitate it and help it happen... I am not responsible, I am the go-between... the individual has got to figure out their own work-life themselves} \]
and if things aren't working figure out how they can adjust it and work things around so you can help them and support them but you can't do for them. So I guess I'm the piggy in the middle. (Jane, Library Services Manager, 11th November 2011)

Comments from both managers indicated that formal policy provisions determined their approaches to work-family issues. One manager spoke about how it was necessary to follow formal policy:

The library is fairly dogmatic or it's fairly strict that it will have those annual reviews and stick to the rules as far as maternity leave and return to work. I don't think that anyone can't do it; they can't not do it. (Jane, Library Services Manager, 11th November 2011)

When the Computing Centre manager was asked if he felt that the work unit was supportive of those with family responsibilities, he replied ‘within the limits of the… the policy, I think so’ (Gary, Computing Centre Manager, 23rd February 2012). He did not think it was necessary to utilise informal arrangements:

I think the policy is reasonably okay and generous to be honest with you, especially compared to other workplaces I have worked at. I don't think I have ever felt or seen a demand to really… go that much beyond the… I don't think the problem has been the policy, I don't think that's been the issue. (Gary, Computing Centre Manager, 23rd February 2012)

The approach of both of these managers contrasts starkly with the ‘family first’ managers, who were willing to implement informal work practices when required by staff. This strict approach to policy implementation could result in negative outcomes for staff, particularly as the policy itself is gendered (as Chapter 4 discussed).

Both of these managers exhibited quite negative attitudes towards the parental leave process. This was evident in the Library Services Manager’s comments about the rights of mothers returning from maternity leave to access flexible work options:

They can't have exactly what they want… although when it’s return from maternity leave they can... [laughter]... they tend to say ‘I want this’ and the library has to figure out how to accommodate it. But [with] other things then it's a bit of give and take and if they are not willing to give then I guess you have to figure out ‘well how do we do this?’ (Jane, Library Services Manager, 11th November 2011)

Both of these managers displayed highly salient managerial identities, which emerged in their comments regarding the centrality of work in their lives. The female manager, Jane, was cognisant that her outlook influenced by her own personal situation and that she might have a different perspective on parental leave if she was a parent:
I mean that's a difficult one because I'm in a different position, if I had kids of my own I might think slightly differently. I think it is quite generous. But if you asked somebody who's having a kid they might think differently, so I might have a bit of a bias. (Jane, Library Services Manager, 11th November 2011)

The male manager, Gary, displayed a high level of dedication to his position. On the day of interview he noted how he had been working until 11pm the previous night and had been up again at 4am to fix a problem. Gary discussed how he was also studying part-time to further his professional credentials, as well as working full-time and sharing custody of his two children. He noted how, given the tiring nature of his work and study commitments it was important ‘to be really careful to be super patient’ with his children. Gary’s commitment to work, displayed through his long hours and his pursuit of career progression through further study, is indicative of his highly salient managerial identity.

An examination of the experiences of two staff members who worked under these managers will provide insight into the impact of this approach on staff members’ experiences of the parental leave process. The first case relates to the interactions between Jane, the Library Services Manager and a staff member who had recently returned from maternity leave. The second case focuses on interactions between Gary, the Computing Centre manager and a staff member who was availing of flexible working hours to care for her young child.

The Fairness = Conformity Approach

Jane was concerned with treating all staff fairly and from her perspective, fairness equated to conformity. This was evident in her management of rosters, whereby all staff took equal numbers of each shift type (early, mid-day and late), regardless of their circumstances. From her perspective it would be ‘unfair’ on full-time staff to have too many part-time staff:

it's just the wrong environment if you've too many... it wouldn't be fair on the others to do that. (Jane, Library Services Manager, 11th November 2011)

She was primarily concerned that all staff were treated the same. The impact of this manager’s ‘family blind’ approach was evident from discussions with one staff member in her work unit who had just returned from maternity leave. She spoke about how the rostering system, which seemed to be implemented rigidly, impacted negatively on her and her family. Despite having great difficulty managing the evening shift she was rostered on to, her manager was very reluctant to alter her shifts. She stated:

After a couple of weeks... it was really terrible... My kids were ... one and three and it was just falling apart... they wanted mum and it wasn't working very well. And so I thought 'well
I'm already doing my fair share because I'm doing one night and an early morning, I'll ask if I can change that to an earlier shift'. Even if I had to do the other really early morning – two of them a week – that didn't worry me. And that wasn't received very well and I was a bit upset about that because there were some colleagues of mine at the time who were full-time who weren't working any nights and weren't doing any early morning shifts. (Denise, Library Services Employee, 1st December 2011)

She spoke about how her manager reacted when she raised the issue with her:

... I was told ‘Well that's what you have to do’ so I let it go for another week or two and then it was really not good at home, like that was very stressful for my husband and kids and for me when I got home so I broached the subject again... and again it was not well-received...

(Denise, Library Services Employee, 1st December 2011)

The staff member stated that at this stage she was feeling ‘a bit discriminated against’ and that she had reached the point when she was going to approach the manager above her direct line manager because she had been supportive in the past. However, before she had approached the senior manager a work colleague who organised the rosters ‘came and had a quiet word’ with her, after noticing the stress it was causing her and offered to change her to a different shift for that day. The staff member noted how the situation impacted on her:

[I was] a bit disappointed because I felt like I was trying to go about it the right way by approaching my manager to do it that way; I didn't want to have to do it this other way but in the end I did that and sort of let it go. (Denise, Library Services Employee, 1st December 2011)

This contrasts significantly with the ‘family first’ manager who went to great lengths to accommodate the needs of staff who had caring responsibilities and illustrates how different approaches can result in significantly different outcomes for staff.

As discussed earlier, interactions in the workplace are key sites where ‘people experience and create dominance and submission, create alliances and exclusions, put together and implement policies that divide and differentiate between men and women, and produce and confirm gender images’ (Acker, 1999, pp.183-184). These interactions are crucial in shaping family-adaptiveness, as messages are conveyed about what is acceptable and appropriate behaviour. This manager’s approach to interactions resulted in the staff member feeling discriminated against and clearly did not contribute to a family-adaptive environment.

The family blind approach can be especially damaging on the careers of those in the childrearing age group. These staff members are at often at a crucial stage in establishing their careers, and
policies that make it difficult to combine career and caring responsibilities may serve to push them out of the workforce and delay their careers (Cahusac & Kanji, 2013). Therefore, a family blind approach may have long-term gendered effects for these staff members. In fact the Library Services Manager noted the absence of younger women in the workforce and how few staff members who returned from work achieved career progression:

*I don't think there's anybody in the library that I've noticed go ahead after they've come back after having kids. But then you know libraries are full of middle-aged women.* *(Jane, Library Services Manager, 11th November 2011)*

This is corroborated by research which has shown that, while it is a highly feminised occupation, librarianship is not necessarily family friendly (Graves, et al., 2008; Zemon & Bahr, 2005).

This manager’s ‘family blind’ approach impacted on the staff member significantly following her return from maternity leave. From this staff member’s perspective, the fact that the manager did not have children influenced her management of the process and her approach to interactions with the staff member. She stated ‘one of the biggest things and I really noticed it is that I know [my manager] doesn't have any children’ *(Denise, Library Services Employee, 1st December 2011)*. The manager’s approach to dealing with the staff member’s request for flexibility was based solely on meeting the work unit’s needs and entirely discounted the staff member’s family responsibilities. The manager’s lack of understanding caused the staff member emotional distress and her inability to change her roster had knock on effects for both her husband and children. I contend that the salience of the manager’s managerial identity (and lack of parental identity) was a key factor in her approach to the management of this staff member’s request. As previously mentioned, the manager noted that she may have a different perspective on work-family issues if she had children herself. Despite being aware of how her own situation impacted on her perspective and despite the staff member’s efforts to explain her difficulties the manager persisted with an approach which placed her preferences for managing rosters within the work unit ahead of the staff member’s needs. It is important to note, however, that managers who are parents also can foster un-adaptive environments: it is not parenthood per se that determines how family-adaptive a manager is, but rather the salience of the parent and manager identities. The discussion below of Gary, a father of two, will illustrate this point.

**Restrictive Policy Implementation**

The Computing Centre manager, Gary took a strict approach to interpreting policy. Below I examine exchanges between this manager and a staff member who was availing of flexible work hours following maternity leave, highlighting how his ‘family blind’ approach impacted negatively
on her and how she used formal policy provisions to guard against unfair treatment. When asked if he had informed the staff member about her entitlements to parental leave he responded:

*Well we discussed them and she was fully aware of them and she took full advantage of them.* (Gary, Computing Centre Manager, 23rd February 2012)

When pressed about what he meant by ‘full advantage’ he stated:

*I think there is a statement in [the university] policy that we are obliged to accommodate staff and support flexible working arrangements and so on and that's what we have done.* (Gary, Computing Centre Manager, 23rd February 2012)

The quote above is important for two key reasons. First, the manager seemed somewhat uncertain about the specifics of the parental leave policy beyond a general understanding that there was some requirement to accommodate staff requests. The lack of understanding of key policies can be a significant barrier to employees’ requests for flexible work. The statement also implies that the manager was willing to support the staff member’s request only so far as he was obliged to under formal policy guidelines. The manager’s statement that she took ‘full advantage’ of the entitlements suggests discontent with the way in which the staff member utilised the policy provisions. The staff member noted how her manager sometimes made negative comments regarding her changing work hours but that formal policy made it easy for her to negotiate the hours she wanted:

*I have had the odd comment from... [my manager], just... there was something along the lines of ‘Oh, you are a bit all over the place, you realise?’ and I just went ‘well that's policy, so it’s fine’... It's been really easy to negotiate but I wouldn't be surprised if there were moments where the management, you know, rolls their eyes.* (Kylie, Computing Centre Employee, 5th March 2012)

She also noted how questions had been raised in her performance review regarding the feasibility for her to continue in a part-time capacity:

*In my last performance review [my manager] did tell me that there was somebody looking into my part-time arrangement and whether I would be allowed to continue and I just said ‘well I know what the policy is so I'm not very worried about that at all’ and he said ‘Oh, well what is the policy?’ and I said that [the university] would be flexible with me until my children go to school and he said ‘Oh okay, well then you are okay’.... I was upset about that for a few days.... But... that's the only time I have actually had something explicit said to me.* (Kylie, Computing Centre Employee, 5th March 2012)
The employee’s comment again highlights how a manager’s uncertainty about university policy can impact negatively on employees who make requests that are within their rights under policy. However, while managerial ignorance of formal policy can be an impediment to employees being granted requests, managers may also attempt to circumvent policies or coerce employees to return to standard work hours. This staff member noted how she felt that the manager’s comments may have been an attempt to put pressure on her to return to full-time work:

_I wondered if he was hoping that maybe there would be a way for me to have to come back full-time as well. He actually... made a few comments along those lines, now that I think about it._ (Kylie, Computing Centre Employee, 5th March 2012)

This manager’s approach to interactions with the staff member was indicative of an expectation that she should be able to work full-time. It is argued that gendering processes can be maintained ‘through the information people receive about how to advance in the organisation, and the organisation’s tacit criteria for competence, commitment and ‘fit’. Many of these practices implicitly place a higher value on the prototypical male, masculine identity, or masculine experience’ (Ely & Meyerson, 2000b, p.115). In this situation, the manager communicated clear messages about what was required in order to pursue career progression: conveying negative messages about flexible work, repeatedly raising her part-time status as a problem issue and at one time stating that she was ‘all over the place’. It is questionable whether raising working hours in a performance review is appropriate, as it could indicate to a staff member that her appraisal was based on her capacity to work full-time. This indicates how, despite the presence of formal policy, informal work practices and interactions and the subtle (or not so subtle) messages that are conveyed about work-family issues can have the effect of restricting access for staff. I contend that the salience of this manager’s managerial identity was a key factor in shaping his attitude towards the staff member’s flexible work arrangement. As discussed previously, this manager was highly dedicated to work, putting in long hours in work while also studying to further his career. His interactions with this staff member were indicative of an expectation on his part that she would take a similar approach, prioritising work by committing to return to a full-time position.

The evidence above supports the contention that a family blind approach to parental leave implementation can have gendered outcomes, impacting negatively on women who predominantly take on primary caregiving responsibilities. Both staff members mentioned feeling upset or annoyed about their managers’ approach to work-family issues and utilised alternative strategies to achieve their work-family goals. For the Library Services respondent, resorting to an informal work arrangement with a co-worker allowed her to solve her problem. The Computing Centre respondent, on the other hand, used formal policy to safeguard against unfair treatment, which allowed her to
pursue her chosen work arrangement with confidence, despite the lack of support from her manager. Chapter 6 will further discuss strategies employees can utilise to achieve work-family balance in the face of resistance from management.

**Discussion and Conclusions**

This chapter has examined the role middle managers play in the management of parental leave within contrasting organisational contexts. The findings indicate that in an environment where social justice concerns are often at odds with wider corporate efficiency goals, managers can face conflict in implementing organisational policies in a way that meets both the needs of staff and the organisation. These findings support previous research that has shown that middle managers play a key role in determining how easily staff can access work-family arrangements, specifically parental leave and return to work (Anderson, et al., 2002; Lapierre, et al., 2008; McDonald, Brown, et al., 2005; O’Neill, et al., 2009; Straub, 2012; Swody & Powell, 2007; Todd & Binns, 2011). However the research also adds to our knowledge about the role managers play in implementing work-family policy in a number of ways.

While existing scholarship notes the contribution of managers, little is known about the factors that influence how managers deal with the work-family needs within their work units. A key contention shaping the research at the middle management level was that the gendered composition of workplaces would play an important role in shaping the approach managers take to policy implementation. However, I did not uncover significant differences in family adaptiveness between male-dominated and female-dominated work units or between male and female managers. Even in work units which are exclusively or predominantly female (such as those in Library Services), the family blind approach can have gendering effects. As the findings indicate, both male and female managers took ‘family first’ and ‘family blind’ approaches to the management of the parental leave process. Some managers spoke about how duties were assigned to staff so that those with parenting responsibilities could be accommodated. However, these examples came from both male and female-dominated units and from male and female managers. The findings thus go against previous research that suggests that female-dominated work units are more supportive of those with parenting responsibilities. This insight into the influence of managers is thus a unique contribution to research in this area.

The next issue I addressed was the extent to which work unit characteristics (such as size, function and work patterns) influenced family-adaptiveness. The research findings revealed that middle managers can face significant barriers in meeting staff needs within the constraints of policy, due to the resource constraints within their work units that arise from work patterns, functions and staff
resources. The inclusion of resource constraints as a factor in the examination of manager’s approach to parental leave implementation is therefore a unique contribution of this research.

