An In-Depth, Longitudinal, Qualitative Study Exploring the Decision-Making Processes of Dual-Earner Couples in Incidents of Work-Family Conflict

A Thesis submitted to The University of Manchester for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy (PhD) in the Faculty of Humanities

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Contents

Abstract

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This study employs qualitative diaries and in-depth interviews with dual-earner couples in order to investigate how the demands of work and family responsibilities are negotiated on a daily basis. The methods used are novel in that in-depth interviews were conducted initially with both members of the couple present, and subsequently with each individual separately. Diaries were also completed by each individual privately, as a means of eliciting their experiences of decision-making in a real-time basis. It is argued that the use of such in-depth qualitative analysis enabled new and important findings to emerge, including distinguishing between different types of decision-making, uncovering important new decision-making cues, and gaining a greater insight into those cues previously acknowledged. The findings also demonstrate how these cues have an impact on decision-making in the context of both parties in the couple. In using both couples and individuals as levels of analysis it is possible to identify how this interdependence is manifested whilst also allowing for the discovery of important strategies used by the couples on a daily basis to resolve work-family conflicts. Balancing work and family is shown to be a continuous work in progress and the methodology used here allowed the daily dynamics of that work in progress to be revealed.

Declaration

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Chapter One: Introduction

This thesis outlines a qualitative study designed to investigate how heterosexual couples make decisions in instances of work family conflict, as well as exploring their personal experiences of this process. This introductory chapter explains the importance of the topic of work-family conflict before providing a brief overview of some of the limitations of previous research in this area. This sets the scene for an introduction to the current research topic and methodological approach. Finally, at the end of this chapter, the structure of the remainder of the thesis will be outlined.

1.1 Why Work and Family?

There has been a steady increase in women's participation in the workforce over the last forty years with 59.1 percent of working age women in the EU (EUROSTAT, 2009), and around 70 percent of women in the UK (EHRC, 2008, Harkness, 2008), being in paid employment . Women are now more likely than men to go to university (Schroeder et al, 2008) with women representing around 60 percent of university graduates in the UK (EHRC, 2009), and comprising a similar representation in the EU (Rusconi and Solga, 2008, pg 1). This reflects the changing values of women's and men's roles in society where traditional family models, which assume women's primary role is within the home while men are the sole breadwinners, have rapidly declined (Abele and Volmer, 2011; Harkness, 2008). There have been an increasing number of dual-career couples raising a family, while concurrently more families have become simultaneously responsible for the demands of both child care and eldercare (Ferber et al, 1991). In addition to this the long hours culture and work intensification in the UK mean that employees, especially managers and professionals, work some of the longest hours in Europe (DTI, 2003). Accordingly the experience of role pressures have increased, with the majority of employees now facing conflicts between work demands and personal and family needs and responsibilities on a daily basis (e.g. Butler et al, 2005; Wortman et al, 1991). It has recently been reported that 60 percent of working parents and carers are not happy with their work-life balance (My Family Care, 2011). This experience of daily conflict and lack of work-life balance might be more prevalent for women since recent research has shown that females still take on the majority of the housework despite their greater participation in the paid labour force (Yee Kan and

Gershuny, 2010; Harkness, 2008). The potential detrimental effects of such role pressure have been well-documented (e.g. Allen et. al., 2000; Parasuraman and Greenhaus, 1997, van Steenbergen and Ellemers, 2009). Taking these aforementioned factors into account, along with the consideration that work and family are two of the most important domains in most peoples' lives (Mortimer et al, 1986) it is no surprise that there has been an enduring and increasing interest within the field of Industrial and Organisational psychology with the dynamics of the work-family interface (Greenhaus, 2008).

1.2 Limitations in Previous Research

Greenhaus (2008) noted that a number of recent reviews of the field have drawn attention to some of the limitations in our knowledge and understanding of this area (e.g. Casper et. al., 2007; Greenhaus and Parasuraman, 1999). Such limitations are of both a theoretical and methodological nature, including the relative lack of attention to the impact of contextual influences on the work-family interface (Greenhaus, 2008: 343). Most of the past research has focused on antecedents and consequences of work-family conflict and these are often objective characteristics of the individual, their family, or their work (Zedeck, 1992). As noted by Eby, Casper, Lockwood, Bordeaux, and Brinley (2005) in their review of the work–family literature, industrial–organizational psychology and organizational behaviour research has tended to focus on the centrality of the work role rather than the family role in people's lives. This overemphasis on the work domain results in a limited perspective on the totality of work– family experiences. Although some work–family research attention has been given to control at work (e.g., Clark, 2002; Thomas and Ganster, 1995), none has been given specifically to control at home. The majority of the research on the family domain has examined variables which contribute to difficulties of managing work and family roles; generally focusing on demographic factors (e.g., number of children, family responsibilities), role stressors, and workplace policies as the key predictors (Byron, 2005). More recently, researchers have also turned their attention to individual differences, examining factors such as personality characteristics and preferences for role segmentation and integration (e.g., Bruck and Allen, 2003; Kreiner, 2006). Little attention has been given to trying to understand the actual dynamics involved within the family when faced with a work-family conflict. Therefore the current research focuses on how people deal

with incidents of work-family conflict, the dynamics involved, and the subsequent outcome of the resolutions made.

1.3 Introducing the Current Research

This thesis describes a qualitative diary study which takes an episodic approach to the exploration of work-family conflict with the aim of providing a more in-depth analysis of how each work-family conflict incident unfolds. The focus here is on gaining a more detailed understanding of the mechanisms and processes of conflict, including a more in-depth examination of the factors that impact upon the decision-making processes associated with work-family conflict, so that a framework of this process can begin to be developed. As stated by Medved (2004) "It is through these everyday actions and interactions that we get a glimpse of the practices that constitute work and family balance, or alternatively conflict."

The research discussed here was carried out under the assumptions of the interpretive tradition, which views all knowledge as a matter of interpretation. It is therefore perceived that people, whether consciously or unconsciously, construct their own reality. In this way, the current research seeks to understand how people interpret their situation, including their personal beliefs, and the meanings that they give to things rather than seeking to obtain objective facts, or predefining dependent and independent variables. I was interested in the meaningfulness of participant's ordinary lives in everyday situations and my aim was to understand events from their point of view, and to gain detailed descriptions of their experiences, rather than trying to find explanations. The belief that multiple interpretations can be made of any phenomenon and 'real' internal states do not exist (King, 2004) is important here and, concurrently, it is also important to remember that the interpretation of the findings presented in this thesis are only one possible interpretation and that, given the same set of data, other interpretations are also possible (Bochner, 1985; Reissman, 1993). The intention is that conducting diary studies under these assumptions and focusing on these aims will produce deeper insights into the participant's decision-making processes regarding incidents of work-family conflict, as they occur on a daily basis and in their own words. As such I was seeking an 'insider's account' (Poppleton, Briner and Kiefer, 2008) that could capture different

levels of meaning that may not have been fully explored using quantitative methods, therefore complementing the quantitative studies traditionally done in this field.

Consequently the methodology employed differs from previous studies in several important ways. Firstly, this thesis employs a qualitative methodology which has the advantage of being able to provide a richer data set that can highlight complex interdependencies between variables. This is particularly important in the area of work-family balance due to its dynamic nature and the complex interdependence between the partners in a couple.

Secondly, the focus is upon couples. Work and family roles have tended to be investigated at the level of the individual where the individual worker appraises the antecedents and outcomes of their own perceived work-family conflict (e.g. Westman et. al., 2008; Grady and McCarthy, 2008). However, those balancing the demands of the work-family interface do so within a given context, usually as part of a couple. Negotiating work and family within a couple is clearly a process that involves the continuous interaction between both partners in order to accommodate both of their workloads and responsibilities. One of the few studies that did look at couples rather than individuals was by Hammer, Allen and Grigsby (1997), who found important crossover effects of work-family conflict between the two individuals within a couple and they concluded by suggesting that future research focuses on the couple as the unit of analysis rather than the individual. A focus on the partnership of couples could help individuals, couples, and organizations better understand how the experiences of each partner at work and at home, and the support they offer each other, can affect the work-family balance. In this way, the present study aims to understand the issue of work-family balance from the perspectives of the couples themselves, as well as the individual participants, by employing diaries which were completed by both members of each of the twenty-four couples who participated in the research. The fact that both members of each couple completed the diaries, as well as their taking part in the interviews, meant that multiple perspectives could be gained.

Thirdly, researchers within the field have usually measured people's experience of work-family conflict on single occasions at times removed from the immediate event. Here qualitative daily diary studies were employed in an attempt to gain a day

to day account of how couples deal with such conflicts, as they happen. The diary's format was decided upon following two phases of pilot studies where a range of diary formats were trialled. The diaries consisted of a front cover explaining the purpose of the diary and 3 pages per day for 28 days; which included four open ended questions and one blank page for any further information participants deemed relevant. They were asked to report all incidents of work-family conflict experienced over time, as close to when the incident occurred as possible, and in their own words, to get a sense of how individuals make these decisions. These diaries were employed in conjunction with qualitative, semi-structured interviews with the couples before keeping the diaries, as well as subsequent individual telephone interviews following diary completion. Initial interviews began with demographic questions before focusing upon areas of difficulty with regard to work-family balance, how decisions were made, and potential conflicts resolved. After diary completion the participants engaged in a second follow up telephone interview, this time with each participant individually, which acted as an opportunity for the couple to discuss any issues that had been raised while completing the diary, as well as to clarify any unclear points. It has recently been acknowledged that diary studies have much to offer research in this field (e.g van Eerde, Holman and Totterdell, 2005; Poppleton et. al, 2008). The intention is that, by employing this method, feelings and emotions can be accessed immediately which may have been lost or diluted using more retrospective techniques (Symon, 2004).