The third contention put forward was that identity would be a key factor that shaped managerial approaches to work-family issues and the implementation of policy across the parental leave process. The research revealed that regardless of the constraints they faced, managers displayed a variety of strategies for dealing with the parental leave process. Evidence suggested that it was possible to interpret policies in a variety of ways, meaning that staff in some work units could have more favourable conditions than those in others. Findings from the research indicated that the salience of managerial and parent identities impacted on how managers approached the parental leave process. There were a variety of ways in which respondents invoked managerial and parent identities in their management of parental leave, reflecting identity theory that contends that individuals invoke identities in different ways, depending on the specific context or situation (Katz-Wise, et al., 2010; Lee, et al., 2005; Stryker, 1968, p.560; Stryker & Burke, 2000, p.286). Some managers discussed how their perspective on work-family balance was linked to their own experiences as parents. However, there were notable differences between managers who were parents in the ways they managed parental leave. I argue that parenthood in itself does not equate to having a salient parent identity when it comes to the management of the parental leave process. The discussion of the male Computing Centre manager who had children illustrates that this is the case. This manager was aware of the issues faced by parents in balancing work and family as he faced those challenges himself. Nevertheless the salience of his managerial identity seemed to be stronger in shaping his approach to work life issues for staff in his work unit. The discussion also indicates that female managers are not necessarily more sympathetic to those with family needs as the manager in Library Services did not take into account how family responsibilities could impact on the ability of some staff members to stick to rigid rostering systems. This indicates that the salience of the managerial and parent identities is a greater indicator of family-adaptiveness than a manager’s gender or parenthood status.

While all managers were concerned with treating staff fairly and justly, there was a notable difference in how ‘fairness’ was defined. Some managers equated ‘fairness’ with the equal treatment to all staff members regardless of their family responsibilities, while others conceptualising fairness as providing equal opportunities for staff members to participate in employment, taking into account the constraints that those with family (or other) responsibilities might face. I outlined three broad models of managing the parental leave process – the ‘family blind’, ‘family fair’ and ‘family first’ approaches. These approaches were associated with the salience of the respondents’ managerial and parent identities.
‘Family first’ managers put staff needs first and foremost and implemented any arrangements that were possible for their benefit. These managers displayed a strong parent identity, and this was reflected in their comments as well as those of staff. Managers who took this approach were upfront about the fact that they actively discriminated in favour of staff with work-family needs. The outcomes for staff were positive overall, both in terms of their perceptions about supportiveness and in the extent to which their working conditions facilitated their work-family balance needs. These managers were at the forefront of developing adaptive work environments.

The majority of managers straddled a line, displaying both managerial and parent identities in their management of the parental leave process. Managers who took a ‘family fair’ approach were aware of and considerate of staff members’ work-family needs, but were also acutely aware of formal policy and were reluctant to stray outside of policy when meeting requests for specific working conditions following maternity leave. The evidence suggested that outcomes for staff members under these managers could be both positive and negative. Some managers would use ‘grey areas’ of policy to implement informal arrangements but others, although aware of difficulties faced by staff, were reluctant to go outside of formal policy.

Finally, managers who displayed a salient managerial identity and/or a weak parent identity were generally unsympathetic to the needs of parents. These managers, categorised as ‘family blind’, took a restrictive approach to policy implementation and a negative approach to interactions with staff on work-family issues. This approach limited opportunities for the achievement of a family-adaptive workplace and this was reflected in comments from staff in these work units, who had faced resistance to their requests following maternity leave. The gender neutral approach these managers took has the potential to lead to gendered outcomes, by limiting the accessibility of policies, potentially pushing employees out of the workforce when there is a perceived lack of support and restricting opportunities for career advancement for those who avail of flexible work entitlements following parental leave.

By examining the role of identity in shaping managers’ approach to parental leave management, this thesis has contributed to a deeper understanding of the complex range of factors that impact on managers’ decisions and addresses critiques of previous research which has treated managers as a single univocal group. An examination of existing research does not uncover any such categorisation for managerial approaches to parental leave implementation. Thus, this is another unique contribution of the thesis. The identification of these distinct approaches to parental leave management illustrates the utility of the conceptual framework, which takes into account the role of identity in shaping managerial approaches to parental leave provision.
Overall, the findings suggest that while resource constraints can limit the types of family-friendly arrangements managers can offer to staff (both in the period preceding and following parental leave), they do have some level of discretion in the decisions they make regarding the allocation of resources to manage work-family needs. How they exercise this discretion is related to the salience of their managerial and parent identities and this can influence the extent to which family-adaptive workplaces are fostered.

The results of the analysis indicate the importance of both formal policy provision and of managerial prerogative in interpreting policy, reflecting previous research in this area. Where policies are gender blind it is likely that they will lead to gendered outcomes for staff. Similarly, if policies are open to interpretation it is possible that they will be used both to the advantage and disadvantage of staff. The findings suggest that clear guidelines should be made available to middle managers regarding the purpose of policy so that it is implemented in the way it is intended. However, it is clear that a ‘one size fits all’ approach does not work in the implementation of work-family policy and some level of discretion will be required. When work-family policy implementation at the work unit level is tailored to staff and work unit needs it may be possible to achieve positive outcomes for both staff and the broader work unit.
Chapter 6: Problematising Parent and Professional Identities: an Examination of Employees’ Roles in Challenging Gendered Organisational Processes

Introduction

This is the final analytic chapter and reports on the third level of analysis outlined in the conceptual framework, examining how non-managerial employees can contribute to the development of family-adaptiveness. I argue that while formal policy provision (by senior management) and policy implementation (by middle managers) are key determinants of how employees manage the transition to parenthood (as outlined in the two previous chapters), employees too have a role to play in determining how ‘family-adaptive’ a workplace is. My aim in this chapter is to explore how employees can not only manage their own work-family balance in an organisational context, but also how they can contribute to organisational family-adaptiveness in a broader sense, focusing specifically on how they can challenge gendered organisational processes through their identity work.

In line with the conceptual framework, I focus on two points of entry through which gendering occurs in organisations: informal interactions and internal mental work. Regarding the first point of entry, gendering is evident in the interactions that occur in the everyday communications between a range of organisational actors (Acker, 2006b; Ely & Meyerson, 2000b). In this chapter I examine how gendering processes can be reinforced and challenged in interactions between employees and their managers during the parental leave process as well as in interactions between co-workers, and how these processes are instrumental in shaping family-adaptiveness. The second point of entry I examine is ‘internal mental work’ that employees engage in as they ‘consciously construct their understandings of the organisation’s gendered structure of work and opportunity and the demands for gender-appropriate behaviours and attitudes’ (Acker, 1992b, p.253). Acker contends that through their internal mental work individuals strive to adopt the ‘correct gendered persona’ (Acker, 1992b, p.253) and hide aspects of their lives that do not fit with the organisation’s gendered norms.

These two points of entry are identified as key sites through which gendered outcomes are reinforced in organisations. However, rather than examining how the gendering of organisations is sustained through these processes, I focus on the potential for employees to use these points of entry to challenge gendering processes, taking the perspective that these processes ‘contain both oppressive and resistive possibilities’. (Ely & Meyerson, 2000b, p.114). I challenge the ‘cause and effect’ implied by Acker, who posits that gendering processes, through internal mental work,
influences employees’ identities. Instead, I argue that individuals’ identities shape their approach to internal mental work and thus their contribution to gendering processes. I argue that employees’ identity salience is a key factor that affects their ability to contest gendering processes and thus foster adaptive environments. In particular, I examine how, when individuals invoke identities that challenge gendered norms around work and care in their ‘internal mental work’ and in interactions in the workplace they can influence family-adaptiveness. A key contention I put forward in this chapter, therefore, is that opportunities for the development of family-adaptive environments will be enhanced where employees invoke identities that contest gendered norms around work and care.

As outlined in Chapter 3, a key issue of concern is how gendering of employment structures contributes towards family-adaptiveness. Thus, I also explore whether possibilities to challenge gendered norms around work and care differ between work units that are gendered in different ways. In particular, I examine how being a male or female employee working in male-dominated or female-dominated work unit can influence possibilities to contribute to family-adaptiveness. In this chapter I focus on the entire parental leave process, from when employees inform their managers about their intentions to avail of parental leave entitlements, through the period while they are on leave and onto their initial return to work, while they avail of flexible work arrangements or part-time work to facilitate their caring responsibilities.

At the employee level, qualitative interviews were used as the primary research method. Interviews were conducted with new mothers and fathers in two occupational groups – Library Services and the Computing Centre. Interviews were carried out with a total of five male and nine female employees. All respondents had had at least one child in the previous five years and had taken parental leave and/or used flexible work arrangements following the birth of their youngest child. Some interviews conducted with managers are also drawn upon in this chapter in the context of the examination of specific interactions between managers and employees relating to the parental leave process.

The discussion below first briefly outlines how practical considerations influenced the approach employees took to managing work and family. I then go on to examine how employees in the case study university could contribute to the development of family-adaptive environments, by challenging gendered organisational processes through their ‘internal mental work’ and interactions in the workplace. First, I investigate the role men play in shaping family-adaptiveness, specifically focusing on those who challenged the ideal worker norm by invoking a salient parent identity and taking on a caring role. Next, I examine how women contested gendered norms around work and care by invoking a salient professional identity. A brief discussion of how gendering processes have
unequal outcomes for men and women follows. Finally, I offer some conclusions about the potential for the development of family-adaptiveness through employee actions.

Creating ‘Family-Adaptive’ Workplaces: how Employee Interventions can Challenge Gendered Organisational Processes

One of the main themes that emerged from this analysis concerned the extent to which respondents’ potential to influence family-adaptiveness was related to processes of identity negotiation. However it is important to note briefly that the research findings indicated that a range of practical considerations also influenced work and caring patterns. For example, one father stated that because his partner was breastfeeding their child it was not practical for him to take on the primary caregiving role, because ‘logically’ his partner would need to be with their child (Daniel, Computing Centre Employee, 29th Feb 2012). Respondents also discussed how the decreased earning potential associated with taking time out of work to care influenced their decisions about when and in what capacity to return to work. A mother discussed how she weighed up the costs and benefits when deciding what hours to return to work after maternity leave:

It might be nice to be committed to the job and to have a higher income and those kinds of things... but I am happy with where I am at in terms of weighing up those differences: the hours that I'm working, my time with my children, and the money that I am bringing home. (Kate, Library Services Employee, 7th February 2012)

Similarly, a father who was working reduced hours planned to move back to full-time hours because of financial needs as soon as his family situation allowed:

Well it is a financial hit... Would I be willing to go back to full-time work? As soon as possible. (Tom, Computing Centre Employee, 21st February 2012)

Overriding these practical issues, however, my research findings showed that respondents’ identity salience played a role in shaping their approach to work and care. In discussing the research findings, I examine how respondents invoked professional and parent identities in the internal mental work they engaged in and in their interactions in the workplace across the parental leave process. I also examine how the outcomes of these processes influence broader organisational family-adaptiveness. Respondents had the greatest potential to contribute to the development of family-adaptive workplaces when they invoked or articulated identities that challenged gendered organisational norms surrounding work and care. For the purpose of clarification (and in recognition of the variety of conceptualisations of what it means to be a parent), in discussing the ‘parent identity’ I focus on those who showed evidence of prioritising their caring role. References
to a ‘professional identity’ indicate a prioritisation of career goals. Cases where men who showed evidence of prioritising caring over their careers provided the most marked examples of the potential for employees to contribute to improvements in ‘care’ related entitlements, such as parental leave and flexible working arrangements. On the other hand, the most significant findings regarding the pursuit of career progression following parenthood came from women who were ‘breaking the mold’ in aiming to progress their careers, by not only moving up the ladder, but also increasing skills and responsibilities within their positions.

Research has examined the ways in which employees adopt formal and informal practices to manage work-family balance in the workplace (Sturges, 2012; Wierda-Boer, et al., 2008; Wiese & Heidemeier, 2012). In the discussion that follows I will highlight how individuals used official means as well as more informal channels to successfully combine their career and caring responsibilities.

**Men who Dare to Care: Accessing Parental Leave and Flexible Work**

Evidence from the research indicated that men experienced more difficulties in accessing parental leave and flexible work arrangements than women. This is consistent with existing scholarship in this area (Allard, et al., 2011; Haas & Hwang, 2009; Sallee, 2012). Some of the male respondents who faced resistance in attempting to take on caring roles negotiated family-friendly arrangements by questioning traditional conceptualisations of the ‘ideal worker’ (Drago, et al., 2005; Drago, et al., 2006). I argue that invoking a salient parent identity was as a key factor in enabling respondents to challenge gendered organisational practices and hence contribute to the development of family-adaptive workplaces.

As discussed I focus on two key points of entry for the gendering of organisations. First, I examine evidence that male respondents invoked salient parent identities in the internal mental work they engaged in that resulted in a decision to take on a caring role. Next, I describe how they invoked their parent identity in interactions with their supervisors on issues relating to parental leave. Finally I provide evidence that through these points of entry, employees could challenge gendering processes. Thus, they could influence family-adaptiveness in their work unit and also had the potential to contribute to broader organisational change. I focus predominantly on two men who were particularly vocal in challenging gendered norms, but also incorporate comments from other respondents as relevant.

**Internalising the Father Role: Breadwinner or Carer?**

Internal mental work refers to the thought processes organisational actors go through that shape their behaviours in the workplace. Acker argues that internal mental work is the process through
which individuals ‘come to understand the organisation’s gendered expectations and opportunities, including the appropriate gendered behaviours and attitudes’ (Acker, 1999, p.184) I refute the contention that organisational messages about appropriate gendered behaviours shapes individuals’ internal mental work and contend that individuals’ identity salience also plays a role in shaping the internal mental work they engage in. Thus, I contend that internal mental work can be used to counteract gendering processes rather than solely being a process through which gendering processes in organisations are reinforced. In the discussion below I examine the internal mental work that male respondents engaged in following fatherhood and the impact of this on their approach to work and care and the subsequent development of family-adaptiveness.

Most of the male respondents stated that they had a changed perspective on work after transitioning to fatherhood. However, the way in which their perspectives changed differed from person to person. For some respondents, becoming a father seemed to solidify the centrality of their professional identity. These respondents associated fatherhood with traditional notions of the ‘male-breadwinner’ and they therefore conceptualised the pursuit of career progression as a positive way of contributing towards the wellbeing of their families. This is consistent with research that found that the fatherhood and employment role can exist in harmony for men (Aryee & Luk, 1996) and that fatherhood is often equated with being a ‘productive member of the workforce’ (Sallee, 2012, p.784). When asked if becoming a father had changed his perspective on work, one respondent stated:

Yes, I think so because of the sense of duty that I have to provide for my family. You know, I struggled very hard to get the job I am in so that I could then afford to buy a house to provide for the baby that was going to come, that type of thing. And so I have been pushing things at work ... to improve things. (Frank, Library Services Employee, 28th November 2011)

Another respondent discussed how he sought ‘new meaning’ in the work he was doing, in part through the pursuit of career progression. He conceptualised career progression as being part of his ‘grand plan’ for his family. He had completed an MBA and was seconded to a higher level role and viewed this as a positive way of contributing to his paternal role. Pursuing his career ‘for the right reasons’ was associated with ensuring a secure financial future for his family:

I guess everybody's got career aspirations regardless of whether they've got a family or not but yes, in line with being away from the family for the right reasons then yes, I want to make my career progression count for the right reasons. (Daniel, Computing Centre Employee, 29th Feb 2012)
In contrast, other respondents associated fatherhood with active involvement in caregiving. These respondents went against the male-breadwinner norm and appeared to place greater emphasis on providing a balanced upbringing to their children than on pursuing their careers. One particularly pertinent example was James, who stated ‘when you've got a young family I think your career goals become “get through the next day”’ (James, Computing Centre Employee, 8th March 2012).