Finally, by employing mixed methods; in using qualitative diaries in conjunction with qualitative interviews, the weaknesses of one method could be strengthened by the other, therefore achieving a detailed and in-depth understanding of how the participants experienced work-family conflict on a daily basis. Specifically, through a qualitative analysis I addressed the research questions:

- How do couples negotiate their work and family responsibilities when they encounter a conflict between the two?
- How are daily incidents of work-family conflict and the decision-making process experienced?

A thematic template was designed and modified to enable the data analysis, along with the creation of novel diagrammatical decision-making representations to analyse individual decision-making processes.

The findings presented highlight two important and distinct types of decisions made by couples: an initial anchoring decision, and subsequent daily decisions, where anchoring decisions provide the framework within which daily decisions are made. The nature of the methods used also enables the identification of new factors that impact upon decision-making as well as critical new insights into previously recognised factors, including the relative impact of these various factors in relation to the different types of decision-making and the interaction between factors. It also allows for the discovery of important strategies used by the couples on a daily basis to resolve work-family conflicts. These findings subsequently enable the development of a decision-making framework. Although there have been useful general heuristics related to work-family conflict episodes in recent research (e.g., Kreiner et al., 2009; Repetti et al., 2009; Shepherd and Haynie, 2009), there has been no previous model or framework demonstrating how a conflict episode unfolds, how its results may carry forward to subsequent episodes, or how these accumulate over time to influence role performance and satisfaction. In addition it is also argued that the factors impacting upon decision-making are interpreted in situ interdependently. That is, decisions are made in the context of both parties in the couple. By using both couples and individuals as levels of analysis it is possible to identify how this interdependence is manifested. Consequently this paper draws on an innovative methodological approach to make a contribution to the developing literature on decision-making in instances of work-family conflict

1.4 Thesis Structure

This thesis will be structured in the following way: The following chapter (Chapter two) discusses previous work in this area with a particular focus on that which has investigated factors impacting upon the decision-making process. It is argued that our understanding of these factors and processes can be enhanced through a qualitative analysis of individuals' accounts of real life examples where difficult decisions have been made. Chapter three will outline the methodological approach of the research, including the rationale for the approach. Chapters four and five present

the findings of the study drawing on data from both interviews and diaries. These chapters also incorporate a discussion of these findings in relation to previous literature. Chapter four explores the various factors found to impact upon decision-making and the Chapter five focuses more explicitly on answering the research questions by making links between various findings, and subsequently proposing an initial decision-making framework. The final chapter (Chapter six) draws conclusions and discusses the implications of the results as well as some possible limitations and suggestions for future research. We now turn to the existing literature in the area of work-family conflict.

Chapter Two: A Review of the Literature

This review examines the previous work-family literature and explores some of the main issues that have been raised in this field in order to set the context for the current research. Initially this review addresses areas which have received predominant attention from work-family researchers in the past; namely previous theories regarding the linkages between work and family, including work-family conflict, a discussion of the antecedents and consequences of work-family conflict, and strategies for managing work-family conflict. This chapter will then move on to address methodological approaches taken by previous research in this area in order to set the scene for the following chapters which discuss the methodology employed in the current research and the subsequent findings. This section also includes a discussion of the two different approaches taken to the conceptualisation and measurement of work-family conflict, which also incorporates a discussion of previous research on decision-making, and research which looks at couples rather than individuals.

2.1 Linking Work and Family

Research has lead to the development of several theories which aim to describe the processes linking work and family life, the majority of which have focused on work-family conflict. This section will also include a discussion of previous research on work-family facilitation and work-family balance.

2.1.1 Work-Family Conflict

Work-family conflict has been described as a form of inter-role conflict in which role pressures from the work and family domains are in some respect incompatible (Greenhaus and Beutell, 1985). Greenhaus and Beutell (1985) identified three forms of conflict, or incompatibility, which can arise between different role responsibilities: time based, where individuals experience the time they devote to one role as preventing them from adequately fulfilling the other; strain based, where individuals feel exhausted from participation in one role as a result of which they cannot satisfactorily participate in another role; and finally behaviour based, where behaviours that are required in one role make it difficult to fulfil the requirements of

another role. For example, a person who makes autonomous decisions at work may find that behaviour inappropriate when making family decisions.

Traditionally researchers viewed work-family conflict as a unidirectional construct; however, since then, they have found it to be bi-directional in nature (Adams et al, 1996, Frone et al, 1992, Gutek et al, 1991, Carlson and Kacmar, 2000). Demands of work that interfere with the family domain have been found to be independent of demands within the family domain that interfere with work (Frone et al, 1996). Work interfering with family occurs when participation in a work activity interferes with participation in a competing family activity or when stress from work has a negative effect on behaviour within the family domain. Conversely, family interferes with work when participation in a family activity interferes with participation in a competing work activity or when stress from the family has a negative effect on performance in the work domain (Frone et al, 1997, Gutek et al, 1991). As such, requirements in the work domain that impede performance in the family domain (work-to-family conflict) and family demands that impede performance in the work domain (family-to-work conflict) have been found to be conceptually distinct (Netemeyer, Boles, and McMurrian, 1996; Mesmer-Magnus and Viswesvaran, 2005) and to have different patterns of correlates (Byron, 2005; Carlson, Kacmar, Wayne and Grzywacz, 2006). Following a dominant model in the work–family literature (Frone, Russell and Cooper, 1992), these patterns are often assumed to be domain specific in that predictors of work-family conflict (WFC) reside in the work domain, while the predictors of family-work conflict (FWC) reside in the family domain. Likewise, consequences of WFC transpire in the family domain, whereas consequences of FWC influence the work domain. In other words, predictors stem from the originating role domain, and consequences from the receiving role domain. Although the notion of domain specificity is popular (Bellavia and Frone, 2005) significant cross-domain effects have been found, but these do tend to be weaker (Michel et al, 2009; Ng and Feldman, 2008). Research has also found that the perception of work-family conflict, including the direction of the conflict, is dependent on individual differences such as the traits one possesses and how an individual defines their work and family roles (Bagger, Li, and Gutek, 2008; Friede and Ryan, 2005; Carlson and Kacmar, 2000). It has therefore, more recently, been

suggested that researchers should expand work-family models to include such considerations. (Fournier, Lachance, ans Bujold, 2009; Livingston and Judge, 2008)

2.1.2 Work-Family Facilitation

Work-family research had predominantly focused on the negative aspects of combining work and family roles, however researchers subsequently began to explore the possible benefits of combining these two important roles(Voydanoff, 2004) and have reported that participation in one role can actually be enhanced by virtue of participation in another role (Wayne, Musisca, and Fleeson, 2004). Previous work on work-family conflict implicitly assumed depletion of finite resources through increasing role commitments, based on an assumption of limited resources (Rothbard, 2001). Theoretically, this scarcity perspective was opposed by role expansion theory (Marks, 1977), which posits that human energy is abundant and expandable and that roles can also positively affect one another. However, researchers in the area of work and family only recently began to pay empirical attention to the concept of work-family facilitation. This refers to the experience that participation in the work role is made easier by virtue of the family role or vice versa (van Steenbergen et al., 2007; Wayne, Musisca, and Fleeson, 2004). This perspective, assuming that resources can expand, argues that engaging in greater role commitment can actually provide a greater overall benefit (e.g., Kirchmeyer, 1992; Reitzes and Mutran, 1994).

Various concepts addressing different aspects of the positive side of combining multiple roles have been found in previous literature. Enhancement refers to the acquisition of resources and experiences in one domain that are beneficial for individuals in facing life challenges which could also occur in other domains (Sieber, 1974). Positive spillover indicates moods, values, or skills that transfer from one domain to another domain in ways that make the two domains more similar (Hanson et al., 2006; Edwards and Rothbard, 2000). Enrichment refers to the instances where resources generated by participation in one role actually improve performance in the other role (Carlson et al., 2006). Work-family facilitation indicates that participation in one role makes it easier to fulfil the requirements of the other role. Some researchers suggest that these concepts are actually identical (Frone, 2003;

Greenhaus and Powell, 2006), whereas others suggest they are distinct (Carlson et al., 2006; Grzywacz, Carlson, Kacmar, and Wayne, 2007; Wayne, Grzywacz, Carlson, and Kacmar, 2007). There is clearly large functional commonality and conceptual overlap amongst these and fundamentally they all focus on the positive aspects of engaging in multiple roles; that more, rather than less, role participation can increase an individual's overall gains across roles (Warner and Hausdorf, 2009).

Van Steenburgen et al (2007) argue that four domains need to be examined to understand different ways in which role-combining is experienced, whether this is conflicting or facilitating. Similarly, other research also suggests that, as has been demonstrated to be the case for work-family conflict, work-family facilitation also has four different forms: (1) energy (strain), (2) time, (3) behaviour, and (4) psychological state. Energy based facilitation refers to how the energy or relaxation obtained in one role can be beneficial for another role making it easier to fulfil the requirements of another role. Time based facilitation refers to instances where the time devoted to one role makes it easier to effectively manage and use the time in another role. Behavioural facilitation is that which occurs when behaviour required or learned in one role makes it easier to fulfil the requirements of another role. Finally, psychological facilitation describes instances in which an individual is able to put matters associated with one role into perspective by virtue of another role, therefore making it easier to fulfil the requirements of the first role. It seems that both the scarcity and expansion views of the work-family interface sometimes hold true but further research is needed to reconcile these and further explore their interaction (Maertz and Boyar, 2011). Different roles, such as being a partner, a parent, and a worker, lead individuals into complex situations in which they have to prioritize issues, make decisions, and apply coping strategies. These different roles may cause conflicts in people's lives but may also enrich them (Mäkelä and Suutari, 2011).