James, an employee in the Computing Centre, took on an active role in caregiving and had been the primary caregiver for his youngest child. James felt that in its capacity as an employer, the university could help its employees achieve work-family balance:

...a lot of child-rearing is frustrating and boring and repetitive as well as rewarding. There are those negative aspects to it as well. And a lot of that can be mitigated with better sharing between the partners. And I think the University is an organisation that I think is very well placed to... try and make that better sharing happen for its employees. (James, Computing Centre Employee, 8th March 2012)

James highlighted how his family benefitted when he took extended leave after the birth of his youngest child:

It was nice to have a little bit more contact in the early days with the baby... It was sort of a more balanced sharing with my wife as well because she took the first four months off or something like that and then I took over and did a few months. (James, Computing Centre Employee, 8th March 2012)

James associated his parent identity with being actively involved in his children’s upbringing, sharing caring responsibilities with his wife. He had the confidence to challenge the gendered male-breadwinner/ female-carer model. James’s concern with maintaining work-family balance was also evident in his reluctant to pursue career progression. When asked if he thought moving into a management position was a possibility, he replied:

Would I even want to?... I don't know, my manager has made the odd noise about that... I'm not entirely convinced that I am management material... when you become [a manager] you do a lot more management stuff and you have budgets and things, so I'm not entirely convinced that I want to go there. (James, Computing Centre Employee, 8th March 2012)

This suggests that his identity as a father and carer may have been more salient than his professional identity. Following our interview, James sent me an e-mail outlining evidence of what he perceived to be a ‘watering down’ of policies that support employees in combining work and caring responsibilities. He had gone through both the university’s old and up-to-date policies to show how ‘very specific, black-and-white wording’ regarding a commitment by the university to prevent
discrimination against those with family responsibilities was ‘wholly absent’ from the new policy document. His acute awareness of the university’s policy is a further indication of the salience of his parent identity and the importance he places on work-family balance.

Tom, an employee in the Computing Centre, also took a non-traditional approach to fathering. Tom was concerned with providing a balanced upbringing for his children by sharing caring responsibilities with his partner. He stated that the level of flexibility offered by the university was an important factor in his choice to work there, highlighting the importance he placed on maintaining balance between work and home:

*I always would have perceived working in the University sector that you would have some sort of flexibility, it was one of the reasons... why have I stayed here for 13 years?* (Tom, Computing Centre Employee, 21st February 2012)

Tom went to reduced hours to help provide care for his children. At the time he had three young children and stated that he ‘found it was a lot easier in the household to be present in the morning at home, just to get the day kicked off’. For Tom, as with James, career progression was not a priority. When asked whether he would consider pushing his career to move up to a higher level he stated:

*Not likely, because of the people that I see that are working... small increments, like one or two levels above me, they are not necessarily happier or more relaxed, or more in control.* (Tom, Computing Centre Employee, 21st February 2012)

This illustrates that Tom was concerned with having a working arrangement that did not impact negatively on himself or his family. Being employed in a job that was interesting and provided him the flexibility to be able to be actively involved in his children’s care seemed to be a priority for him.

This discussion above illustrates that it is possible to invoke different conceptualisations of the ‘father’ identity following the transition to parenthood. Some respondents associated fatherhood with the traditional male-breadwinner norm while others took a non-traditional approach emphasising their caring role. This mirrors research which examined how male employees crafted different identities following the transition to fatherhood in order to manage the new role (Sallee, 2012).

The impact of the differences in conceptualisations about the fatherhood identity emerges through an examination of internal mental work they engaged in relating to their management of work and family. Employees who had a traditional fatherhood identity based on the male-breadwinner norm were likely to emphasise career progression as the route through which they could fulfil their fatherhood role, by being a provider for the family. In contrast, those who were focused on their
caring role were less bound by traditional notions of fatherhood and hence a concern with career progression was less apparent in the internal mental work they engaged in. Instead, they saw their contribution as a father as being more closely related to their availability to care for their children.

In discussing internal mental work, Acker states that ‘workers must first recognise what is appropriate and then try to control and shape their actions and feelings in those directions’ (Acker, 1999, p.185). I contend that the male employees whose identity went against the traditional fatherhood norm may have recognised that they were going against what is deemed ‘appropriate’ fatherhood in an organisational context (i.e. the male-breadwinner norm). However, instead of shaping their own actions and feelings towards that norm, they chose to oppose it, by emphasising their caring role. Thus, these employees could contribute to family-adaptiveness.

**Invoking the Father Identity in Workplace Interactions**

The contrasting conceptualisations of the father identity discussed above translated into respondents’ behavior in the workplace, specifically in their interactions with managers and co-workers. While workplace interactions are seen as a key site for the reproduction of gendering processes (Acker, 1999; Ely & Meyerson, 2000b), I argue that there are opportunities to challenge gendering processes through interactions. I argue that the ways in which individuals invoke their identities is a key determinant of how gendering processes can be challenged.

Respondents who held traditional notions of fatherhood were more likely to fall in line with the ‘ideal worker’ norm. In contrast, respondents for whom caring was central to their fatherhood identity were more likely to seek alternative working arrangements. Evidence suggests that men who attempt to access work-family entitlements can face significant resistance in the workplace (Allard, et al., 2011). Gendered organisational practices can deter men from attempting to access entitlements which are traditionally viewed as being reserved for women. In the discussion that follows I illustrate how respondents invoked strong parent identities in their interactions with supervisors and co-workers in order to overcome these challenges.

James took on the role of primary caregiver following the birth of his youngest child. He initially attempted to access the university’s 26 weeks paid parental leave. According to James, because the wording of the Enterprise Agreement parental leave clause was ‘a little bit imprecise’ it was open to interpretation whether or not he could access primary caregiver leave. James sought clarification from HR, both within his occupational group and at the central University level and was informed that he could not access the leave. The university’s expanded parental leave policy states that primary caregiver leave can only be shared between parents when both are employed by the
university. As James’s wife was not an employee of the university, he was unable to access the leave. As James stated:

> It sounds like it could be for both when you look at the policy, but when you actually press them and say ‘I’m going to do this’ they say ‘no, if you're a guy, no’... the entitlement, the impression I get, goes with the woman and the woman could give it to the man if that's advantageous. (James, Computing Centre Employee, 8th March 2012)

James’s ineligibility to access primary caregiver leave brings into focus the gendered ideology underlying the university’s parental leave policy. The policy assumes that mothers should take on the caring role. By excluding fathers from accessing primary caregiver leave on the basis that their partners are not employed by the university, gendered norms surrounding caring are reinforced.

While James was unsuccessful in accessing primary caregiver leave, he stated that he was prepared to go ‘right up the food chain’ in order to clarify whether he could access the leave. After contacting HR he went to a senior union representative in the university, who discussed with him the union’s attempts to extend the policy to cover fathers. He noted how:

> Some of the more senior executives of the University with whom he was talking were scratching their head and just couldn't get it; just didn't understand why the guy would be at home. (James, Computing Centre Employee, 8th March 2012)

This is corroborated by the senior trade union official (also interviewed as part of the research), who stated that some members of senior management had a ‘conceptual problem’ and ‘couldn’t get their heads around’ the idea that a father could be the primary caregiver (Richard, Trade Union Branch Manager, 19th March 2012). There was a perception that fathers who availed of leave were accessing a benefit that they might not be entitled to. The attitude of senior management is again indicative of the gendered logic underlying the provision of policy in the case study university.

In the end, James took accumulated long service leave to care for his children. Despite being unsuccessful in accessing the primary caregiver leave, his determination to achieve work-family balance was evident in the lengths he went to, trying various different avenues to see if there was any way he could make the policy work for him. This is a further indication of the strength of his parent identity. He noted the importance of being persistent in pursuing work-family balance requests and stated that it was important to be willing to fight for what you want:

> ... you still at some level kind of have to fight a bit for what you want. Like when I got the answer ‘no, you can't get the 26 weeks’ I actually... took that to a few different people up the chain just to see if this is really right, but then ultimately there is only so much you can do. (James, Computing Centre Employee, 8th March 2012)
Interactions between managers and subordinates are key sites for the gendering of organisations (Acker, 2006a). The example of interactions between this employee and his manager as well as others in positions of seniority to him illustrates how interactions can be used to challenge gendering processes. I contend that James’ non-traditional fatherhood identity was crucial in this process.

Another respondent, Tom, also faced significant resistance from his supervisors in attempting to move to reduced hours:

*I was told point blank… by the head of our section at the time that I wouldn't be able to do that and then I went up to the next tier. (Tom, Computing Centre Employee, 21st February 2012)*

Difficulty accessing changes to working hours following parenthood is a key issue raised in complaints of discrimination in the workplace relating to family responsibilities (McDonald, 2008). Tom stated that he felt the reasons he was being denied flexible work arrangements were flimsy at best. He felt that they were ‘lip-service’ and that ‘the reasons advanced for maybe not having work flexibility are pretty vague, they are not very substantial, they don’t stand up’. Tom was willing to go up the chain of command to pursue his request. The salience of Tom’s parent identity was evident in the lengths her was prepared to go to in order to access flexible work arrangements:

*I actually initially moved to [reduced hours] two years ago. And that was after a bit of negotiation… I said ‘Well I need this or I go and see equity’. And since I don't think that any of my bosses at the time had ever heard that, bells started ringing. (Tom, Computing Centre Employee, 21st February 2012)*

Tom outlined how he continued to pursue the issue, despite his request being continuously denied. He stated that he ‘was refused and stalemated and they didn’t want to talk… about it for about a month’. It was only after a new manager came in to the work unit that Tom succeeded in getting the arrangement he desired. Despite being told ‘point blank’ that he could not access flexible arrangements, he persisted and made moves to involve the office for equity and diversity. Tom’s persistence contrasts with another respondent who, when asked whether he felt he had control over the time off after the birth of his child, stated:

*I just went with what I could get, I didn't try to negotiate for any more; I stuck with that so I guess there wasn't a lot of control. (Nick, Library Services Employee, 30th November 2011)*

This highlights how it is sometimes necessary to persevere in order to get work-family balance requests approved. I argue that Tom’s persistence in pursuing his request through his interactions with managers is related to the salience of his parent identity and his belief in his right to care for
his children. Acker states that through interactions ‘at various levels of hierarchy, policies that create divisions are developed and images of gender are created and affirmed’ (Acker, 1992b, p.253) The discussion of the difficulties Tom faced in accessing flexible work arrangements illustrates how a policy that appears to apply to all workers can in fact be based on gendered assumptions. Thus, Tom’s managers were blinkered in their approach, assuming that flexible work arrangements were intended for use by women to care for their children but not men.

Another example of the salience of his parent identity was Tom’s ‘point blank’ refusal to do on-call duties shortly after he became a father. He stated that some pressure was exerted on him, but that he countered this pressure by emailing his supervisor stating that he could not guarantee that he ‘would be able to meet the service requirements’ of the role, due to his caring responsibilities. The ‘on-call’ policy is one example of a gender neutral policy that can result in gendered outcomes, in that those with caring responsibilities (predominantly women) can be disadvantaged by it (Ely & Meyerson, 2000b). In this context, however, it was a man who stood to be disadvantaged by the policy due to his non-traditional approach to fatherhood and caring. Tom stated that he was the first to take this stance and noted how more recent development in the university’s occupational health and safety obligations provided an opportunity for employees to opt-out of on call duties. This respondent’s awareness of the university’s policy also highlights his keen interest in work-family balance issues and may be a further indication of a salient parent identity. Tom stated that his specific work arrangement ‘was a little bit hard to swallow’ for his immediate work colleagues, and although he got some negative reaction from them, he stated that it didn’t bother him. Research has indicated that the support of co-workers is crucial in creating family-supportive work environments (McDonald, Brown, et al., 2005; Waters & Bardoel, 2006). The fact that Tom did not allow negative reactions to bother him is indicative of his strong belief in his right to access flexible work arrangements and the salience of his parent identity. Tom therefore was also able to challenge gendering processes in his interactions in the workplace by invoking a salient father identity that emphasised caring and thus went against the traditional fatherhood norm.

The discussion above illustrates how it is possible to challenge gendering processes through informal interactions in the workplace. Both respondents discussed above showed evidence of invoking a salient parent identity in their interactions with supervisors and colleagues to challenge gendered norms around work and care.

**Challenging Gendered Norms to Engender Broader Organisational Change**

Evidence suggested that by invoking identities that went against gendered norms through these two ‘points of entry’ (internal mental work and informal interactions), male respondents may have had
the potential to lead to changes in broader organisational policy and practice, thus contributing to organisational family-adaptiveness.

James was persistent in trying various avenues to access primary caregiver leave. Despite being unsuccessful he stated that he thought it was important that fathers should have access to the full amount of parental leave and that it was a goal that should be pursued in future enterprise negotiations. He hoped that unions would ‘continue to fight’ for it. While there was no evidence that James’s actions led to changes in how his occupational group operated, by being vocal about his work-family balance needs to senior managers and union representatives he may have had some influence in bringing the issue to the fore and highlighting its importance for future enterprise negotiations.

Tom provided a clearer example of the potential for individuals to influence organisational work-family policy and practice. Tom was a pioneer within his work unit in both attempting to move to reduced hours and in refusing to do on-call duties. His willingness to challenge the ideal worker norm opened up opportunities for others in his work unit to see the potential to work non-standard hours. He suggested that he may have paved the way for others to follow his lead when he successfully moved to reduced hours:

*Perhaps I've advanced the possibility in my work section more than anything that was written down by doing it, by actually doing it... for example one of my workmates who has only joined the workforce in the last 14 months, and he came from private industry and he found my hours a little bit weird... And he's had a child in the meantime and they're going to have another one so he starting to realise this is a real, a live possibility; that if I can afford to and it suits my wife and myself, I could work reduced hours at some stage.* (Tom, Computing Centre Employee, 21st February 2012)

The discussion above highlights how the gendered approach to work-family policy provision in the case study university impacted on male respondents who attempted to access family-friendly working arrangements. These men faced significant resistance to their work-family requests, which they succeeded in challenging with varying degrees of success. While James was unsuccessful in his attempt to access primary caregiver leave, by bringing his story to the HR department and to union officials he has increased recognition of the needs of fathers who wish to take on caring roles. Tom’s persistence in pursuing his request for flexible work arrangements ended in him successfully accessing reduced hours and also paved the way for others within his work unit to access work-family arrangements that they may not have previously considered. These findings mirror research
that shows that men can act as ‘agents of change’ within organisations (Haas, et al., 2002, p.319) by bringing to the fore work-family issues that have not previously been of concern.

A final issue which emerged from the examination of men who challenged gendered norms around work relates to the impact of the gendered structure of employment on opportunities for family-adaptiveness. Both of these men were employed in male-dominated work units. Of all the male respondents, these men faced the most resistance from their managers in accessing entitlements related to parental leave. While James would have faced the same issues regardless of the work unit in which he was employed (as the same parental leave policy applies across the university), the resistance that Tom faced arguably was related to the specific work context and the dominance of male patterns of work. This is illustrated by the fact that he was the first employee to avail of reduced hours; a working arrangement that may be more common in female-dominated work units. Thus, the findings indicate that family-adaptiveness is at least to some degree related to the gendered organisational structure. However, as the discussion below on women’s roles in shaping family-adaptiveness will show, women can face difficulties in balancing their career and caring even in female-dominated work units and factors other than the gender structure of employment must be considered. I argue that regardless of the gendered structure of particular occupational groups, gendered norms around work and care, which sees a man’s role as earner and a woman’s role as carer, are more influential in dictating family-adaptiveness.

Women who Dare to Pursue a Career: Opportunities for Skill Development and Advancement

While fathers faced difficulties in accessing work-family arrangements, the key challenge facing mothers on their return to work following maternity leave was the pursuit of career advancement within often changed working arrangements. In line with the concept of the ‘mommy track’ discussed earlier (Benschop & Doorrewaard, 1998, p.794), there appeared to be few opportunities for career development in the case study university. There was limited evidence of formal policy to facilitate those with caring responsibilities in accessing training and career development opportunities. While a fund was in place to support the professional development of employees with caring responsibilities, few employees and managers were aware of it. In the absence of formalised policies to promote career progression for parents, evidence suggested that respondents had to rely on their own initiative in order to access career development opportunities. The discussion below examines how some female respondents had successful transitions back to work and pursued opportunities for career advancement following maternity leave. I examine how respondents mitigated some of the negative career impacts commonly associated with maternity leave by invoking their professional identities in the workplace and clearly articulating their career goals,
focusing mainly on three women who had particularly salient professional identities. Two of the respondents were in the early stages of their careers while the third was in a management position. For these respondents, employment remained an important source of fulfilment and they associated their return to work with a desire for some of the intrinsic rewards related to their identity as professionals; rewards that they felt they could not access in their role as a mother. I examine how gendering processes were evident in the internal mental work these respondents engaged in following their return to work, illustrating how they experienced conflict by going against the male-breadwinner/female-carer model. I also discuss how they interacted with their supervisors to pursue their career goals. Throughout the discussion I contrast these women’s experiences with those of other respondents to illustrate how having a salient professional identity helped ease the transition back to work. However I am not suggesting that employees should have sole responsibility to manage this process: how employees manage the transition back to work is just one aspect of a much larger picture in which organisational leaders and line managers play crucial roles.

**Internal Conflicts in the Transition Back to Work: Caring or Career?**

The decision to return to work following maternity leave is often fraught with conflicting feelings and emotions (Brough, et al., 2009). Research has indicated that women can experience conflict in maintaining their professional identity while also managing their new role as mother (Millward, 2006). In line with previous research, many respondents in this study spoke of feelings of guilt, nervousness and uncertainty in returning to work. Kylie described it as a ‘grieving process’ and stated that she ‘felt really guilty about it and really torn about priorities’ (Kylie, Computing Centre Employee, 5th March 2012). Similarly, Vanessa stated ‘as a mother you never get rid of the guilt’ (Vanessa, Librarian with supervisory duties, 27th September 2011). These comments highlight how gendered norms impacted on the internal mental work respondents engaged in. Acker contends that gendering processes in organisations can shape the internal mental work of organisational actors, teaching them about what is appropriate workplace behaviour and determining how they ‘construct personas that are appropriately gendered for the institutional setting (Acker, 1992a, p.568). This results in the reproduction of gendered patterns of work and care. In this research, there was evidence that gendered norms impacted on the internal mental work female respondents engaged in, with some respondents feeling guilty about going against the male-breadwinner/female-carer model in returning to work. However, evidence suggested that those who had a salient professional identity could overcome negative emotions by justifying their decision to return to work as necessary to pursue their career goals. For example, Catherine – a mother who is employed in a management position within the library – spoke about having reservations about leaving her children in childcare on her return to work:
I had certainly missed the mental stimulation of work. I had some reservations about leaving the children in care at such a young age... they wouldn't have been quite a year old...[but] I think I recognised that mentally I wanted the stimulation. (Catherine, Librarian and Manager, 30th November 2011)

Catherine’s desire to pursue her career meant that she was ‘pretty happy’ with the decision to return when she did, as she felt she had minimised any negative impacts on her career due to her absence:

I didn't really want to be away for more than year, because I thought you can kind of catch up after a year but after more than a year I think it would be more difficult. But yes, so I think all in all I was pretty happy. (Catherine, Librarian and Manager, 30th November 2011)

Similarly Rachel, a librarian who recently gave birth to her second child and is working part-time, highlighted the salience of her professional identity when she said: ‘I would really like to be working more, I am not a stay-at-home person, I'm just not’ (Rachel, Library Services Employee, 29th Nov 2011). Returning to work was a way for Rachel to take ownership of role in which she felt confident in her abilities. While Rachel’s actual role was not necessarily what defined her, being competent at work was an important aspect of her identity:

It's always been so hard for me to find something that I’m good at and the things that I am good at are really quite limited and I am very good at them so I want to do them. And I am a crap housewife, really rubbish; I mean I'm really bad. I am an alright mom but my housekeeping is atrocious. You want to do what you are good at. (Rachel, Library Services Employee, 29th Nov 2011)

Similar evidence emerged from an interview with Emma, a librarian who at the time of interview had recently returned from maternity leave for her first child. Emma was employed in a full-time position prior to her maternity leave but moved into a part-time position on her return to work. While Emma’s specific work role was not central to her identity, being employed in a role where she was able to use her skills was an important aspect of her identity. When asked if her role as a professional was important to her she stated:

It is really important. I studied really hard and spent a lot of money to... get where I am... I know a lot of librarians that being a librarian defines them, I don't think it defines me, but being sort of... smart and snappy and good at what I do does define me. (Emma, Library Services Employee, 16th March 2012)

She noted how while her role as mother was very important to her, having a professional identity still remained central:
My relationship with [my son] is 100 percent about him or 99 percent about him, but this relationship at work is about me which... I am selfish and I like. (Emma, Library Services Employee, 16\textsuperscript{th} March 2012)

These findings mirror research that shows how work can be central to mothers’ identities and can be a key source of mental stimulation (Bailey, 1999, 2000). Being recognised and valued in her professional role was a key motivating factor for Emma in making the decision to return to work:

I think I have always been treated here like I'm very, very valued and make a very positive contribution. I'm a little bit special... I do tend to get a lot of praise and value and you don't get that from a one year old... So there is that; there is a feeling to be able to come back here and to have a shifting role... I am still [son]'s mother, [son]'s my son, but at work I've got this different role, this wunderkind kind of role as well. (Emma, Library Services Employee, 16\textsuperscript{th} March 2012)

These comments illustrate how for some respondents having a salient professional identity was a key motivator for returning to work and that it seemed to counteract some of the negative ‘internal mental work’ that they experienced as a result of challenging gendered norms. The findings support the contention that while organisational context play a role in shaping individuals’ internal mental work and thus their gender identity (Acker, 1990, p.140), individuals also can shape internal mental work through their inherent identity salience.

‘You are an Advocate for Yourself’: Developing Career Opportunities through Workplace Interactions

Having a salient professional identity not only eased the emotional transition back to work following childbirth, but also seemed to contribute towards a smooth physical transition back into the workforce. While appropriate workplace planning by HR and line managers is key to ensuring a smooth transition following maternity leave (Brough, et al., 2009; Houston & Marks, 2003), employees themselves also have an important role to play in this regard. There was general consensus amongst female respondents that little formal reorientation was available following maternity leave. Many respondents told a similar story about being ‘thrown into the deep end’ (Tessa, Computing Centre Employee, 28\textsuperscript{th} March 2012) or being ‘thrown immediately into it’ (Kylie, Computing Centre Employee, 5\textsuperscript{th} March 2012). Some spoke about not being given clear direction on their return:

I had no idea how things had changed during that time so... that was pretty disappointing to come back and not have anybody there to be like ‘Oh [Denise], you're back, let's sit down
and talk about what’s happened over the last 12 months and get you up to speed and ready to go again’. (Denise, Library Services Employee, 1st December 2011)

No-one sort of sat down and defined ‘this is exactly what [Emma] will do when she comes back’, there was sort of ‘let’s talk to people and see what bones they want to throw you’ kind of thing. (Emma, Library Services Employee, 16th March 2012)

How the lack of direction was dealt with differed from person to person. For example, while Denise stated that she ‘was a little disappointed that [her] manager was not there with time set aside to update [her]’ (Denise, Library Services Employee, 1st December 2011), Emma stated that she actively sought out a meeting with her supervisor to clarify what her responsibilities were ‘on [her] first day back, first thing because [she] thought that's what [she] should do’ (Emma, Library Services Employee, 16th March 2012).

Emma also discussed how making regular visits to the workplace during her maternity leave was a way of keeping on top of changes that were occurring:

So I really used the visits with the dual purpose: so I was gauging what the environment was like and changes within the staff and within the work practices and things like that. (Emma, Library Services Employee, 16th March 2012)

Again, this contrasts with Denise, who did not keep in touch with the workplace and reported that she ‘felt a little bit left out that no one even bothered to let [her] know’ when changes happened in her workplace while she was on leave. By actively taking responsibility for managing her transition back to work Emma was able to ease the process.

Emma discussed how she pursued her career goals by driving her own learning and skill development. She noted how she made efforts to extend and instigate improvements in her role prior to going on maternity leave:

I worked really hard. A lot of what we were doing... you had to instigate yourself and I had worked my backside off doing a lot of additional things and setting a lot of additional things up that really improved the work quality. (Emma, Library Services Employee, 16th March 2012)

Following her return from maternity leave, she moved to a new position. She felt that her previously developed skills were somewhat wasted in the new position. In fact research has identified changed work responsibilities following maternity leave as one of the key grounds on which family-related discrimination claims are raised (McDonald, 2008). However, despite her changed working conditions, Emma saw opportunities to develop new skills:
When I was told that the position wouldn't be moving back to my old team I wasn't happy about that because I thought it was a waste of my skills but having come back to the team... I don't know that it is a waste of my skills because I can do these things as well and I can do them just as well and it's a new set of things to do and a new set of things for me to try out... different areas of me to develop. (Emma, Library Services Employee, 16th March 2012)

While Emma was only back at work for a couple of months at the time of interview, it was apparent that she was attempting to drive her own learning and carve out a niche for herself within her new workplace. By invoking her professional identity both while she was on leave and when she returned to work she succeeded in easing the transition back to work.

While workplace interactions can be a key site through which gendering processes are reinforced in organisation, the discussion illustrates how gendering processes can be challenged, particularly when individuals are willing to contest gendered norms. Gendering processes in organisations mean that specific gendered meanings are attached to the behaviours of organisational actors. For example, the ideal worker norm which pervades many organisations means that there is a general expectation (although unacknowledged) that those who work part-time do not have career ambitions. Thus gendering processes can be invisible, unstated but yet pervasive in the organisation. As Acker states ‘the production of gender is often “inside” the activities that constitute the organisation itself’ (Acker, 1992b, p.253).

Some respondents showed how these norms could be challenged by consciously addressing the gendered assumptions in their interactions with managers. For example, one respondent noted the importance of being upfront in discussions about caring responsibilities and career goals:

You are an advocate for yourself... you need to communicate your needs and if you don’t communicate them then nobody can help you. (Rachel, Library Services Employee, 29th Nov 2011)

Rachel stated that in discussions with her supervisor she made clear what her work-family balance needs and career goals were. Rachel was only available to work limited hours due to her caring commitments but still was keen to advance her career. Her comments suggest that the salience of her professional identity was a key factor in her pursuing her career goals:

I started the job in this situation and I was very honest and open about the situation and I didn’t expect them to give me tons of work but it was just that I said... ‘I really want to be employed and I want to be doing something that I love and it is killing me to be stuck at home to be honest, it is absolutely killing me’. (Rachel, Library Services Employee, 29th Nov 2011)
Despite only being available for limited hours, Rachel reported that she had the strong support of her manager to pursue career development:

_I have had it said to me straight out that I’m young, I am smart and I am enthusiastic and that there are not many people graduating and coming up, so they are trying to get the good ones now and they have actually been really straight up about that._ (Rachel, Library Services Employee, 29\(^{th}\) Nov 2011)

In fact, she stated that efforts were made in order to ensure that she would be able to continue to work, despite the fact that the budget was being stretched:

_They were really trying to keep me, so they made a few shuffles to try and do that for me. It was really nice, I felt really special._ (Rachel, Library Services Employee, 29\(^{th}\) Nov 2011)

Rachel’s story illustrates how, by emphasising the importance of her professional identity and being upfront about her work-family needs, she was able to carve out a route towards career progression. Although Rachel was successful in achieving the work-family balance she desired by invoking a strong professional identity, her comments indicated that other factors influence the extent to which this is possible:

_It does depend a lot on who wants you and who wants to keep you and that has a lot to do with how you present yourself._ (Rachel, Library Services Employee, 29\(^{th}\) Nov 2011)

In discussing the situation of some of her colleagues who she felt were ‘overworked and very disgruntled’ she stated:

_I sometimes shake my head actually about the hours that some of the senior library assistants do and there just seems to be no reprieve for them, they just seem to work and work and work and they don’t really get the same flexibility and there is almost a shake of the head if they can’t make it in._ (Rachel, Library Services Employee, 29\(^{th}\) Nov 2011)

She then compared this to her own situation and said:

_I feel like they are pulling strings behind the wall or whatever, and it's funny because some people just seem to be struggling against nothing._ (Rachel, Library Services Employee, 29\(^{th}\) Nov 2011)

This highlights the crucial role that managers play in enabling employees to achieve work-family balance, as the previous chapter examined in detail.

While it is clear that the lack of reintegration following return to work is an issue which managers need to address, the discussion above highlights how some respondents could ease the transition
back to work and pursue new skills and responsibilities. However, while respondents could pursue career development through up-skilling and training, there was almost universal agreement among employees and managers that opportunities for career progression (in terms of moving up the ladder) were very limited for part-time employees, regardless of the salience of their professional identity. For example, while career progression was important for Emma, she could not envisage moving up to a senior position while working part-time. In discussing her decision to remain part-time she stated:

*It wasn't easy because I am quite ambitious personally and it's also hard when you have a lot of support from colleagues and from your manager and from other managers saying 'you can be a University librarian someday' or... 'you would make a great manager' and stuff like that and you get this sort of feeling that that's what the organisation expects from you; they have been putting all this time and money and energy into training and giving you opportunities because they expect you to be stepping up and in some respects you feel selfish saying 'no', putting that on hold...* (Emma, Library Services Employee, 16th March 2012)

As with many other respondents, Emma viewed career progression and part-time work as being incompatible, despite the fact that her manager saw serious potential for her to progress. This mirrors research that shows while an organisation may offer flexibility, choosing to avail of flexible work arrangements implicitly can equate to forfeiting career ambitions (Holt & Lewis, 2011).