2.1.3 Work-Family Balance

Work-family balance has become a very popular topic in the work-family literature (Kossek and Lambert, 2005; Sturges, 2008, Maertz and Boyar, 2011) but one problem with this concept is that there are multiple definitions used to describe exactly what the term 'balance' refers to (Lobel, 1991, Clark 2000, Grzywacz and

Carlson, 2007, Greenhaus and Allen, 2011). In their recent review, Greenhaus and Allen (2011) summarized most definitions as being related to high involvement across roles, high satisfaction or effectiveness across roles, and the absence of work-family conflict. There appears to be some agreement amongst definitions that all of these are part of work-family balance. They also suggest that definitions that require some equal allocation of time or effort in each role are too limiting and do not adequately account for different work-family role definitions and priorities. They view balance from a fit perspective which implies that the distribution of involvement in work and family roles, or the outcomes of involvement in these domains, can have different consequences for different individual's perceptions of work-family balance depending on their personal priorities or values. Based on this, they define balance as, "an overall appraisal of the extent to which individuals' effectiveness and satisfaction in work and family roles are consistent with their life values at a given point in time" (Greenhaus and Allen, 2011, pg.17). This definition purports a very individualistic view of work-family balance which requires knowledge of the core values and priorities of the person's self concept. In contrast, Grzywacz and Carlson (2007, pg.458) define Work-Family balance "as accomplishment of role-related expectations that are negotiated and shared between an individual and his or her role-related partners in the work and family domains," suggesting that work-family balance is a social construct.

2.2 Antecedents and Consequences of Work-Family Conflict

A great deal of past research on work-family conflict has focused on establishing it's antecedents and consequences. Antecedents include work-specific variables and family-related variables as possible sources of work-family conflict (Higgins et al, 1992). Work-specific variables include autonomy, ambiguity, conflict, overload, the hours spent on paid work, and job distress or dissatisfaction. It has also been found that family demands, family-role conflict, family-role ambiguity, and family distress or dissatisfaction are positively related to reports of family-to-work conflict (Grandey and Cropanzano, 1999, Grzywacz and Marks, 2000).

Spillover theory (Caligiuri and Cascio, 1998) describes how mood or behaviour originating in one domain can spill over into another causing stress and possible

conflict. There is a clear link between spillover and work-family conflict (or facilitation) with the key distinction being that spillover may only be subsequently labelled as an incident of work-family conflict if the mood or behaviour that has spilled over from one domain to another has an impact on role performance or fulfilment of obligations in the target domain (Edwards and Rothbard, 2000). Studies within this area have demonstrated that daily events cause mood spillover which influences attitudes and role behaviours across domains (e.g. Repetti, 1987, Cropley and Purvis, 2003, Poppleton, Briner, and Kiefer, 2008). Repetti, Wang, and Saxbe (2009) recently proposed that spillover effects include mood, cognition, and physiology. With regards to Cognition Spillover; stress researchers have reported that ruminative thoughts are a type of cognitive mechanism of spillover from stressful events (Cropley and Purvis, 2003) which can interrupt when one wants to focus on other concerns and therefore may carry across different settings and domains (Williams et al., 1991). Another possible cognitive spillover mechanism is the learnt behavioural techniques for success that can be applied, successfully or otherwise, in a different domain (Greenhaus and Powell, 2006). Evidence of physiological spillover was demonstrated by Repetti et al. (2009) who reported that elevated cortisol after stressful events could act as a physiological spillover mechanism across domains. Poppleton et al. (2008) addressed the depletion of cortisol in one domain causing fatigue leading to individuals lacking the minimum physical energy needed to participate in activities in the other domain. The most common form of the spillover occurrence appears to be that of negative mood spillover from work to home (Poppleton et al, 2008, Maertz and Boyar, 2011). If family to work spillover occurs, it is more likely to be positive than negative, especially for older employees (Grzywacz, Almeida, and McDonald, 2002). However, it has also been reported that those who form families early and had achieved lower educational attainments experienced more years of negative family to work spillover (Ammons and Kelly, 2008) and similarly this type of spillover was also more likely to occur in working mothers (Williams and Alliger, 1994), and in those with high family orientation (Judge et al., 2006).

The consequences of work-family conflict at different levels have also been duly explored with research demonstrating widespread and serious consequences of work–family conflict for employees, their families, employers, and for society as a

whole (e.g. Allen et al, 2000; Parasuraman and Greenhaus, 1997). At the individual level people may incur increased health risks, including more physical health symptoms (Schmidt et al, 1980) or certain mental health outcomes, such as greater psychological distress (Burke and Greenglass, 1999), stress and burnout (Anderson et al., 2002), anxiety disorders, mood disorders and substance abuse disorders (Frone, 2000). Work-family conflict has also been found to be related to dissatisfaction with life and inadequate performance as a marital partner and parent, reduced life satisfaction and poor marital adjustment (Greenhaus and Beutell, 1985, Suchet and Barling, 1986, Rice, Frone, and McFarlin, 1992). Another outcome that has been explored is interpersonal crossover, or the impact that these conflicts can have on others, defined as "a bi-directional transmission of positive and negative emotions, mood, and dispositions between intimately connected individuals such as spouses or organizational team members" (Westman, Brough, and Kalliath, 2009, pg.589). Such effects can only exist within close relationships, such as marriage, where one partner is likely to have the capacity to influence affect, cognition, and behaviour of the other (Westman et al., 2009). One suggested explanation for interpersonal crossover is emotional contagion, whereby an individual "catches" the mood of another person (Westman, 2001; Westman and Etzion, 2005). This can occur when the observation of another person's facial, postural, or vocal expressions elicits similar feelings within the observer (e.g., Neumann and Strack, 2000, Barsade, 2002) and previous research has demonstrated that unconscious imitation plays an important role in mood crossover effects (e.g., Lazarova, Westman, and Shaffer, 2010, Hawk et al, 2011). It has also been suggested that contagion can occur via a conscious process of tuning in to the emotions of others via direct empathetic reactions (Dikkers et al, 2007, Bakker et al, 2007). Several conditions can facilitate such crossover, including the frequency and quality of the interactions between the two, empathy, the individual's susceptibility to emotional stimuli, and their similarity to one another (Bakker et al, 2009).

The impact of such consequences of work-family conflict at the individual, and family, level can also subsequently have an impact at the larger organisational level. At this level work-family conflict can lead to increased absenteeism and staff turnover, reduced organizational commitment, and lower productivity (Edwards and Rothbard, 2000; Anderson et al, 2002; Wayne, Musisca, and Fleeson,

2004).Consequently, the prevention or reduction of work-family conflict has become an increasingly important issue for companies and organisations.

2.3 Managing Work-Family Conflict

While a great deal of research has helped to provide some understanding of the problems leading to work-family conflict and the negative outcomes associated with this (Eby et al., 2005), these findings have not enabled the discovery of the necessary solutions that can be used to manage such conflict. There is a relative scarcity of research on the kind of coping strategies people use in order to manage these situations (Mäkelä and Suutari, 2011). Despite this, understanding how organizations and individuals manage these conflicts is clearly an extremely important area for exploration.

2.3.1 Organizational Policies

Research in this area has more frequently paid attention to solutions at the organizational level rather than the individual level, studying human resource policies such as flexible working hours, career break schemes, parental leave, compressed working weeks and other such family-friendly policies (Kreiner et al, 2009). In 2003 The Employment Act introduced the right for employees to request reduced or flexible working hours in the UK if they were parents of a child under the age of 6 years, or a disabled child less than 18 years. From April 2007 this right was extended under the Work and Families Act to employees caring for an adult in need of care and in April 2009 this was further extended to parents of children aged 6 to 16 inclusive under the Flexible Working Amendment (Plantenga and Remery, 2010). The Third Work–Life Balance Employees' Survey in 2006 found that 90 percent of employees said that at least one type of flexible working arrangement was available to them if they needed it, the most common of which was working part-time, with 69 percent of employees reporting availability. Working from home on a regular basis was the arrangement employees reported least likely to be available with 23 percent of employees reporting its availability (Hooker et al, 2007).

 The existence of such policies within organisations has been said, by some researchers, to reduce the conflict between working and raising a family (Grover and Crooker, 1995, Raabe and Gessner, 1988). However, generally, this research has

been somewhat disappointing, demonstrating mixed results and often a limited impact of these policies on employees' lives (Kossek and Lambert, 2005). This could be at least partially due to the availability of such policies not automatically resulting in their use (Hochschild, 1997). Previous studies have found poor uptake of family supportive policies due to the associated wage depression, missed promotions, and other negative consequences, even when they were employer-sanctioned (e.g. Hochschild, 1997; Glass, 2004). The Third Work–Life Balance Employees' Survey reported that half of employees who had flexitime available to them made use of that arrangement, and 44 percent of those who were able to work regularly from home did so. In addition, 38 percent of those who said that the arrangement was available to them worked part-time. The take up of other available policies was reported as much lower (Hooker et al, 2007).