One respondent, however, showed that it was possible to combine a management role with caring responsibilities. Catherine returned to work part-time in a management position following her maternity leave (after previously being in a full-time management role). As with the other female respondents, Catherine frequently invoked her professional identity while on leave. She reported that she occasionally visited the workplace and read e-mails to ‘try and catch up on things’ and ‘keep a toe in the water’ to help ease the transition back to work. A number of respondents referred to Catherine in discussions of the potential to achieve career progression in a part-time role:

*Well I guess I look at [Catherine] and she is achieved this, she's a Level 8 and she was working full-time ... and then she took time to have children as well and she has come back to work part-time ... so she is one person who is achieving it.* (Kate, Library Services Employee, 7th February 2012)

*I think the precedent is there, because we have a part-time senior manager...* (Emma, Library Services Employee, 16th March 2012)

Catherine therefore acted as a role model for others, illustrating that it was possible to be employed as a manager in a part-time capacity. The discussion illustrates how people learn about what is
appropriate workplace behaviour in organisations ‘through the stories [they] tell about particular persons or events, and the sense they make more generally of what goes on around them’ (Ely & Meyerson, 2000b). This ‘sense making’, which often occurs in informal interactions in the workplace, is a key processes through which gendering can be reinforced or challenged in organisations. Catherine could thus contest gendering processes and contribute to family-adaptiveness by developing a new workplace narrative about the compatibility of part-time work and management.

However, despite opening up possibilities for challenging gendered perceptions about part-time work and career progression, Catherine noted that there may be limited opportunities to move into a managerial position while working part-time:

*People have said to me ‘oh you are very lucky’ and some have even said ‘you were quite clever, getting promoted to a manager and then having your children’, with the implication that you wouldn't be able to do it the other way around. But I think that's probably actually true.* (Catherine, Librarian and Manager, 30th November 2011)

She also discussed how, despite being employed in a part-time capacity, she felt that she was fulfilling a full-time role:

*...so I found myself really coming back to work and really trying to manage a five day role in three days, with some support but yes... It was okay because I did know the job, I knew the people that I was managing and I think those people were quite forgiving of the situation they found themselves in as well... and they were supportive of me which I appreciated. But you know, for two days of the week I just wasn't there and there were people that they could pass issues that arose and were urgent to, but I just felt that it was my job to keep everything running in three days.* (Catherine, Librarian and Manager, 30th November 2011)

This reflects research which has highlighted the difficulties faced by part-time staff attempting to take on a full-time workload (Smithson, 2005) and again is reflective of gendered perceptions about the need for those in management positions to be ‘married to the job’. The lack of experience organisations have in dealing with part-time working arrangements – particularly amongst managerial staff – has the potential to result in unproductive working patterns. For example employees may be required to work longer hours to fulfill workloads or risk failing to complete tasks to a satisfactory standard. Thus new organisational narratives around what the productive worker looks like (i.e. one that challenges the contention that full-time work equates to productivity and commitment) may be required so that it is possible to successfully combine part-time work and management.
Despite the difficulties Catherine faced in her part-time role, she acted as a role model for other employees hoping to pursue career progression. Researchers have identified the crucial role working mothers play in ‘role-modeling’ behaviours for others. For example, one study found that expectant mothers took cues from other working mothers about what was acceptable and achievable by examining how other women managed career and motherhood (Ladge, et al., 2011). Catherine also contributed to the development of a family-adaptive environment within her work unit. She discussed how engaging in informal discussions with other mothers in the workplace provided an outlet for her to discuss issues or problems she faced in her new role as a mother and spoke about the benefits of having a work environment in which family responsibilities are acknowledged. In a sense, she was a mentor for her employees when it came to work-related issues, and her employees were mentors for her in relation to parenting. This highlights how the work unit can benefit from having an open approach to the discussion of work-family issues, where work and family are not seen as separate spheres, but intertwined.

**Women Influencing Organisational Change: Identifying Avenues for Policy Development**

The evidence suggests that while female respondents could exert some control over their transition back to work and the pursuit of skill development, there was little potential to pursue career advancement. While Catherine illustrated that it was possible to work in management in a part-time capacity, there was no evidence of others following her lead. Catherine referred to the fact that there was a lack of formal policy to encourage part-time staff to apply for management positions. She stated that there are differences ‘between the rights you have when you are in a position and the rights you have to apply for a position’ and went on to say:

> The irony is, is that you have the right to request to work reduced hours when you have children who are under school-age… but that right doesn't seem to carry itself forward to the job application process and maybe [the university] needs to do something more actively to allow that to happen. (Catherine, Librarian and Manager, 30th November 2011)

This indicates that while it was possible for Catherine to hold onto a management position after moving to part-time hours, it may be more difficult for an employee to move up to a management position while working part-time. Catherine was conscious of this problem and was concerned with assisting part-time staff who wished to pursue career progression:

> I think there should be plenty more opportunities for people to work at managerial levels in job-share positions and I would certainly support any of my staff who are working in part-time positions to apply for promotion on that basis. (Catherine, Librarian and Manager, 30th November 2011)
While there was no evidence of the women in this study influencing the university’s policy on career progression for parents, the discussion above highlights ways in which policy could perhaps develop in the future, specifically with regard to the creation of opportunities for part-time staff to apply for promotion. Dye and Mills examined the potential to challenge gendering processes in organisations by offering alternative discourses to the dominant ‘ideal worker norm’. They argued that it is important to ‘encourage new discourses, generate ample support for these discourses, and ensure that people in perceived “positions of power” are at the helm’ (Dye & Mills, 2011, p.437). Therefore, the dominant discourse that contends that part-time staff cannot viably be managers could be destabilised by managers who champion alternative working arrangements, such as Catherine. By illustrating that it is possible to hold a management position in a part-time capacity, and by supporting others who would like to follow her lead, Catherine perhaps has made it feasible for policies and processes to develop in this area in the future.

The Disproportionate Impact of Gendering Processes on Women Compared to Men

The analysis above indicates that both women and men could face difficulties in pursuing their careers while availing of work-family entitlements. Therefore gendering processes in organisations can have gendered effects that impact negatively on both women and men. On the surface this finding challenges Acker’s contention that gendering processes equate with female subordination: men too can be the losers when organisations are gendered. In order to understand how gendering processes operated more fully it was necessary to examine whether outcomes for male and female employees were comparable over the longer term. As discussed, the ideal worker norm made it difficult for men to take on a primary caregiving role, mirroring previous research in this area (Allard, et al., 2011; Haas, et al., 2002). Women were less likely to experience opposition to requests for parental leave. In relation to the career penalties associated with parenthood, the findings indicated that in the short term, both women and men experienced a slowdown in career progression when they availed of flexible working options. But the evidence about the longer term effects of caring was less clear-cut. Discussions with the men who took on roles as primary caregivers revealed that career penalties seemed to be short-term and when they went back to full-time work they quickly progressed. For example, James succeeded in moving from a Level 6 to a Level 7 and did not have any desire to move to a higher level, despite his manager encouraging him to do so. Similarly, a male manager who moved to part-time work when his second child was born was advised ‘that it wasn't probably a good career move’. He stated:

*While I was part-time I didn't really progress that much, but as soon as I went back from part-time to full-time again I was kind of lucky in that I progressed quite quickly. So... it*
There seemed to be an understanding that stalled career progression was short-term for men and that career progression could resume quickly after returning to full-time work. While none of the women included in the study had gone back to full-time work at the time of interview, discussions with managers revealed a perception that career expectations changed after motherhood and that, for most mothers, career progression was not a priority, at least in the short term (e.g. 2-3 years).

What I find is that with returning mothers in the first 12 months, further training is not high on the agenda; they are more concerned about the flexibility of being able to go early, if somebody is sick, that type of stuff, in childcare or whatever. (Thomas, Library Services Manager, 6th December 2011)

I think there is a perception, it's also that with part-time [employees] with children – especially for women – that the children will always have a priority when it comes to the work; I think there is a perception. (Thomas, Library Services Manager, 6th December 2011)

These ‘perceptions’ about the change in career goals for women following motherhood were not based on concrete evidence but instead appeared to be based on ‘unacknowledged and unquestioned’ general understandings about how motherhood impacts on career ambition. It is argued that through interactions in the workplace ‘narratives that embody general understanding of the world… by their repetition come to constitute that which is true, right and good’ (Ely & Meyerson, 2000b, p.116) This illustrates how gendering processes can be reproduced in organisations when gendered perceptions go unchallenged.

Evidence suggested that managerial perceptions about women’s career ambitions following parenthood influenced their approach to the provision of professional development opportunities for women returning from maternity leave, with few opportunities made available. While it may of course be the case that some women do have changed career ambitions in the short term, the assumption that this is the case for all women impacts negatively on those who would like to pursue their careers. Additionally, I contend that a failure to consistently address professional development and career progression issues – even if women are not interested in these issues in the short term – may have longer term negative implications for women, as ‘catching up’ becomes more difficult as time progresses. In contrast to men who perhaps were rewarded after returning to full-time work, women told stories of how they felt they needed to ‘prove themselves’ in terms of their career goals. These findings support contentions that fatherhood is an asset in terms of career progression
Discussion and Conclusions

The findings outlined in this chapter indicate that gendering is evident in a range of processes, including the internal mental work individuals engage in, interactions in the workplace as well as in wider organisational policy development, consistent with Acker’s argument that organisations are gendered through a range of ‘points of entry’ (Acker, 1992b, 1999).

A key contention put forward in the chapter was that family-adaptiveness could be achieved when employees invoked identities that challenged gendered norms around work and care. This contention was supported through the research findings. I illustrated how employees can challenge these gendered processes to contribute towards the development of family-adaptive workplaces through their articulation of parent and professional identities. Those who go against gendered organisational norms can experience conflict, both in terms of their own personal ‘internal mental work’, as well as in their relationships with others in the workplace. This mirrors research which has shown that the extent to which employees can negotiate their identities is limited by gendered norms at play in organisations regarding the ‘appropriate’ roles for men and women (Halford & Leonard, 2006). Nevertheless, despite the sometimes challenging circumstances, the research findings suggested that when employees do contest gendered processes they have the potential to improve their own work-family balance as well as to influence family-adaptiveness within their occupational group and the broader organisation.

The fatherhood identity is often positively related to employment (Aryee & Luk, 1996) and gendered norms surrounding work and care lead to expectations that fathers will take on the breadwinner role and have little involvement in caring. As a result, men can face difficulties in negotiating their father identity in an organisational context when they challenge prevalent norms (Halford & Leonard, 2006). The findings showed that employees could conceptualise fatherhood in different ways, with some basing their perceptions on the traditional male-breadwinner norm while others emphasised their role as carers. Some male respondents who challenged gendered norms by invoking an identity that was centred on caring rather than career development faced significant resistance from their managers and to a lesser extent co-workers, mirroring previous research which has found that men can be penalised for choosing to take on caring roles (Sallee, 2012). In addition
to facing opposition from management, gendered organisational policies made it difficult for male respondents to access work-family provisions. However, those who challenged these processes and practices by invoking a salient parent identity did have some success in achieving work-family balance and may have opened up opportunities for other men to access non-standard work arrangements.

For many female respondents, the decision to return to work was fraught with guilt and uncertainty, echoing existing research regarding identity transitions following motherhood (Haynes, 2008; Millward, 2006). Previous research has found that ‘gendered organising processes challenge women to intersubjectively (re)construct their identities and agency’ following maternity leave (Buzzanell & Liu, 2005, p.2). Similarly, findings from this research indicated that gendered norms surrounding motherhood impacted on the internal mental work women engaged in. Some women invoked a salient professional identity in order to challenge these gendered norms. Due to the university’s limited focus on career development opportunities for parents, it was necessary for women to take the initiative to create their own opportunities to access training and up-skilling. However, evidence suggested that opportunities for progression (in terms of moving up the ladder) were limited. This is consistent with previous research which highlights the career penalties associated with motherhood (Correll, et al., 2007; Livermore, et al., 2010). One respondent, however, was acting as a ‘pace-setter’ for alternative work arrangements by holding a part-time management position (Wallace & Marchant, 2009). She may pave the way to open up opportunities for other part-time staff in the future by challenging this deeply entrenched gendered norm.

While gendering processes impacted negatively on women and men, and there was evidence that it was possible to challenge these processes, evidence suggested that the longer term outcomes of gendering could affect women disproportionately. Men who took on caring roles experienced a short-term career slow-down but there was a perception that motherhood could have lasting effects on women’s careers. Findings from the interviews indicated that gendered norms limited career progression opportunities for those who availed of part-time work. As discussed in the previous chapter, managers could view part-time workers as an asset or a burden. However, regardless of whether part-time work was viewed in a positive or negative light, there was a perception that those who availed of this option did not have career ambitions. Thus, even when managers supported part-time work gendered conceptualisations about what constitutes career ambition (i.e. willingness to work full-time hours) limited opportunities for those who wished to combine career progression with caring responsibilities. Thus, Acker’s contention that the gendering of organisations impacts on women is supported to a large extent.
A second proposition addressed in this chapter was that the gendered composition of workplaces would shape family-adaptiveness. However, the findings indicated that gendered norms around work and care were more significant factors in shaping family-adaptiveness than the gendered structure of employment. The evidence suggested that men were more likely to face resistance to taking on a caring role while women were more likely to face barriers to career progression. The examples of men who faced resistance to caring both came from male-dominated units and the examples of women who faced difficulties in pursuing career progression all came from female-dominated units.

Overall, the research findings outlined in this chapter highlight the potential for individuals to shape both their own work-family balance as well as broader organisational practices by invoking identities that challenge traditional norms around work and care both in their ‘internal mental work’ and interactions, in spite of gendering processes that can make this difficult. This chapter’s findings, in conjunction with the research outcomes outlined in Chapters 4 and 5, indicate how a range of organisational and individual factors interact to create family-adaptive environments.
Chapter 7: Conclusion

Introduction

My motivation to undertake this research grew from an interest in examining why, in the face of a range of organisational supports, working mothers continue to face career penalties associated with caring for young children. Despite formal supports and an increasing rhetoric around ‘family friendliness’ in organisations, mothers continue to bear the majority of caring responsibilities and experience career disadvantages associated with their caring roles. I contend that current norms disadvantage not only women who wish to pursue career progression, but also fathers who wish to take a more active role in caregiving. As a result, I sought to identify the conditions necessary for both mothers and fathers to successfully combine career progression and parenthood. The family-adaptive framework was thus developed to capture the broad range of factors that contribute to the development of workplaces that enable both mothers and fathers to participate equally in work and caring.

Even the most cursory of literature searches reveals a vast array of scholarship in the area of organisational work-family support. This literature has its origins in diverse fields including, for example, family studies, sociology, organisational studies, human resource management and psychology (Bardoel, De Cieri, & Santos, 2008; Drago & Kashian, 2003). In spite of this breadth, however, relatively few scholars have attempted to explain the interaction of influences across different levels in the organisation, and I contend that the frameworks that have been developed do not adequately explain the complex array of influences on family supportiveness.

Based on an extensive review of the literature, I developed a comprehensive and multi-level framework for examining ‘family-adaptiveness’. The theory of gendered organisations – particularly the work of Acker and recent extensions of her work as discussed in Chapter 2 – provided me with the theoretical foundation for examining how organisational policies, practices and processes can be gendered and thus influence the extent to which organisations are family-adaptive. Drawing on this literature, I identified six key gendering ‘points of entry’ (Acker, 1999) through which to examine the gendering of organisations. In addition, I sought to examine if and how individuals within an organisation could shape gendering processes and thus contribute to (or detract from) the development of family-adaptive workplaces. I identified ‘identity’ and ‘resource constraints’ as factors that could shape broader organisational gendering processes. Drawing together relevant strands of existing research, I identified three specific levels at which gendering processes could interact with identity and resource constraints to influence family-adaptiveness: (i) the senior management level, with a particular focus on policy formulation; (ii) the middle
management level, with a focus on policy implementation; and (iii) the employee level, with a focus on policy uptake. My aim was to examine how each level – and the interaction of all three levels – contributed to the development of family-adaptive workplaces.

A single organisational case study methodology was adopted, focusing on general staff in two occupational groups in an Australian university. Both qualitative and quantitative data were utilised. The research design corresponds to what Johnson et al (2007) call a ‘qualitative dominant’ mixed methods approach. Qualitative interviews carried out with 28 individuals in the case study university constituted the primary data source. This rich material was supplemented with quantitative analysis of parental leave provisions in the case study university and broader university sector.

In Chapters 4-6 I applied the conceptual framework to an examination of parental leave policy development and implementation in the case study university, outlining how gendering processes interacted with identity and resource constraints to contribute to family-adaptiveness. Each chapter focused on a distinct analytical level (senior management, middle management and employee) and in each case the analysis focused on two of the gendering processes identified in my family-adaptive framework. I also examined evidence of interactions between the three levels in shaping family-adaptiveness.

This final chapter brings together the findings of the research, outlining the contributions the research makes to current understandings of organisational support for employees who combine career progression and caring responsibilities. I show how the ‘family-adaptive’ framework developed for this research project provides a structured approach for examining how gendered organisational processes interact with identity and resource constraints to contribute to family-adaptiveness. I first discuss the key empirical findings of the research. In line with the conceptual framework (and layout of analytic chapters) each section focuses on a distinct level of analysis (i.e. senior management, middle management and employee). After discussing how the empirical findings add to understanding of organisational family supportiveness I outline the theoretical contributions of the conceptual framework.

**The Development of a Family-Adaptive Environment: Key Findings**

The central aim of this thesis was to identify the conditions under which employees will be able to successfully combine career progression and parenthood in an organisational context. The preliminary research question was:

*What factors contribute to the development of a family-adaptive workplace?*
Following the development of the family-adaptive framework this was refined with the addition of three further research questions:

*How do gendering processes in organisations interact with identity and resource constraints to contribute to the development of family-adaptive environments?*

*How do these processes operate at, and between, different levels within the organisation?*

*What role does the gendered composition of workplaces (in terms of gender segregation and gendered perceptions about work) play in shaping these processes and the subsequent level of family-adaptiveness?*

Based on these research questions, a number of propositions were put forward and addressed throughout the thesis. In the discussion that follows I summarise the key research findings that emerged from these propositions in Chapters 4, 5 and 6 where the focus is on family-adaptiveness at the level of senior management, middle management and the employee, respectively. The discussion then explores how the three levels interact. Throughout, I highlight the contributions to knowledge that have emerged from the research.

### Senior Management and Formal Policy Provision: the Influence of Resource Constraints and the Gendered Understructure

The provision of parental leave entitlements is perhaps the most readily observable way in which organisations can be supportive of those with family responsibilities. Accordingly, my investigation of the case study university began with an examination of formal parental leave policy development at the senior management level. Drawing on the conceptual framework, I framed the analysis around two gendering processes: formal policies and processes; and formal interactions. A key contention put forward in this chapter was that the rationale underpinning parental leave policy provision would have implications for the extent to which a gendered approach to policy provision was adopted, with a ‘social justice’ rationale most likely to contribute to family-adaptiveness.

The first step in addressing this contention was to identify the particular model of parental leave provision in the case study university, and the extent to which it could be considered ‘family-adaptive’. This consisted of a comprehensive review of parental leave provisions in the Australian university sector which resulted in several contributions to the literature. Much of the research on organisational-level parental leave provisions in Australia is dated (Baird, 2003, 2007; Baird & Litwin, 2005; Diamond, Baird, & Whitehouse, 2006), and it has also been conducted primarily on a cross-sectoral basis (Baird, Frino, et al., 2009; Baird, Whelan, et al., 2009; Whitehouse, Baird, & Charlesworth, 2008; Whitehouse, Baird, Diamond, & Hosking, 2006; Whitehouse, Baird, Diamond,
& Soloff, 2007). My review of the university sector was both novel and timely, considering the recent introduction of a federal paid parental leave scheme. The analysis provided a broad overview of the duration of leave provisions, with breakdowns for each component of leave, including maternity, primary caregiver, partner leave as well as pre-natal and return to work entitlements. A significant contribution to knowledge was the identification of distinct models of provision across the sector. Three models were identified, each ‘gendered’ to a different degree, i.e. in the extent to which they allowed both mothers and fathers to manage work and family in a way that did not discriminate against either. Analysis of this kind has not previously been undertaken in the Australian context. It provides insight into how the design of leave provisions can have implications for gender equity aims. Based on the analysis, parental leave at the case study university was classified as being ‘moderately’ gendered, in that parents could share leave entitlements but only when both were employed by the case study university.

The next stage was to identify the rationale underpinning the model of provision in place. The discussion was framed by three common arguments for policy provision that were outlined in Chapter 2: the business case, social justice and institutional perspectives. The findings indicated that while these perspectives shed some light on why the organisation adopted parental leave policy, there were other factors at play.

The case study university had been awarded a prestigious ‘Employer of Choice for Women’ award several times in the last decade and it was therefore posited that social justice concerns would have shaped policy provision. However, discussions with senior managers and trade union representatives indicated that social justice rhetoric was predominantly employed after policies had been determined, portraying a positive organisational image in the university’s policy documents and on the public website, but that business case concerns were a stronger driver for policy provision. It was not a simple case of the university adopting and strictly applying a business case rationale, though: looking at the issue through the ‘family-adaptive’ lens revealed that while management focused on the business case arguments in enterprise bargaining processes, they adopted only a narrow focus whereby costs but not benefits were acknowledged. I found that resource-based arguments strongly shaped the perspective management took to negotiations surrounding parental leave and that it was resource constraints, rather than a broader business perspective, that predominantly shaped policy development. Thus despite the arguments put forward by management in negotiating for parental leave provisions (the business case) and their rhetoric in promoting policy (social justice concerns), policy provision was not shaped not by either of these broad perspectives, but by a narrow business focus, based on fundamental concerns regarding resource constraints in the university.
Consequently, the approach taken by senior management limited the extent to which policy could address gender equity aims. For example, a concern with resources meant that management was reluctant to extend leave to both parents, out of reservations about cross-subsidising employees in other organisations. Additionally, limited resources were made available to facilitate return to work and furthering of professional development for new parents. The findings therefore supported the contention that the rationale underpinning policy provision would have implications for family-adaptiveness. This advances previous research by providing a new layer of complexity to existing theories of the motivations for work-family policy provision – specifically by identifying divisions within a ‘business case’ approach with implications for the types of policies adopted.

A second proposition examined in this chapter was that the gendered ideology underpinning parental leave policy provision would influence family-adaptiveness. The literature covered in Chapter 2 underlined how policies that are ostensibly gender neutral can in fact be based on an assumption of a female carer and thus result in gendered outcomes in work and care as men are deterred from availing of them (Allard, et al., 2011; Haas, et al., 2002; Haas & Hwang, 2009). The concept of the ‘gendered understructure’ (Acker, 1990; Dye & Mills, 2012) was used to explore how gendering processes, reinforced through the ‘gender subtext’ and ‘organisational logic’, subtly influenced the approach management took to parental leave negotiations. In Chapter 4 I outlined how the gendered understructure was evident in the approach management took to negotiations both relating to increasing the duration of leave as well as changing the model of leave to allow both parents access to leave entitlements. The gendered understructure emerged in the types of rationales management put forward to oppose improvements to parental leave. For example in relation to increasing the duration of leave, arguments put forward by senior management were based on the ‘ideal worker’ (i.e. leave should not be increased as the university sector is a ‘competitive environment’ and employees who are out of the workforce for too long get ‘left behind’). In relation to the extension of primary caregiver leave to both parents, there was evidence of a fundamental ‘conceptual’ difficulty in understanding why a father would be the primary caregiver. The pervasiveness of the gendered organisational logic was evident in the fact that these senior managers could not comprehend any other model of work and care than the male-breadwinner/female-carer model. Thus, the contention that the gendered ideology underpinning policy influences the extent to which policy is family-adaptive was supported by the research findings.

**Middle Managers: Conflicting Identities, Contrasting Management Approaches**

The second level of analysis focused on middle managers at the work unit level; in particular on formal interactions and informal workplace practices. In contrast to the senior management level, where evidence suggested that resource constraints and the gendered understructure played a role in
shaping policy, at the middle management level there was evidence that managers had more leverage to shape policy implementation.

In Chapter 5 I put forward three key propositions in relation to the influence of middle managers on the development of family-adaptiveness. First, in relation to organisational context, I contended that the gendered composition of workplaces (in terms of horizontal and vertical segregation and the associated gendered conceptualisations about the occupations) would influence family-adaptiveness. I chose one female- and one male-dominated occupational group to examine this issue. Gendered conceptualisations about the nature of employment were evident in both occupations, with librarianship seen as stereotypically ‘feminine’ work (Hickey, 2006; Passet, 1993; Piper & Collamer, 2001) while computing has traditionally been seen as men’s work (Crump, et al., 2007). The examination of these occupational groups revealed patterns of both horizontal and vertical segregation, with women underrepresented in higher earning brackets compared to men, and with smaller proportions of the female (compared with the male) workforce achieving the highest levels positions. Overall, the contention that gendered patterns of employment would influence family-adaptiveness was not supported through the research. While there were some examples of female-dominated work units that were supportive, there were also some male-dominated units that showed similar characteristics. Similarly, there were examples of both female- and male-dominated units that could be considered un-adaptive. Examination of the influence of the gender of managers also revealed supportive and unsupportive male and female managers.

While the analysis did not support my first proposition, another aspect of the organisational context was found to play a role in shaping family-adaptiveness. The second contention put forward related to the impact of work unit characteristics, in terms of size, function and work patterns on family-adaptiveness. I found that the frontline managers included in this study often faced strain in attempting to meet their obligations to the university as well as to their employees. Managers were often pulled in different directions, seeking to offer suitable options to employees within the restrictions of budgeting and personnel constraints. The influence of resource constraints on the management of work-family issues is perhaps to be expected and evidence suggested that managers could adopt informal parental leave strategies to deal with resource issues. For example, managers could circumvent formal policy where it was insufficient for their needs, or alternatively could use narrow interpretations of policy to restrict what they offered employees.

The final issue examined was the association between the salience of managers’ identities and the extent to which a gendered approach to policy implementation was adopted. I asserted that managers who invoked a salient parent identity in their interactions with staff during the parental leave process would employ a gender equitable approach to policy implementation, resulting in
enhanced potential for the development of family-adaptiveness. I identified three distinct approaches to the implementation of work-family policy. These management styles, which I categorised as the ‘family first’, ‘family fair’, and ‘family blind’ approaches, were reflective of managers’ identities, with those who displayed a strong managerial identity likely to have a ‘family blind’ approach, and those who had a strong parent identity more likely to have a ‘family first’ approach. Family fair managers straddled the line between both of the other approaches.

Each of these approaches had different gendering outcomes. Managers who took a family blind approach largely disregarded the work-family needs of employees. Policies were implemented in a gender neutral way and in some cases this resulted in gendered outcomes. For example, in one case a female member of staff felt that a requirement to work equal amounts of early and late shifts had a disproportionately negative impact on her due to her caring responsibilities. In contrast, the family first approach was most likely to address gender equity, as managers were more likely to implement informal arrangements that could counteract the potentially gendered outcomes of a strict ‘by the book’ approach to policy implementation. Consequently, the approach taken by managers had implications for family-adaptiveness, with the family first approach most conducive to a family-adaptive environment, while managers who took a family blind approach were less likely to foster adaptive environments. Evidence suggested that employees who worked under a ‘family first’ manager, and to a large extent those who worked under a ‘family fair’ manager, had an overall positive perception about family friendliness. In contrast, those who worked under a ‘family blind’ manager were likely to have ineffective or negative interactions with their managers in relation to parental leave and were more likely to experience negative affective outcomes in terms of their perceptions about family friendliness.

Overall, the findings indicated that while resource constraints could limit managers’ ability to meet employees requests for workplace flexibility, they often had some scope to implement informal practices to deal with specific requests from employees. Managers’ use of informal parental leave management strategies were shaped not only by the resource constraints they faced, but also by their own identities. Consequently, informal parental leave and flexible work options offered to employees differed between work units with largely the same characteristics, due to differences in managerial approaches to the parental leave process. While a small body of research examines how managers can experience identity conflict (Clarke, et al., 2009; Sveningsson & Alvesson, 2003; Watson, 2008), I have not found evidence of research that examines how identity salience influences managerial approaches to parental leave policy management. Moreover, although previous researchers have contended that managers are not a unitary, homogenous group (Linstead & Thomas, 2002; Thomas & Linstead, 2002), there is little research that attempts to identify how
managers differ in their approach to the management of work and family. Thus, my examination of the implications of managerial identity salience on family-adaptiveness contributes significantly to the literature.

**Employees Invoking Identities to Shape Family-Adaptiveness**

The final analytic chapter (Chapter 6) examined how non-managerial employees in the case study university contributed to the development of family-adaptiveness. The key contention examined in this chapter was that the ways in which employees invoked their identities could significantly affect family-adaptiveness, both in terms of their own work-family balance and in terms of broader organisational processes. In particular, I proposed that employees who invoked a salient identity that challenged gendered norms around work and care would be more likely to contribute to the development of a family-adaptive environment. The chapter examined how employees invoked their identities in their internal mental work and in their interactions with colleagues and managers in the workplace.

The findings of this research complemented previous scholarship discussed in Chapter 2 which has shown that employees can adopt a variety of strategies to manage their own work-family balance. Findings indicated that some respondents were more willing than others to flex their family boundaries in order to meet work obligations and vice versa. I argued that the salience of respondents’ professional and parent identities was a key factor in shaping their approach to their career and caring responsibilities. While the link between employee identity and work-family balance management has been identified in the literature recently, particularly in discussions of work-family boundary management (Kossek & Lautsch, 2012; Winkel & Clayton, 2010), the relationship has not yet been empirically tested to any great extent. This research therefore extends previous work significantly by outlining how employees’ work-family balance strategies were related to the salience of their professional or parent identities.