Individual's general perceptions of organisational support have been reported to be related to enhanced job satisfaction, lower work-family conflict, higher organisational commitment and lower turnover intentions (Allen, 2001). A growing body of research suggests that it is the informal work environment, such as the organizational culture or the degree to which a supervisor accommodates and understands family issues, which has a greater impact on employees' ability to manage work and family roles, rather than the formal benefits or programs organizations offer. This research demonstrates that experiences of work-family conflict are more strongly related to support for the family domain provided by the supervisor and co-workers and the overall organisational culture, than to the availability or use of concrete work-family benefits (Allen, 2001; Hammer et al, 2005; Thompson, Beauvais, and Lyness, 1999; Thomas and Ganster, 1995). For example, Thompson and Pottras (2006) examined whether the conflict experiences of employees were related to the availability of family-friendly benefits or to the extent to which they received informal family support in their work environment, including supportive organizational culture, supervisor support, and co-worker support. Family-friendly benefits were not found to be associated with the level of conflict employees experienced, whereas higher levels of informal support for family responsibilities was found to be related to significantly lower levels of conflict reported by these employees. If family-friendly policies are not fully embraced by managers', in a generally supportive work environment, employees tend to be less

likely to take advantage of these policies due to their concern that it could jeopardise their career and that they may face negative judgments regarding their lack of commitment to the organisation (Allen and Russell, 1999). Therefore in order for family-friendly programs to be used and for them to have the desired positive effects on employees' attitude and behaviour it is crucial that they are supported by managers (Powell and Mainiero, 1999; Anderson et al, 2002) and that they are incorporated within a supportive organisational culture (Lewis, 2001; Anderson et al, 2002).

2.3.2 Individual Coping Strategies

It is also clear that organisational policies do not provide the whole story in the management of work-family conflict. With regards to how individuals cope with work-family conflict, or attempt to achieve some kind of work-family "balance", two main classes of coping strategies have been identified (Folkman and Lazarus, 1988). The first of these is referred to as emotion-focused coping which involves changing how you think about the stressor, and the second type of coping strategy is problem-focused coping which refers to acting to actually eliminate or reduce the environmental causes of stress. Kirchmeyer (1993) identified coping strategies used to deal with work and family conflicts and looked at the relationship between these strategies and a number of outcomes including work-non-work spillover. Problem-focused styles of coping led to positive outcomes, while emotion-focused strategies were less effective, suggesting that problem-focused coping strategies may be important for the management of work-family conflict. However, both types of coping strategies have been negatively related to work-family conflict in subsequent research (Lapierre and Allen, 2006; Rotondo, Carlson, and Kincaid, 2002). Later, avoidance coping, where a person moves away from a stressful situation, either physically or psychologically and reappraisal, made on the basis of information derived from past experience, were also recognized as important coping strategies (Pienaar, 2008). It is important to note that, when discussing "coping" strategies, these go beyond practical resolution actions to include ways in which individuals cope emotionally with these situations. Such emotion-focused coping tends to be involved in the justification of the practical action that an individual has taken. Studies of coping at the family level have also revealed three types of adaptive strategies (Mäkelä and Suutari, 2011; Voyandoff, 2002). The concept of family

adaptive strategies was adapted from Moen and Wethington's (1992) family adaptive strategies, which they define as, "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" (p. 234). The first of these is making changes in work or family roles, which relates to a type of active problem solving, or problem-focused coping, but at the family level. The second strategy is obtaining support from a partner, and the third type of family-level coping strategy reported was the utilization of family-orientated programs provided by an employer (Voydanoff, 2002), the pros and cons of which have been previously discussed.

Beyond these general types of coping strategies, some researchers have made attempts to list more specific types of coping used by individuals experiencing work-family conflict. For example, Wiersma (1994) catalogued the following behavioural strategies used by dual-career couples for resolving work-home conflict: hire outside help, divide chores, set priorities, cognitive reappraisal, sharing friends and activities, plan recreational time, plan time to be alone with family, plan time to be apart from family, negotiated deals on "role cycling" or job mobility plans, avoidance, mutual sharing, and discussing new norms with others. More recently, Jennings and McDougald (2007) explored the experiences of male and female entrepreneurs and the strategies they adopted for coping with business and family role commitments. They categorised the various coping strategies as: segmentation, compensation, accommodation (limiting one's involvement in one domain to meet responsibilities in the other), structural role definition (changing the expectations of others), personal role definition (revising one's own expectations), and purely reactive role behaviour (attempting to respond to all demands). They also suggested gender differences in the coping strategies employed, finding that female business owners were less likely to use segmentation and tended to have lower boundary separation between work and family domains, as compared to the male business owners.

Recent frameworks of strategies discussed in the literature have tended to include segmentation or integration within them which are types of boundary management strategies. Boundary theory suggests that individuals use such boundary management strategies. Boundaries (such as physical, temporal, and behavioural)

serve to structure and define the various roles an individual maintains in different domains and individuals vary in the extent to which they manage these boundaries by either integrating or segmenting their various roles across domains, such as the work and family domains (Olsen-Buchanan and Boswell, 2006). In this way, people manage the boundaries between work and family roles by striving to either segment or integrate these two domains. This is referred to as "boundary work" (Nippert-Eng, 1996a). Theoretical perspectives on how work and family roles can interconnect vary on a continuum; with a high degree of segmentation, keeping work and family activities completely distinct, at one end; and a high degree of integration, amalgamation of work and family to a degree where there is no distinction made between which domain these activities belong in, at the other end of the continuum (Kossek et al, 2005; Nippert-Eng, 1996a; Nipper-Eng, 1996b). Kossek et al. (2005) argued that an individual's boundary management strategy "is partly shaped as a result of the structure of the job they are in and partly by individual differences" (p. 254). Research has confirmed that employees have preferences for more or less segmentation (e.g., Nipper-Eng, 1996a; Michel and Hargis, 2008; Rothbard, Phillips, and Dumas, 2005) and that these preferences have an impact upon the strategies used to deal with work-family conflict (Shockley and Allen, 2010). In addition to individuals framing boundaries differently, collectives can also develop shared norms regarding the permeability of boundaries. For instance, families and workplaces vary in the degree to which they treat the work-home boundary as permeable or impermeable (Kreiner et al, 2009). Consequently it has been found that the fit of personal preference for integration versus segmentation with the environment is crucial in alleviating work-family conflicts (Kreiner et al, 2009; Shockley and Allen, 2010). Research has also demonstrated that neither integration nor segmentation offers a complete solution in terms of managing work-family conflict episodes, but rather that excessive segmentation and excessive integration have both been related positively to work-family conflict (Ashforth et al, 2000; Poppleton et al., 2008; Shepherd and Haynie, 2009). Boundary preferences can vary across work and home responsibilities and there is also the possibility that, rather than being stable, boundaries are dynamic, changing frequently (Hecht and Allen, 2009). Models and measures must account for such complexity regarding boundaries and their permeability (Maertz and Boyar, 2011).

Kreiner et al (2009) classified four types of boundary work tactics ; behavioural, temporal, physical, and communicative, that individuals utilized to help create their ideal level and style of work-home segmentation or integration and to decrease work-home conflict. Behavioural tactics included using other people, an active, conscious choice to utilize the resource of another individual; leveraging technology, using technology to facilitate boundary work; invoking triage, prioritizing those work or home demands that appeared to be urgent and important; and allowing differential permeability; choosing which specific aspects of work-home life will, or will not, be permeable. Temporal tactics were broken down into controlling work time which described manipulations of the time spent engaged on work activities, and finding respite which involved removing oneself from work and home demands for a significant amount of time. Physical tactics included adapting physical boundaries; erecting or dismantling physical borders or barriers between work and home domains; manipulating physical space, creating or reducing a physical distance between the work and home domains; and managing physical artefacts, using tangible items such as calendars, keys, photos, and mail to separate or integrate each domain. Finally, communicative tactics were divided into setting expectations, which involved managing others expectations in advance, and confronting violators, where those who violated a person's preferred work-home boundaries were made aware of this, either during or after the occurrence.

Maertz and Boyar (2011) reviewed such frameworks of strategies used to manage work and family responsibilities and concluded that all frameworks leave out at least one construct expressed in another model, and that some constructs overlap within and across frameworks with many representing different levels of specificity, meaning that they are difficult to collapse and synthesize into one general framework. Despite this they formed their own framework in an attempt to synthesise previous frameworks of strategies that individuals use to manage work-family conflict. Their framework was made up of seven different strategies. The first of these strategies was compromise where they would choose one role over the other or to partially meet both responsibilities. The second strategy was cognitive affirmation and reappraisal used to minimize the importance of the incompatibility of the competing responsibilities in order to alleviate feelings of guilt produced by leaving one responsibility unfulfilled (Judge et al., 2006). Third was enlisting

support and fourth was changing others' roles which involved negotiating responsibilities with others and could be undertaken for the short term (e.g., one episode) or permanently (Jennings and McDougald, 2007; Wiersma, 1994); however this involved the consideration that any success in changing another's role might cause some anxiety about their capacity to role send to that person in the future. Fifth was changing one's own role responsibilities in one or both domains, in anticipation of, or in response to, work-family conflicts. Sixth was role boundary management via segmentation or integration attempts, as described by Nippert-Eng (1996) which can be used, in some cases, to reduce and manage incongruence and conflicts, depending somewhat on boundary permeability. The final strategy was psychological or physical avoidance or withdrawal from one or both domains which can include anything from planning time to be apart from family (Wiersma, 1994) to entirely avoiding the setting where current demands are greatest, up to and including job turnover and divorce. They also organised these strategies in terms of three dimensions: whether the strategy is preventative of, or in response to, work-family conflict episodes, whether they are part of pre-established routines or automatic scripted processing developed in advance, and whether or not they involve any dyadic communication.

2.3.3 Support seeking

An important and prevalent strategy for managing work-family conflict which has been included, in some form, within all frameworks, and has received a great deal of theoretical attention, is support seeking. Researchers have suggested that support enables individuals to reduce or manage the stress associated with managing work and family responsibilities (Greenhaus and Parasuraman, 1994). It has been suggested that seeking social support is a combination of emotion-focused and problem-focused coping (Pienaar, 2008) but it has also sometimes been conceptualized as a separate strategy (Rotondo et al., 2003). Burchielli, Bartram, and Thanacoody (2008) reported that individuals use both personal resources and available social support to manage their work and family demands.

The stress-strain literature suggests that social support can provide a variety of functions, including a stress-buffering effect, whereby the availability of social support weakens the negative relationship between stress and well-being therefore

lessening the impact of the stressors. The availability of support is thought to enhance the individual's coping abilities therefore enabling them to manage the stressful situation more effectively (Greenhaus and Parasuraman, 1994). Evidence for the stress-buffering properties of social support is, however, not conclusive (Cooper, Dewe, and O'Driscoll, 2001) and research findings on the impact of social support in relation to work-family conflict are similarly mixed (Carlson and Perrewé, 1999) More recently it has been reported that, while support can have beneficial effects on work-family conflict, receiving support can actually increase distress in recipients. Gleason et al (2008) investigated these apparently contrary findings in a large daily diary study of couples over 31 days leading up to a major stressor. Results confirmed that daily support receipt was associated with greater feelings of closeness within couples but also with greater negative mood. These average effects, however, masked substantial heterogeneity. In particular, those recipients showing greater benefits on closeness tended to show lesser cost on negative mood, and vice versa.

 Researchers have also made a variety of distinctions between different types of support; for example, it has been suggested that support can involve providing emotional assistance in terms of empathy, care, love and trust; instrumental support meaning the provision of actual aid in time, money and energy; appraisal support referring to providing information relevant to self-evaluation; and finally informational support which includes advice, information and suggestions (House, 1981). Other distinctions have been made between affect, affirmation and aid (Abbey et al, 1985); or between esteem, informational, social companionship and instrumental support (Cohen and Wills, 1985). More recently, Powell and Greenhaus (2006b) listed emotional or affective support which enhances self-esteem and brightens appraisal of life events, informational support about available resources or options, companionship support that meets needs for affiliation, and social comparison support, as being relevant. There is clearly considerable overlap between the different approaches used by researchers but it has also been found that all types of support are perceived to have an emotional component (Barling et al, 1988) and that different types of support from the same person tend to be highly inter-correlated (House and Khan, 1985).

One may receive social support from work-related sources or non-work related sources (Adams et al., 1996). Spouse support has received particular attention in the literature. This includes instrumental support, offering to help, and emotional, listening sympathetically and showing empathy, provided by the spouse (Beehr and McGrath, 1992). Social support from a spouse may lessen the impact of a conflict situation by reducing the perceived role stressors and time demands, therefore indirectly decreasing work-family conflict (Carlson and Perrewé, 1999). Social support at work has also been investigated as a potential resource for helping to reduce work-family conflict, which has been mentioned previously during the discussion on solutions at the organisational level. Thomas and Ganster (1995) found that supervisor support reduced work-family conflict among health care workers, which in turn led to greater job satisfaction, less depression, fewer somatic complaints and lower cholesterol levels. Individuals who feel a strong sense of community at work, perceive social value to their work, and have access to promotional opportunities have also been demonstrated to experience less work-family conflict (Clark, 2002; Wallace, 1997). These results indicate that social support from the work domain reduces WFC and social support from the home domain reduces FWC. However, most of the studies mentioned above examined only one source of social support, or examined the effects of social support from the work domain on work-related antecedents of WFC and the effects of social support from the home domain on home-related antecedents of FWC (Carlson and Perrewé, 1999).

Gender differences have also been reported with regards to seeking support. It has been found that men generally receive more social support from their spouse than women (Reevy and Maslach, 2001, Van Daalen et al, 2005), whereas women generally receive more social support from relatives and friends than men (Joplin et al., 1999, Van Daalen et al, 2005). With regards to social support received from the work domain, research has tended to demonstrate that men and women receive similar levels of support from their supervisors (e.g. Greenhaus and Parasuraman, 1994) whilst other studies have reported that women receive more social support from the work domain than men, usually in the form of co-worker support (Fusilier, Ganster, and Mayes, 1986, Van Daalen et al, 2005). However, other studies have

reported no such gender differences (e.g. Roxburgh, 1999, Geller and Hobfoll, 1994).

Although there is some evidence to suggest that men and women differ with respect to the sources from which they receive social support, there appears to be no gender differences with regards to the effects of social support. Both males and females experience social support as effective in reducing work–family conflict (Adams et al., 1996; Van Daalen et al, 2006). It appears that social support reduces work–family conflict either directly or through altering the impact of stressors that lead to work–family conflict, such as role conflict and role ambiguity. For instance, Carlson and Perrewé (1999) found that social support reduced perceived role stressors, such as conflict and ambiguity, and time demands, therefore, indirectly decreasing work-family conflict. Social support from the work domain reduced WFC through its' impact on work role conflict, work time demands, and work role ambiguity, while social support from the home domain reduced the severity of family role conflict, family time demands, and family role ambiguity, which in turn reduced FWC. Thomas and Ganster (1995) examined the direct and indirect effects of family-friendly organizational policies and practices on work–family conflict and found that support from supervisors reduced work–family conflict directly, as well as indirectly, through the increased sense of control over the areas of work and family.

Social support is a complex and multifaceted concept involving the exchange of resources between at least two persons, with the aim of helping the person who receives the support (Shumaker and Brownell, 1984). An important issue when considering support seeking as a strategy used to manage work and family responsibilities is whom the support is being sought from and what this means in terms of costs to the person seeking the support. Relying on official forms of support such as a childminder or nursery involves financial costs but no residual role costs or expectation whereas, enlisting help from others, whether family or friends, may create role expectations of reciprocity from the person providing the support. This type of cost is much more complex than simple monetary payment and can change the nature of the relationship. Such support is embedded within social relationships and an appreciation of the characteristics of the social relationship is important (Greenhaus and Parasuraman, 1994). It has been suggested that reciprocity and

equity norms could have a significant influence on the decision to provide and accept social support (Greenhaus and Parasuraman, 1994). Equity theory assumes that people are concerned with fairness in interactions; ensuring that neither side over or under benefits at the expense of the other (Walster et al, 1978). Equity theory suggests that we are equally and simultaneously concerned with our moral obligations to reciprocate and our interest in receiving reciprocity from others. Past research overall provides strong support for the idea that people feel obliged to reciprocate benefits or assistance. Therefore reciprocity norms can influence a person's decision to seek, or accept, support since the acceptance of support implies an obligation to provide future support which may not always be possible (Shumaker and Brownell, 1984).

2.4 Methodological approaches in previous work-family research

2.4.1 Levels vs. Episodes

As previously stated, the majority of the previous research in this area has focused on objective antecedents and consequences of work-family conflict (Zedeck, 1992) which is unlikely to fully capture the complexity of work and family roles. They tell us little about how individuals, and couples, actually deal with work-family conflict on a daily basis, or their personal experiences of this. Such studies do not address how people respond when they are continuously confronted with difficult choices between the numerous responsibilities of their work and their home life. They do not explore the factors taken into consideration by individuals when making these decisions, or how these decisions are negotiated between the individuals within a couple. The lack of work carried out in this area is partly due to the predominant focus on the levels approach of work-family conflict rather than research conceptualising and measuring conflict as a specific event or episode (Maertz and Boyar, 2011). Work and family conflict is infrequently explored in relation to actual interaction. Williams et al (1991) were the first to suggest studying "specific episodes of work–family conflict" (Maertz and Boyar, 2011, pg.69). This approach can be partly traced to a research focus on the impact of major life events on stress, which led to conclusions suggesting that the assessment of daily events may be a better approach to the prediction of outcomes than the general levels approach. (e.g. Kanner et al, 1981). In research on stress management, an episodic approach has

become well established (Maertz and Boyar, 2011), leading to a conceptualization of stressors as episodic. More recently, this application has expanded to include day-to-day events and, in particular, how incidents of stress in the work domain affect families (e.g., Butler, Grzywacz, Bass, and Linney, 2005).

Williams and Alliger (1994) identified three levels of analysis when measuring episodic experiences: Level one, which describes the immediate experience of the episode at the time of occurrence; Level two, which refers to primary consolidation at the end of day; and Level three, pertaining to secondary consolidation which involves global assessment across many days. Measurements at level one are the only measurements which do not rely on retrospective recollection. The problem of measurements further removed from the actual event, or episode, is that they can often fail to capture the subtleties of immediate experience. Very few studies measuring actual episodes measure at Level one and most either induce or assume work-family conflict (e.g., Greenhaus and Powell, 2003; Williams et al., 1991).