In this component of my analysis I have shown that not only can individuals influence their own work-family balance, as previous research I have elaborated earlier has indicated, but that through their identity work some respondents in this study could also influence family-adaptiveness in their work unit and the broader organisation. The examination of the strategies that women employed to manage work-family balance indicated that those who challenged the male-breadwinner/ female-carer norm, by invoking a salient professional identity, had smoother transitions back to work, both in terms of emotional as well as physical experience. Additionally, these women could influence family-adaptiveness in their work unit, by ‘role modeling’ behaviours for other employees, showing that it was possible to maintain career progression as a working mother. For the men included in the
study, I illustrated how those who invoked a salient parental identity were more likely to challenge the ideal worker norm and pursue changes to their standard work hours in order to care for their children. These respondents also paved the way for others in the work unit to follow suit, by showing them that alternative work practices that diverged from the ‘ideal worker’ norm were possible. The evidence also showed how these respondents had the potential to influence broader organisational policy by bringing their work-family balance preferences to the attention of management. Thus, the findings supported the contention that employees were most successful in contributing to the development of a family-adaptive environment when they invoked identities that challenged gendered norms around work and care.

I build on research discussed in Chapter 2 that has examined how individuals’ identity work can influence their own work-family balance and their personal strategies for managing work and family in a number of ways. First, much of the prior research focuses exclusively on mothers’ identity transitions while less attention is given to fathers’ experiences of identity transition; in this research I examine the experiences of both mothers and fathers. I thus extend previous knowledge by identifying the specific ways in which identity salience changed for both mothers and fathers and illustrating the impact of these identity changes for their work-family balance strategies.

For some respondents, transition to parenthood cemented the salience of their professional identities, while for others the transition to parenthood led to a diminishing salience of the professional identity as the parent identity took precedence. The transition to parenthood led to disengagement with work and with career aspirations for some mothers, as their priorities shifted towards caring for their child. In contrast, for others maintaining a professional identity was crucial: for these women work was something they felt in control of and valued for and thus their professional identity remained highly salient. The process was particularly marked in the case of fathers, where the transition to parenthood led to two contrasting outcomes: some fathers embraced the caring aspect of their parent identity, while for others the transition to fatherhood seemed to strengthen the salience of their role as breadwinner. This divergence between respondents who identified with the caring aspect of the parental role and those who identified with the traditional ‘breadwinner’ aspect of the role is a new contribution to the literature on identity salience changes in the transition to fatherhood.

The findings also add breadth to the scholarship on the impact of parenthood on career progression. While a large literature examines how organisational processes impact negatively on mothers (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2006; Correll, et al., 2007), identifying the sometimes severe and long-lasting career penalties associated with caregiving (Benschop & Doorewaard, 1998; Drago, et al., 2005; Hardill & Watson, 2004), very little comparable research has been done on men (some
exceptions are discussed in Chapter 2). I therefore extend the scholarship by examining whether similar penalties are experienced by men who take on caregiving responsibilities. The results indicated that many of the men included in the study faced difficulties in accessing work-family policies and that the ideal worker norm worked against men who sought to take on a significant caregiving role. However, in relation to the impact of parenthood on fathers’ career progress, career penalties for the men who took on primary caregiving roles were short-term and these men progressed quickly when they returned to full-time work. In contrast, the research suggested that managers tended not to see career progression as a priority for new mothers and placed little emphasis on it for those returning from maternity leave. This provides further evidence of how deeply held gendered perceptions about work and care can have a disproportionately negative impact on women.

**Gendering Processes, Identity and Resource Constraints Across the Organisation**

The findings supported the contention laid out in the conceptual framework that a multilevel analysis of gendering processes was a suitable approach. Gendering processes operated at different levels within the case study organisation and interacted with identity and resource constraints at these levels, albeit in different ways and to different extents. Structural gendering processes, such as formal policy provision, were primarily apparent at the senior management level, while less formalised processes were more evident at the middle management level. The least perceptible gendering processes, including ‘internal mental work’, arguably were at play across all levels, but were clearly evident in employees’ discussions of their approach to work-family management. Additionally, the gendered understructure was shown to have an impact on policy provision at the senior management level but arguably was evident in all levels, shaping managerial and employee perceptions about work-family issues.

The findings indicated that the concepts of identity and resource constraints are useful for examining how individuals can shape family adaptiveness. As with gendering processes, identity and resource constraints operated differently depending on the level of analysis. For example, at the senior management level, resource constraints were a strong influence on management while identity seemed to play a less important role. In contrast, middle managers seemed to be influenced both by identity and by resource constraints. The analysis revealed how resource constraints imposed from the senior management level were often in conflict with the manager’s personal identity and how managers also faced conflict between their identities (e.g. as manager or parent). At the employee level, employees were significantly influenced by their identities in the approaches they took to work and family. Utilitarian concerns, based on the resources available to employees, did not emerge as a notable factor shaping their approaches to work-family management. Instead,
respondents focused more closely on their intrinsic desire to spend time with their children or to return to work to pursue their careers as stronger motivations for their actions.

Interactions between senior management, middle managers and employees were important factors in determining family-adaptiveness. A small number of scholars have noted how family supportiveness operates across different levels in the organisation (Major, Fletcher, Davis, & Germano, 2008; O’ Neill, et al., 2009; Straub, 2012; Swody & Powell, 2007) but this literature does not examine how interactions across different organisational levels can contribute to family supportiveness. Thus, this thesis adds a layer of complexity to understanding how organisations can become adaptive to the needs of those with family responsibilities by taking into account the ways in which interactions across different levels influence such outcomes.

At the most basic level it is clear that policy formulation by senior management at the organisational level impacts on employees availing of policies and on managers responsible for implementing policies. Thus, if restrictive policies are developed, this will have implications for family-adaptiveness throughout the organisation. This is an issue which is broadly accepted in the literature. However, evidence from my research suggested that the development of family-adaptiveness was not simply a top-down process: interactions occurred between various levels in the organisation. Middle managers could contribute to family-adaptiveness through their upward interactions with senior management and downward interactions with their employees. For example, discussions with the manager from the office for equity and diversity and HR managers revealed that there were opportunities for middle managers to give feedback to senior management about policy implementation through various channels including HR. While interactions between senior management and work unit management were sporadic and disjointed and evidence of feedback actually making its way back up the management chain was scant, the findings nevertheless highlighted the importance of fostering productive relationships and chains of communication between different strata of management to establish how well policies work in reality. At the middle management level there was also evidence that managers could influence family-adaptiveness for their employees through the types of informal practices they put in place. Managers could do this simply in the ways they interacted with their employees. Working relationships between managers and employees could be strengthened when family issues were acknowledged and accepted as a normal part of working life. Managers who invoked a strong parent identity fostered environments in which employees could be open and frank about their needs. The specific cases discussed in Chapter 5 provide additional insight into the implications of unproductive manager-employee relationships for the potential to achieve family-adaptiveness. A key contribution of this thesis is the examination of the ways in which bottom-up interactions of
employees with their managers and senior management influenced family-adaptiveness. My analysis showed how employees could shape family-adaptiveness by challenging policies and processes which prevented them from achieving work-family balance. The findings discussed in Chapter 6 regarding the male respondents who challenged policies they perceived to be inequitable provided evidence that employees can make considerable strides towards challenging un-adaptive work environments by raising these issue with the various levels of management in the organisation.

Together these findings support the contentions laid out in Chapter 2, indicating that the factors that contribute to family-adaptiveness are multilevel and interactional and that it is necessary to focus on each of these levels and on their interactions with each other in order to fully understand the conditions under which employees will be able to successfully combine career progression and parenthood. I thus conclude that the conceptual framework is a useful and unique contribution to knowledge on career progression and parenthood in an organisational context, and elaborate on this briefly in the following section.

Theoretical Contributions of the ‘Family-Adaptive’ Framework

The theoretical framework developed for the thesis has addressed a number of gaps in the existing scholarship on family supportiveness in an organisational context, thus making a significant contribution to research in this field. At present there is a large body of research which examines what constitutes a ‘family supportive’ environment, and existing frameworks focus on a range of issues, including: the structural supports that are available within organisations, including parental leave and the broad suite of family-friendly working arrangements (flexible work, childcare provisions etc.); informal supports and specifically the influence of managers; and the role of employees in achieving ‘family-adaptiveness’ in their own lives. However, in the course of my literature review I found no evidence of a comprehensive framework that examines how a range of factors, operating at different organisational levels, interact to create environments in which it is possible to successfully combine career progression and parenthood. The family-adaptive framework allows an in-depth examination of such interactions. It has also been claimed that the research to date is broadly descriptive (Brough & O'Driscoll, 2010), examining phenomena such as family friendly policy, managerial support and employee adaptive strategies, without explaining how or why these phenomena have developed in the way they have. I have addressed this limitation by not only describing the factors that contribute to the development of a ‘family-adaptive’ environment, but by also putting forward a framework that can explain the conditions under which these factors impact on family-adaptiveness.
The process of developing and applying the conceptual framework has resulted in the advancement of both the theory of gendered organisations and identity theory. The decision to ground the theoretical framework in the theory of gendered organisations arose out of recognition of possibilities for examining family-adaptiveness through a range of ‘points of entry’ (Acker, 1999). The concept of the ‘gendered understructure’ (Acker, 1992a) which encompasses the deep ideological underpinnings that shaped each of these ‘points of entry’, provided a further layer of depth for examining family supportiveness which was absent from other research I had encountered. However, there were limitations which I hoped to address, both in relation to a) the scope of the theory and b) how the theory had been previously applied.

Despite providing a strong foundation from which to examine organisational processes that contribute to family-adaptiveness, the theory of gendered organisations did not provide sufficient scope to examine the agency of individuals in this process. As outlined in Chapter 2, the theory of gendered organisations has been critiqued for its lack of attention to the agency of individuals, seeing gendering of organisations as something that is inevitable, unchallengeable and which always results in disadvantage for women (in other words, the gendering of organisations is undifferentiated from the masculinisation of organisations) (Crawford & Pini, 2011; Kantola, 2008). Therefore, the theory of gendered organisations did not provide sufficient scope for examining how individuals within the organisation could contribute to (or challenge) gendering processes. In examining the agency of individuals within the organisation in shaping gendering processes (and thus contributing to the development of family-adaptiveness), I was not only interested in examining how individuals could shape gendering processes but why they did so. If there were differences between individuals at various levels, I wanted to explore and put forward explanations as to why these differences existed. An examination of the literature revealed a number of possible explanations for why individuals act in specific ways. A key issue that emerged was whether individuals are motivated by utilitarian or identity-related concerns. Drawing on the reviewed literature, I identified ‘resource constraints’ and ‘identity salience’ as key factors that influence how individuals exercise agency in shaping gendering processes. The examination of the agency of the individual at various levels within the organisation in shaping gendering processes through their identity work and management of resource constraints is a unique contribution to the field of research on gendered organisations.

One critique which has been leveled at previous studies which have utilised a gendered organisational framework relates to their failure to take a holistic approach to the application of the theory (Dye & Mills, 2012); much of the extant literature has focused on specific elements of the theory in insolation. I aimed to address this issue by incorporating each of the elements of Acker’s
theory in a more complete way. As the discussion above indicates, each of the points of entry as well as the gendered understructure were examined in this research (although not all aspects were examined at each level of analysis). Thus, another significant contribution of this research is the application of ‘gendered organisation’ theory in a more comprehensive way than in much of the existing research.

I have also furthered the application of the theory of gendered organisations by exploring how gendering processes differ depending on the perspective under examination. The analysis showed that gendering processes were observable to different extents and hence had different effects at the level of senior management, middle management and the employee. I believe that this is a useful contribution to the application of the theory and may contribute to future empirical studies which adopt the theory of gendered organisations. The findings of the research open up opportunities for using these theories in a new way not only in the examination of organisational processes that contribute to family-adaptiveness, but in broader studies relating to gender in organisations. For example, a similar multi-level approach may prove useful in the examination of gendering of promotion processes in organisation. Such a study could investigate formal organisational policies on promotion and performance appraisal, informal patterns of promotions within work units and employees’ propensity to apply for promotion.

The findings also revealed that neither identity nor utilitarian motivations can be considered in isolation when examining individual strategies for the management of work and family. While the need to examine both identity and utilitarian concerns has previously been identified in relation to work and family (Rothbard & Edwards, 2003), the research to date focuses specifically on employees and their investment in work and family roles. In this research, I extended the analysis to explore how identity and utilitarian motivations influence middle managers and senior management. Additionally, while the existing research follows a quantitative design, I add further depth by examining these issues qualitatively, taking into account the perspective of each of the groups of individuals under study. The findings revealed that identity and resource constraints influenced respondents at each level of analysis, albeit to different extents. The empirical findings outlined above illustrate the additional insights than can be obtained through a multifaceted approach like the one I have devised here.

In developing the ‘family-adaptive’ conceptual framework I also make a unique theoretical contribution by bringing together two theoretical frames (gendered organisations and identity theory) in a way not previously seen in the literature on parenthood and career progression. The research findings indicate that a conceptual framework that combines the theory of gendered organisations and identity theory is useful for examining the extent to which organisations can
facilitate employees in combining career aspirations and caring responsibilities. The application of the family-adaptive framework highlights how a range of organisational and individual processes influence policy development and implementation and that family-adaptiveness is a result of a multifaceted, multi-layered range of processes. The framework allows for a detailed and structured examination of how a broad range of factors interact to influence family-adaptiveness and facilitates an examination of where organisations may be falling short. A clearer understanding of the complexity underlying policy provision and implementation will help inform organisational leaders engaging with the development of family-adaptive workplaces.

Limitations and Implications for Future Research

The research has added significantly to understanding the processes that contribute to the development of family-adaptive work environments in the case study organisation. However, it is important to note some limitations of the study.

In relation to the scope of the study, while the research was generally representative of the gender breakdown in the occupational groups included in the study, the project could have benefitted from additional insight in some areas. For example, the majority of fathers included in the study had taken partner leave with only three fathers (two employees and one manager) having taken on primary caregiving roles. It must be noted that due to the small number of men who access primary caregiver entitlements this issue may be difficult to overcome, and a similar problem could be faced by future researchers who wished to follow the research design laid out in this thesis. Nevertheless, the scholarship in this area would benefit from further exploration of the issues faced by fathers who take on primary caregiving responsibilities.

The scope of the research project also limited the range of managers that could be included. While I did include the perspective of male and female managers in both occupational groups, the research included only one manager who was not a parent. This limited the extent to which I could explore the managerial identities of those without children. Future research could attempt to incorporate the perspective of a broader range of managers, although this would require a considerably larger project.

As my focus here was on employees who had become parents in the previous five years, it was not possible to explore the longer term effects of parenthood on career progression. While the research indicated that men who took on primary caring responsibilities for short periods succeeded in achieving career progression after returning to full-time work, all of the female respondents included in the research were still working part-time at the time of research (with some intending to return to full-time work in the future). Therefore comparisons between career progression for male
and female respondents were not entirely possible. Future research could potentially examine the longer term career paths of these women in order to determine how their careers have progressed.

A key aspect of the research design was the inclusion of managers and employees within the same work unit. This facilitated an examination of interactions between managers and employees from both perspectives. This approach to the examination of family-adaptiveness – where specific cases were examined from the perspectives of individuals across a range of organisational levels of analysis – provided insight into the family-adaptive process. However, this was only possible in a few cases, due to difficulty recruiting both managers and employees in the same work unit. A larger project would be required to overcome this hurdle.