Much of the extant episodic research concerns the relationships between conflict, mood, and other outcomes using daily diaries or surveys. Most of these studies deal with work to family, and family to work, mood or satisfaction spillover across domains. Others deal with interpersonal crossover effects which refers to the impact that one person's mood has on those closest to them. Bakker et al. (2009) specifically argued for episodic models in conceptualizing and studying crossover effects. Such studies tend to explore the mechanisms behind these implicitly episodic phenomena (Cropley and Purvis, 2003, Poppleton, Briner, and Kiefer, 2008). In using an episodic approach, research in this area has not only found evidence to support the existence of bidirectional crossover effects between significant others (Hammer, Bauer, and Grandey, 2003; Westman and Etzion, 2005) but has also demonstrated that daily events cause mood spillover influencing attitudes and role behaviours across domains (e.g. Repetti, 1987, Poppleton, Briner, and Kiefer, 2008).

Other research taking an episodic approach has explored role juggling where a person is engaging in activities or demands of work and family simultaneously. Williams and Alliger (1994) found that distress ratings were significantly higher and calmness ratings lower during work-family role juggling than during all other work-

family events. Williams (1991) et al. found that the negative effects of role juggling were made salient by the absence of such conflicts on the preceding days; a finding which highlights the importance of taking an episodic approach.

A few studies investigating work-family conflict episodes have focused on particular negative emotions. Judge et al. (2006) found that FWC was related to guilt at work and hostility at work but not to job satisfaction, whereas WFC was related to hostility at home and marital satisfaction but not to guilt at home. Finally, they reported that work–family conflict more strongly affected the emotions of those individuals who scored more highly on trait guilt and trait hostility. Livingston and Judge (2008) found that a traditional role orientation led to experiencing greater guilt in relation to FWC whereas an egalitarian role orientation meant that individuals experienced more guilt in relation to WFC. The link between FWC and guilt was also found to be stronger for those men with a traditional role orientation than for those men who were more egalitarian, or women of either gender role orientation.

In this way, episodic research in this area has produced new and important insights into work-family conflict that would have been difficult to uncover using the predominant levels approach therefore suggesting the need to explore work and family at the level of daily practice to examine exactly how people manage work and family in their day to day lives. Medved (2004) argued that meticulous investigation of everyday actions and interactions is essential because it allows for an examination of the relational work embedded in the routines involved in managing daily work and family responsibilities. Beyond this, findings have also emerged that might appear to challenge the levels concept. For example, Butler et al. (2005) focused on daily work-family conflict and work-family facilitation episodes and found that both varied from day to day, whereas Rantanen et al (2008) reported that WFC and FWC levels were stable over 1 and 6 years, a seemingly improbable and unexpected outcome given that work-family conflict and facilitation episodes vary daily and conflict levels are supposed to change over time. This could imply that these measures might not be measuring what they are intended to or that they might not be successfully obtaining results that represent people's actual experiences. Maertz and Boyar (2011) questioned whether or not people actually have a theoretical work-family conflict level that "they carry around ready to be reported on surveys" (Pg.74)

and concluded that "researchers should look to break out of comfortable routines of using "levels" scales in between-subjects designs, particularly when the main phenomenon of work-family conflict and its immediate effects occur within subject." (Pg.72)They argue for further examination of how work-family conflict is played out in the micro-practices of daily work and family routines.

An episodic approach provides a more accurate theoretical reflection and better empirical strategy for understanding how employees psychologically perceive and process work-family conflicts whereas a levels approach is more efficient at discovering basic constructs and relationships and supporting interventions to address the average person's work-family conflict (Maertz and Boyar, 2011). The current study takes an episodic approach as the focus is on understanding work-family conflict events from the point of view of each participant in order to gain a more in-depth understanding of the experiences of, and the processes involved, in managing specific incidents of work-family conflict, rather than trying to find generalisable explanations.

2.4.2 Decision-Making

Another issue in the work-family literature that has been investigated taking an episodic approach is decision-making in incidents of work-family conflict; although this area has received fairly little theoretical attention to date. The majority of research addressing decision-making in relation to work and family has done so from a feminist perspective, exploring the inequality of power at play in such decision-making within couples (e.g. Bartley et al, 2005, Fox and Murry, 2000, Ball et al, 1995) often concluding that husbands are more likely to maintain an upper hand in decision-making processes. However, theories of work-family balance have not tended to provide an explanation of the decision making processes that individuals, and couples, go through when faced with a work-family conflict; addressing why they make the choices they do. Many previous studies focusing on the construct of work-family conflict as a level, and on its antecedents and its consequences have overlooked such important issues. It could be helpful for employers to be aware of the decision criteria of their employees throughout their career in order to gain a better understanding of the conflicts faced by the individual and therefore help them to introduce family-friendly policies that more effectively address employees' needs.

The decision-making process usually begins with the diagnosis of the decision problem before moving onto the selection of the action to solve the problem and then finally concluding with the implementation of the selected action in order to resolve the problem (Beach and Connolly, 2005). Models of decision making all hold two general assumptions (Ilgen et al, 1995); that people base their decisions on one or more cues (pieces of information) and that people combine these cues in some manner to reach their decisions regarding which action to take to solve the problem. Human decision-makers tend to edit and simplify problems by using a relatively small number of cues and combining them in a simple manner (March, 1994, pg. 12). Human rationality and decision-making is bounded by both internal (mental) and external (environmental) constraints (Todd and Gigerenzer, 2003). Rather than being the perfectly rational actors predicted by normative theories which focus on probability rules and utility theories (Camerer, 1995), human beings operate within, what has been termed, bounded rationality to make the majority of their decisions (Todd and Gigerenzer, 2000). The temporal limitations of the human mind must be taken into consideration when addressing how people select and combine cues in order to make decisions in real life scenarios. It has therefore been argued that decision-makers use simplified knowledge and heuristics to arrive at decisions in real environments and that these can be used to solve problems of sequential search through options, or to make choices between simultaneously available options using the available information, or cues (e.g. Todd and Gigerenzer, 2000; 2003).

One study that has focused on the decision making process in incidents of work-family conflict is that of Greenhaus and Powell (2003). They extended the framework for individual decision-making set out by Ilgen et al (1995), which suggested that different cues may encourage or discourage adoption of different courses of action, by applying it to individuals' decision-making processes when faced with conflict situations. They employed a vignette methodology to investigate the effects of several cues on the decision to choose to invest their resources in either the work or family domain when faced with simultaneous role demands. The vignette method involves presenting a hypothetical incident to participants and asking them how they would respond. In this case, part-time MBA students were presented with a scenario in which they were faced with choosing to attend a parent's surprise party, or a team meeting at work. Participants were also told that

neither the work, nor family activity could be rescheduled, and were instructed to "answer all questions in terms of what you think you would do if you were in the situation described." The responses to these vignettes were considered to inform the researchers of how internal and external pressures influence a person's decision when faced with a work-family conflict.

The first cue they investigated was role pressure, which refers to the demands or pressure placed on the individual by their spouse or manager. They did this by manipulating the amount of pressure received from the hypothetical manager and spouse in the scenario given. They also looked at the effects of role salience, which was assessed by a questionnaire. Role salience describes how important work and family is to a person's self-concept. Self-concepts are composed of values and identities and identities are organized in the self-concept according to a hierarchy of salience (Shamir et al, 1993). The higher an identity in the hierarchy, the greater the probability that a person will perceive a given situation as an opportunity to perform in terms of that identity, and the greater the probability that a person will actively seek out opportunities to perform in terms of that identity (e.g., Callero, 1985). People are motivated to retain and increase the correspondence between the self-concept and behaviour (Shamir et al, 1993). Therefore, individuals appear to create pressure on themselves to participate in a particular domain or role, based on their personal beliefs about what it means to them to be an employee, spouse or parent and how important this role is to their self-concept. Evidence suggests that, the more salient a role to an individual, the more time and emotion they invest in this role (Burke and Reitzes, 1991). The final cue investigated was role support, which referred to the degree of support they received from their spouse or manager. Based on their findings, they concluded that work and family pressures, and the salience of work and family roles for respondents, affected the choice of whether to engage in the work, or the family, activity.

However, the fact that this study employed a vignette method means it cannot completely capture the reality of people's lives and does not necessarily indicate what individuals would do in a real life situation, or whether they would do what they say they would (Greenberg and Eskew, 1993). Participants were confronted with a hypothetical situation therefore only behavioural intentions, not actual

behaviours, were demonstrated. It is possible that real-life reactions to real people would differ from those that were observed in the vignette experiment. It is also unknown whether or not the event chosen for the vignette is one that occurs frequently in real life. It could be more useful and more relevant if participants were asked to make decisions about conflicts that actually arise in their lives on a regular basis therefore enabling a greater insight into participant's actual daily lives and experiences.

This method also only considers three factors which may have an impact on the decision regarding whether to participate in the work or the family activity and does not provide any way of capturing other factors that may have had an important impact on decision making. For example, it does not consider pressure or support coming from sources other than from the participants spouse or manager, and it does not capture the impact of making cumulative decisions over time. For instance, individual's decisions could be affected by the frequency with which they have previously chosen to participate in a particular domain when a work-family conflict has occurred, therefore to maintain a balance they may be more inclined to choose to participate in an activity in the other domain (Greenhaus and Powell, 2003). Finally, although this study examined the decision to participate in a work or a family activity, the method used did not allow for an exploration of the psychological conflict that individuals experienced in the process of making the decision, or the consequences of making such decisions.

In a later study they developed this idea further (Powell and Greenhaus, 2006) suggesting that people base their decisions on three types of cues. The first they called internal cues which described an individual's priorities regarding work and family as can be explained by role salience (Lobel and St Clair, 1992). The importance of specific work and family incidents may also influence decision making, rather than just the overall importance of work or family. They highlighted the fact that these specific incidents have not been given attention in previous research. The second type of cues proposed as impacting decision-making in terms of work-family decisions was referred to as role sender cues describing the priorities of the other individuals involved in the situation. Role senders may exert varying amounts of pressure on individuals to participate in the activity and they may also offer varying amounts of support for individuals' involvement in activities in the

other role (Carlson and Perrewé, 1999). The final type of cues they identified were labelled role activity cues, describing characteristics of the activity, such as whether each activity could be held at a different time, or whether it was still able to occur without the individual's presence. These authors also proposed that, when faced with an instance of Work-Family Conflict, there were five possible decisions that participants could make:

1. Whether or not to try to reschedule an activity (affected by role salience and role activity cues)
2. Which activity to try to reschedule (affected by role sender and role activity cues)
3. Whether to make a 2nd attempt to reschedule the other activity if the 1st does not work (affected by role sender and role activity cues)
4. Whether to participate in some combination of the 2 activities if they do not reschedule one activity (affected by role salience and role activity cues)
5. Which activity to participate in, if participating solely in one activity (affected by role salience, role sender and role activity cues).

This study used the critical incident technique, where respondents are asked to recall the last time that they had to make a decision between work and family and what factors affected the decision that they made. Participants were instructed in the survey to, "Think of a time when you faced a difficult choice between engaging in a work activity and engaging in a family activity" and then they were asked questions about this incident, each assessing the three different types of cues. Two items assessed internal cues, four items assessed role sender cues (two assessing pressure from role senders and two assessing support from role senders), and another four items assessed role activity cues. They then asked five questions to assess what decisions were actually made.

They found that it was not only the salience of a role that affected the decision to participate in that role but that activity importance within each role was actually a more powerful cue than role salience in making the decision regarding which task to participate in. These findings suggest that individuals discern within-role differences in the importance of tasks or activities and that, at least in some decisions, the

importance of a particular activity can be more influential than salience of the role in which the activity is embedded. They also found that the characteristics of the activities themselves, such as, whether they can be held at a different time or whether they require the presence of the individual, are also likely to have an impact on decision-making. This research also highlights how individuals appear to be concerned about preserving positive relationships with important role senders in the work and family domains and they concluded that Baumeister and Leary's (1995) suggestion that people need to establish and maintain strong and stable interpersonal relationships in order to satisfy their belongingness needs, seems to have considerable relevance to individuals juggling work and family responsibilities. Finally, their findings also suggested that individuals may place more weight on cues from the family domain than the work domain since these cues seemed to have a greater impact.

This study yielded some interesting and important findings that suggest many interesting research avenues regarding decision-making and work-family conflict. However, the critical incident technique is retrospective, meaning there is the possibility that participants may not have recalled incidents, or the factors affecting their decision-making, accurately (Schwarz, 1999). It is also impossible to be certain that the incidents chosen by participants were typical of daily conflicts, and how they dealt with these, or whether they may have chosen exceptional incidents that were particularly salient in their mind due to their rarity (Schwarz, 1999). As in their previous study, the researchers have presented the participants with measures that assess the factors that they think will have an impact on individuals' decision-making. Although these are based on past literature, and do appear to have an impact on decision-making, it does puts some limits on the recognition of any other factors that may be important.

2.4.3 Research exploring Couples

Dual earner couples now make up 66 percent of households with dependent children, in contrast to 45 percent in 1971 (Collingwood, Bakeo and Clarke, 2004). These statistics show that dual-earner families are significant in the socio demographic profile in the UK. They have outnumbered the male breadwinner family since the early 1980s and their dominance has been maintained since (Such, 2002). However, the majority of work and family research has conducted studies of individuals,

despite the fact that balancing work and family in a couple is clearly a process that involves the continuous interaction between both partners in order to accommodate both of their workloads and responsibilities. Work- family balance research which uses the individual as the unit of analysis assumes that the work and family behaviour of an individual in a partnership is unaffected by the work and family role behaviour of their spouse (Yogev and Brett, 1985). However, previous work-family research that has explored interactions within couples has reported the vital nature of the interdependence between partners.

Some research has analysed the way in which stress crosses over, or is shared, among family members. Crossover focuses on how stress, and other emotions, experienced by one individual influences similar reactions in the individual's spouse or team member. Westman et al (2009) define crossover as a bi-directional transmission of positive and negative emotions, mood, and dispositions between intimately connected individuals such as spouses or organizational team members. Westman (2001) proposed that the mechanism of direct transmission of stress and strain from one partner to the other was a result of empathic reactions. The basis for this view is the finding that crossover effects appear between closely related partners who share the greater part of their lives together. Generally, it is assumed that the emotions expressed by one partner elicit an empathic reaction in the other partner. Subsequent research has found support for the role of empathy in the crossover of positive and negative experiences (e.g. Bakker and Demerouti, 2009, Westman, 2001). Bakker and Demerouti (2009) found that crossover of work engagement was strongest when men were high in perspective-taking empathy which refers to ''the spontaneous tendency of a person to adopt the psychological perspective of other people—to entertain the point of view of others'' (Davis, 1983, pg.169). Empathy involves an understanding and recognition of a partner's thoughts and feelings as well as the sharing of another person's emotional state. Therefore, strain in one partner produces an empathetic reaction in the other that increases his or her own strain, by way of what may be referred to as empathic identification (Westman et al, 2009).

Hammer et al (1997) studied the crossover effects of work-family conflict and found that an individuals' partners' work-family conflict accounts for a significant amount of variance in the individuals own sense of conflict. This finding was true for both

men and women. Hammer, Allen and Grigsby (1994) also found important crossover effects of work-family conflict between individuals within a couple and subsequently concluded by suggesting that future research should focus on the couple as the unit of analysis rather than the individual.

Beyond crossover, individuals' choices are always shaped by the people in their lives therefore a realistic view of the individual as part of a system of interconnected individuals is fundamental to understanding how people manage their work and family responsibilities (Moen and Sweet, 2002, Bluestein, 2001b). Previous research (e.g. Kossek et al, 2001), has demonstrated how relatives can play an important role in balancing work and family and can impact upon work-family conflict. Most workers, regardless of gender, have an employed spouse meaning that men and women workers increasingly have to integrate the goals and demands related to their families, their careers, and frequently their spouses' careers as well (Moen and Sweet, 2002). Poppleton and colleagues (2008) observed that work–non-work conflict can originate from the responses of partners, becoming an interpersonal process which is a relatively new idea in the work-family literature. They refer to Perlow's (1998) study of managerial boundary control which identified 'resister; spouses who can exacerbate work–non-work difficulties faced by their partners by, for example, setting limits on what they are prepared to accept in terms of their partner's work demands. Based on her findings she concluded that work–non-work conflict is underpinned by an interpersonal, rather than merely an intra-psychic, process.

There has been some research which has begun to focus on couple's, rather than individual's, strategies for managing work and family responsibilities, thereby acknowledging that this is a joint process (E.g. Becker and Moen, 1999, Moen and Yu, 2000). For instance, Becker and Moen (1999) used in-depth interviews with more than 100 people in middle-class dual-earner couples to investigate the range of work-family strategies that couple's use over their life course. They found that the majority were not pursuing two high-powered careers but were typically engaged in 'scaling back' strategies which reduce and restructure the couples' commitment to paid work over the life course, buffering the family from excessive work infringements. They identified three separate scaling back strategies: placing limits

on the extent to which career concerns dictate family life; having a one-job, one-career marriage; and trading off or taking turns in making career sacrifices for family. Females disproportionately did the scaling back, although in some couples husbands and wives traded family and career responsibilities over the life course.

In analysing work-family conflict the proper focus is on the combined work schedules of family members rather than the patterns of individual workers (Jacobs and Gerson, 2001; 2004). Any model that fails to take into account the two partners and their relationship with each other is limited in its capacity to predict decision-making in dual-earner couples (Challiol and Mignonac, 2005). Research focusing only on the individual overlooks the complexities inherent when men and women attempt to coordinate their work and family commitments with those of their spouses and with the needs of their families (Crouter and Manke, 1997). One cannot understand the decisions made by the couple without recognizing the interdependence of the two members of the couple (Kelley, 1979; Kelley and Thibaut, 1978). In this way, a focus on the partnership of couples can help individuals, couples, and organisations better understand how the experiences of each partner at work and at home, and the support they offer each other can affect the work-family balance. The present study aims to understand the issue of work-family balance from the perspectives of the couples themselves, using the couple as the unit of analysis, rather than the individual, in order to gain important insights into the dynamic interactions that are involved when couples strive to manage their work and family responsibilities.

In Conclusion

The current study therefore aims to address the aforementioned gaps in the literature by conducting a more in-depth analysis of how each work-family conflict incident unfolds with particular attention on how couples make the difficult decisions that they face on a daily basis, as well as how they are affected by this process. Instead of using only retrospective techniques, diary studies are employed to enable a day to day account of how couples deal with such conflicts as they happen, allowing for a detailed investigation of the factors that are taken into account when making these decisions, how these factors are combined within the couple to arrive at a decision,

and the subsequent impact of the choices they make. Therefore, this research aims to explore the following research questions:

- How do couples negotiate their work and family responsibilities when they encounter a conflict between the two?
- How are daily incidents of work-family conflict and the decision-making process experienced?