Due to the limited time frame and scope of this research project it was necessary to limit the study to an examination of family-adaptiveness in traditional heterosexual families. The majority of respondents were part of two-parent families. Further studies may benefit from examining whether the model of family-adaptiveness developed for this thesis also is relevant for other family forms.

As I followed a case study methodology and was primarily interested in the particular context in which the research took place, it is not possible to generalise the findings beyond the research setting. However, there is scope to replicate the research in other similar settings (e.g. other universities or large institutional settings). Further research would be necessary to determine the suitability of the conceptual framework for examining family-adaptiveness in smaller organisations.

**Conclusion: Implications for Family-Adaptiveness?**

The thesis draws on the theory of gendered organisations and identity theory in order to explore how the gendering of organisational processes interacts with identity and resource constraints in the organisation to determine how successfully employees can combine career and caring responsibilities. It makes a significant contribution to the scholarship on parenthood and career progression by identifying how specific factors at particular organisational levels of analysis, and the interaction of these different levels, contribute to family-adaptiveness. I contend that family-adaptiveness cannot be achieved through one process alone: it requires action at each of the levels discussed in the preceding chapters. Ely and Meyerson stated that change ‘must be highly context-sensitive; emergent; in tune with local politics, constraints and opportunities; and pervious to experimentation, reflection and learning’ (Ely & Meyerson, 2000b, p.133). This applies to this research: while the findings may be generalisable to some extent (e.g. within the context of universities in Australia), it is important to note that the particular circumstances of each organisation will be different and thus provide different opportunities to become family-adaptive.
The research findings lead to a number of implications for the development of family-adaptive workplaces. First, in relation to parental leave policy design, the findings revealed that the model of parental leave provision may have consequences for the extent to which organisations are family-adaptive. Thus, the model of provision is an issue which should be considered when undertaking negotiations for parental leave. This is an issue which has received little emphasis in the Australian context to date.

The research findings may also have implications for the implementation of parental leave policy. The evidence suggested that there was little emphasis placed on meaningful consultation between different levels in the organisation regarding the scope and purpose of policies. At the middle management level, this meant that awareness of policies varied significantly between managers. Uncertainty about the scope of policies resulted in substantial discrepancies in how managers implemented policies, meaning that some work units could be more adaptive than others. The findings also indicate that the gendered composition of work units was not a significant factor in shaping family-adaptiveness; rather, middle managers played a crucial role in shaping how supportive the work environment was for those with parenting responsibilities. Thus it cannot be assumed that work units that are female-dominated will necessarily be family-friendly. This highlights the need to ensure a) that emphasis is placed on fostering supportive environments in both male and female-dominated units, b) that managers are aware of and understand policies and c) that there is sufficient oversight to ensure that policies are implemented correctly.

Lack of consultation between senior management, middle managers and employees meant that it was difficult to determine the degree to which policies met employee needs. An issue which emerged consistently throughout the research was the lack of emphasis on the return to work process. While the parental leave policy in place in the case study university is broadly in line with sector trends, there is very little emphasis on workforce reintegration and career progression for those returning from leave. At the senior management level, programs that could facilitate employees in pursuing career progression following parenthood were sparse and the programs that were in place were not promoted. This was reflected in the overall lack of awareness amongst managers and employees alike. This had implications at the middle management level, where there was little emphasis on career progression, especially for new mothers. Indeed, it appeared that men and women who took on caring roles were treated differently, with a perception among managers that mothers were not interested in career progression. I argue that while a strong parental leave policy is crucial in the period surrounding leave, it is not sufficient unless coupled with initiatives which aid in the reintegration of staff into the workforce. I suggest that managers need to maintain a focus on career progression and development opportunities for mothers following childbirth, even if
these issues are not immediately of interest to these employees. This could prevent women from having to play ‘catch up’ after return to work. The provision of a robust return to work policy by the organisation could address this issue to some extent.

While part-time work was in many cases viewed as an asset to the organisation, there was a perception that part-time work and career progression were incompatible, either because those who worked part-time were not interested in career progression, or because it was not possible to work in higher level management positions in a part-time capacity. I contend that it is necessary to change perceptions about what constitutes ‘productive work’, so that the benefits of employing part-time workers are recognised and thus opportunities to pursue career progression are opened up for this group of workers.

Overall, the empirical and theoretical contributions of the thesis indicate that the family-adaptive framework designed for this thesis provides unique and useful contributions to scholarship in the area of work and family in an organisational context.
Reference List


Eveline, J. (2004). Ivory Basement Leadership: Power and Invisibility in the Changing University. Crawley, Western Australia University of Western Australia Press.


## Appendix 1: Group 1 Interview Schedule

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>REF</th>
<th>Broad areas of interest</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>Leave Process</td>
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<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>Career Progression- actual and perceived opportunities</td>
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<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td>Formal Entitlements/ Supports</td>
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<tr>
<td>D</td>
<td>Informal Supports</td>
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<tr>
<td>E</td>
<td>Negotiations re transition to parenthood</td>
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<tr>
<td>F</td>
<td>Influence of senior management, supervisors, individuals in managing transition to parenthood</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>G</td>
<td>Work unit characteristics</td>
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</table>

### REF 1. INTRODUCTION

- Thanks for agreeing to participate. So just to confirm, you’re position here is xxx and you’ve been in the position for approximately xxx mths/ years- is that correct?
- And before I go onto ask about the parental leave entitlements here at [university] can I just ask whether you have any caring responsibilities?

### 2. UNIVERSITY LEVEL ENTITLEMENTS

I’d like to ask you some questions about the supports that are available for staff when they have children, so these questions will centre on parental leave and related issues.

- Would you say that the current level of provision parental leave is adequate?
- What role do you think the university should play in supporting employees with young children and specifically around the time they make the transition to parenthood? (i.e. in transitioning out of and back into the workforce)
- Do you think that this university offers sufficient support to new parents?
- Are there any specific programs (other than parental leave) that are in place to help parents make the transition?
- Overall, would you say that this university is a supportive environment to work in for those wishing to start a family? Can you expand?
- Do you think that this university offers opportunities for career advancement for those who don’t work standard full-time hours? Can you expand?
- Are there any policies or programs here at [university] to enable those with family responsibilities to engage in up-skilling/ training opportunities?
- Do you think work-family policy is something that should be pursued at senior management level, or is it better managed at a more local level (e.g. work unit)?
- (e.g. individual work units having scope to implement work-family policies that meet their own particular needs?)
- How do you manage interactions with specific organizational units regarding work-family policy?
- Do you have any strategies for communicating policies down to specific organizational units?
- Any channels for organizational units to give feedback on how policies work for them?
- Are policies evaluated at the work unit level to determine how well they are operating?
- Where do you think the responsibility lies in ensuring that staff achieve a healthy work-family balance- with staff themselves, their direct supervisors, or the university more generally?
### Appendix 2: Group 2 Interview Schedule

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>REF</th>
<th>Broad areas of interest</th>
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<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>Leave Process</td>
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<td>B</td>
<td>Career Progression- actual and perceived opportunities</td>
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<td>Formal Entitlements/ Supports</td>
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<td>E</td>
<td>Negotiations re transition to parenthood</td>
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<td>F</td>
<td>Influence of senior management, supervisors, individuals in managing transition to parenthood</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>G</td>
<td>Work unit characteristics</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

#### REF 1. You

*Can you tell me a little bit about yourself and your job*

- You are the xxx of this work unit- is that correct?
- How long have you been working in this position?
- How did you come to be in this position?

#### 2. The Work Unit

- Would I be correct in saying that there are approximately xx staff employed in this unit? And that there are approximately x% females and y% males? *(send these questions prior to interview)*

#### 3. Parental Leave Process- preparing for leave

*The following questions will ask about the processes you go through in managing staff movements out of and back into the workforce around the time of childbirth. Can you talk me through the steps you take when staff members inform you that they are, or their partner is, pregnant?*

- How much notice do you generally receive? How much notice would you ideally receive?
- Ideally, how far in advance would you like staff to notify you of their intentions to return?
- Do you provide information to staff about leave entitlements? E.g.
  - the university’s parental leave policy?
  - Federal PPL scheme
- To what extent do you think it’s within your scope of responsibility as a supervisor to inform staff about their entitlements?

### Work unit characteristics

- Would you say that the current level of parental leave provision offered by this university is adequate?
- Does this work unit have any specific strategies for managing parental leave or work-family balance?
  - If so, can you provide some details? *It might be useful to think about staff who have recently gone on leave*  
- Does the work unit provide any additional informal arrangements beyond those outlined in the university's collective agreement?
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<th>4. WHILE STAFF ARE ON LEAVE</th>
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<th>5. RETURNING TO WORK</th>
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<th>6. SUMMING UP</th>
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## Appendix 3: Group 3 Interview Schedule

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<th>REF</th>
<th>Broad areas of interest</th>
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<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>Leave Process</td>
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<td>B</td>
<td>Career Progression- actual and perceived opportunities</td>
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<td>Formal Entitlements/ Supports</td>
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<td>D</td>
<td>Informal Supports</td>
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<td>E</td>
<td>Negotiations re transition to parenthood</td>
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<td>F</td>
<td>Influence of senior management, supervisors, individuals in managing transition to parenthood</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>G</td>
<td>Work unit characteristics</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### 1. INTRODUCTION

**Can you tell me a little bit about yourself and your job**

- G What is your position in this work unit?
- G What HEW level are you employed at?
- G How long have you been working in this position?
- E You recently had a child- what age is (s)he?
- E Is (s)he your first child?
- E Is (s)he the first child you’ve had while working here (in this work unit)?
- G Do you work full-time or part-time?
- E Are these the same working arrangements since before having your child?
- E If not, why did your employment arrangements change? (personal choice?)

### 2. PREPARING FOR TAKING LEAVE

**Can you talk me through the steps you took when you first found out that you were having a baby...**

- A Who is your direct supervisor?
  - A And who would you say is responsible for making decisions that affected your leave arrangements? (e.g. same person? a more senior director? HR?)
- A Thinking about **the person who is responsible for determining your leave arrangements**, can you tell me about any discussions you had about your leave- e.g. the length of leave you’d take, when you might return, what type of contract you’d return to?
- A Thinking about **your direct supervisor**, can you tell me about any discussions you had about your leave- e.g. the length of leave you’d take, when you might return, what type of contract you’d return to?
- A Was this a difficult or uncomfortable discussion?
- A How long before the birth did you leave?
- A How long after did you return?
- A When did you make the decision/ tell your supervisor about when you’d like to return?

- C When you were planning your leave, how familiar were you with
  - C The university’s parental leave policy?
  - C Federal PPL scheme (if relevant)
  - C How did you find out about your entitlements? (e.g. supervisor, internet etc.)
### a. Supervisor and work colleagues

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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>F</td>
<td>• Did your supervisor give any information to you about your entitlements?</td>
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<tr>
<td>D</td>
<td>• Are you aware if this work unit has any specific arrangements around parental leave?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D</td>
<td>• Overall, would you say your supervisor was supportive when you informed her/him about your leave intentions?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D</td>
<td>o In what ways did you feel you were/ weren’t supported?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D</td>
<td>• How did your work colleagues react to the news?</td>
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<tr>
<td>D</td>
<td>o Would you say they were supportive? How?</td>
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</table>

### 3. WHILE ON LEAVE

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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>D</td>
<td>Did you maintain contact with the department/ supervisor/ colleagues while on leave?</td>
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<tr>
<td>D</td>
<td>If yes:</td>
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<tr>
<td>D</td>
<td>o Who instigated contact?</td>
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<tr>
<td>D</td>
<td>o How often were you in contact? About what types of issues?</td>
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<tr>
<td>D</td>
<td>If no:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D</td>
<td>o Was it your preference not to keep in touch?</td>
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<tr>
<td>D</td>
<td>o Would you like to have been kept better informed about workplace issues?</td>
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</table>

### 4. RETURNING TO WORK AND FUTURE CAREER PLANS

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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>E</td>
<td>• Can you tell me about any steps you’ve taken to manage the transition back into the workforce?</td>
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<tr>
<td>E</td>
<td>• How did you feel about coming back to work?</td>
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<tr>
<td>E</td>
<td>• How important would you say your career is in defining who you are?</td>
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<tr>
<td>D</td>
<td>• Do you feel that you have been supported in transitioning back into the workforce</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D</td>
<td>o By your manager? Colleagues?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D</td>
<td>o Why/ why not?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D</td>
<td>• Have you experienced any problems in your transition back into the workforce?</td>
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<td>F</td>
<td>• Did you feel any pressure to return</td>
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<td>F</td>
<td>o at a certain time</td>
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<td>F</td>
<td>o to a certain type of contract?</td>
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<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>• Since coming back to work, have you sought to advance your career e.g. through applying for appointment to a higher level position or availing of training opportunities?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>• Have you been offered any training / up-skilling opportunities since coming back to work?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>o If no: Do you feel that you have missed out on any training opportunities due to your absence on parental leave?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>• Do you think there are sufficient career development for employees who work non-standard hours (e.g. PT/ compressed work week) in this university?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>• Do you think that there are any obstacles to career advancement for employees who have children in this workplace?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>o If yes, what kinds of obstacles?</td>
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</table>
5. **identity Negotiations**

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<tr>
<td>E</td>
<td>To what extent would you say you have been able to control how you’ve managed the transition out of and back into work?</td>
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<tr>
<td>E</td>
<td>Have your career expectations changed since having a child?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E</td>
<td>o If yes- in what ways? Positive or negative?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E</td>
<td>Have your career plans changed? In what ways?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E</td>
<td>Do you feel that you are doing the same job now as before you went on leave?</td>
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<tr>
<td>F</td>
<td>Do you feel that your manager’s expectations of you as an employee have changed since you came back to work?</td>
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<tr>
<td>F</td>
<td>o If yes: In what ways? Would you say this is a positive or negative change?</td>
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<tr>
<td>E</td>
<td>Do you experience any conflict in trying to fulfill your roles as a parent and as an employee?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E</td>
<td>What would you say being a parent means to you?</td>
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6. **SUMMING UP**

*For the following questions I’d like you to think about your overall experience of taking leave and returning to work:*

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<tr>
<td>D</td>
<td>So to sum up what we’ve spoken about, there are a number of ways in which you may have been supported throughout the leave process, including through parental leave entitlements, and the support of supervisors and colleagues.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D</td>
<td>o What would you say was the most important source of support you received within the workplace?</td>
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<tr>
<td>D</td>
<td>Was there anyone else in the workplace that supported you during the transition to parenthood? In what way?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D</td>
<td>Is there anyone outside of the workplace who was of particular help to you? (e.g. partner, parent etc.)?</td>
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<tr>
<td>D</td>
<td>o If yes: how important is this support in helping you achieve a satisfactory work-family balance?</td>
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<tr>
<td>G</td>
<td>Overall, would you say that your work unit is a supportive environment to work in for those wishing to start a family? Why?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>G</td>
<td>o Are these issues that are particular to this work unit?</td>
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<td>G</td>
<td>Is there anything else you’d like to mention?</td>
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</table>