We will now turn to a discussion of the current research; a qualitative diary study employing both members of dual-earner couples and taking an episodic approach to the exploration of work-family conflict.

Chapter Three - Methodology

This chapter will discuss the methodological approach taken in the present research and in doing so describe the research process. It will begin by examining the rationale for the approach used, including the theoretical position taken here. It will then go on to provide a brief description of the participants (see Appendix A for more detail), before discussing the process of designing the diary, including a summary of the pilot studies and the impact that these had on the final research designs. Finally, there is a discussion of the actual research procedure including the interviews, diary delivery and retrieval, and the analysis of the data obtained.

3.1 Rationale for the approach

Researchers within the field have usually measured people's experience of work-family balance on single occasions at times that are far removed from the immediate events that may impact work-family balance. The majority of this research is dominated by a positivistic paradigm, which assumes the existence of a single objective external reality and has focused on antecedents and consequences of work-family conflict which are often objective characteristics of the individual, their family, or their work (Zedeck, 1992). The everyday reality of people trying to balance work and family, however, takes place in a much less certain, and more complex world, where reconciling different interpretations of truth is an everyday occurrence. In this way, considering work-family balance from this epistemological perspective may cut us off from valuable sources of insight and understanding. The current research is carried out under the interpretive tradition which argues that positivistic methods impose a certain view of the world on participants rather than capturing, describing and understanding their world views. Interpretive research does not focus on objective facts, but focuses on the full complexity of human sense making as the situation emerges (Kaplan and Maxwell, 1994). The realities of situations are thought to be socially constructed through individual's interpretations, meaning that material realities can mean different things to different people, and it is these interpretations that the current research is concerned with. It is therefore the aim of the current research to explore the way individuals make sense of the work and family phenomena that occur in their everyday lives, seeking to understand situations from their point of view, and to provide a detailed analysis and

descriptions of their experiences, rather than to provide explanations. It is this perspective, and the subsequent aims, that informed the decisions made regarding the methods used here.

Previous diary studies investigating work-family balance have also tended to use quantitative measures. The current study will be a qualitative diary study used with the aim of examining different levels of meaning that may not have been fully explored using quantitative methods. Qualitative studies have the advantage of being able to provide a richer data set that can highlight complex interdependencies between variables, which is particularly important in the area of work-family balance due to its dynamic nature and the complex interdependence between the partners in a couple.

Both members of the couples kept diaries, and took part in qualitative interviews, so that multiple perspectives could be gained. As previously mentioned, the majority of research in the area of work-family balance has been studies of individuals despite the fact that balancing work and family in a couple is clearly a process that involves the continuous interaction between both partners in order to accommodate both of their workloads and responsibilities. Previous research has found important crossover effects of work-family conflict between the two individuals within a couple and has suggested that future research focuses on the couple as the unit of analysis rather than the individual (e.g. Hammer, Allen and Grigsby, 1994; Green et al, 2010). A focus on the partnership of couples could help individuals, couples, and organisations better understand how the experiences of each partner at work and at home, and the support they offer each other can affect the work-family balance. In this way, the present study aims to understand the issue of work-family balance from the perspectives of the couples themselves, as well as both individuals within those couples. Using couples, and individuals, as the units of analysis allows for a framework which analyzes the interactions of work and family roles within and between partners (Wilson, 2003). It was with this aim in mind that I decided to conduct the initial interviews with both individuals within the couples together. Some researchers have advocated separate interviewing of husbands and wives (Hertz, 1995), however subsequent researchers have drawn attention to the merits and limitations of each approach (O'Rourke and Germino, 2000; Taylor and de Vocht, 2011). An advantage of individual interviews is that participants might be

more able to freely express their own individual views as responses to questions in the presence of their partner can produce answers that are perceived to be acceptable to the partner, or are consistent with the partner's perceived position (Zipp and Toth, 2002). Capturing their own individual and unique perspectives might be easier in separate interviews (Taylor and de Vocht, 2011). However, in joint interviews there is the opportunity for one partner to correct, or adjust, the dialogue corroborating or supplementing each other's stories in an attempt to be more accurate about what occurred in a situation therefore resulting in further disclosure, richer data and enabling a process to become clearer during the interview (Sohier, 1995; Taylor and de Vocht, 2011). While participants might be willing to disclose things to the researcher that they would not disclose if their partner was present, participants in individual interviews can reveal or conceal information without any possibility of being corrected or contradicted by their partner. Conducting joint interviews provides opportunities for researchers to understand the collective perspective of the couple (Gilliss and Davis, 1992) and to gain an insight into the way that couples make sense of their shared experiences. I therefore considered gaining this extra perspective to be pertinent in acquiring an in-depth understanding of what was involved in the daily management of work and family responsibilities, including the necessary dynamics between the partners within the couple, and their joint understanding of work and family decision making. Individual diaries were to be kept subsequently, therefore also allowing their own individual stories room for expression and, due to reasons that will be discussed shortly, follow-up interviews were also conducted individually. Previous research has advocated the use of both approaches in providing a richer understanding of phenomena by eliciting the separate accounts of both individuals as well as a shared account. In other words it enables the uncovering of "his story", "her story", and "their story" (O'Rourke and Germino, 2000; Taylor and de Vocht, 2011).

In-depth qualitative techniques are used with the aim of examining different levels of meaning that may not have been fully explored using quantitative methods. Prior research on the work-family relationship has generally followed a quantitative approach. Eby et al. (2005) suggested that the limited number of exploratory studies on the issue may have restricted the development of theory building. Qualitative research techniques can also provide unique and novel perspectives on well-

researched areas (Strauss and Corbin, 1990). A qualitative methodology has been chosen for studying work-family balance of dual-earner couples because it enables a more detailed examination of the intricate and dynamic relationship between work and family. A diary study seems particularly suitable for this topic as it allows a picture to be built up of the types of issues that are raised on a daily basis and to capture moments and emotional experiences that may be lost or diluted using more retrospective techniques (Symon, 2004).

As discussed in the previous section, both the work and family domains are dynamic, changing daily and perhaps more frequently (Butler et al, 2005, Williams and Alliger, 1994) therefore it is useful to employ a method, like daily diary studies, which have the ability to capture this dynamism. By getting both individuals in each couple to keep a separate diary it also enables different perceptions of the same event to be obtained. As far as I am aware, no previous research has used a qualitative diary study to investigate the work-family balance issues that couples deal with on a daily basis. Partnerships where both couples work, also referred to as dual career couples (Rapoport and Rapoport, 1969), have become increasingly significant lifestyles and are therefore an important area for researchers to investigate. Although work-family conflict has been investigated in this group by a number of researchers (e.g. Greenhaus et al, 1989, Hammer et al, 1997), as previously mentioned, the majority of research in the area of work-family balance has been based on studies of individuals. A focus on the partnership of couples will generate better understanding of how the experiences of each partner at work and at home, and the support they offer each other, can affect the work-family balance. The study reported here therefore aims to understand the issue of work-family balance from the perspectives of the couples themselves and to fill this gap in the literature and provide an innovative contribution to the field.

3.2 Participants

A total of 48 people took part in the study which comprised of 24 couples who were responsible for child dependents (see Table 1. for a brief overview or Appendix A for more detailed description of the couples). They were from a variety of organizations and occupations from both the public and the private sector. Selection criteria included couples who (a) have both partners working greater than or equal to

20 hours a week, (b) have child dependents of 17 years or younger, and (c) who share a common residence. Participants were recruited using self-selection as well as snowball sampling in order to enhance sample size due to the difficulty of identifying members of the desired population. Although this method of sampling can cause problems of representativeness, due to respondents being most likely to identify other potential respondents who are similar to themselves (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2003), given the rather specific requirements of the desired population this sampling method provided the most effective way of recruiting the necessary number of participants. An information sheet explaining why the research was being carried out and what was involved in taking part was presented to potential participants. This information sheet asked individuals to take time to decide whether or not they wished to take part, to read the information carefully, discuss it with others if they wished and to contact the researcher if there was anything that was not clear or if they would like more information. I continued recruiting participants in this way until the 'saturation' point was reached (Taylor and Bogdan, 1998, p. 93), that is, little new or relevant information was retrieved from the data. This recruitment effort resulted in 24 couples volunteering to participate in the study, 23 of whom were white British, while one couple were Spanish and had been living in England for the past five years. Qualitative data was gained from diaries kept by participants, along with interviews before and after the diaries were completed. Couple 24 only participated in the initial in-depth interview and did not complete diaries due to time constraints and personal circumstances.

Table 1. A brief overview of the participants

	Names	Children	Occupations	Work Flexibility
Couple 1	Lucy & Paul	Rachel – age 8 Kieran – age 5 James – age 2	Paul – civil engineer Lucy – Social worker	Paul – Flexi-time & works from home 2 days/wk Lucy – Part-time
Couple 2	Sylvia & Ben	Mary – age 11	Ben – machine operator Sylvia – personal assistant in the healthcare sector	Ben – works nights Sylvia – part-time
Couple 3	Hannah & Nigel	June – age 17 Sam – age 14 Liam – age 8	Nigel – engineer Hannah – payroll manager	Hannah – working hours arranged around school times
Couple 4	Amy & Keith	Logan – age 10 months	Keith – IT consultant Amy – research assistant	Keith – works from home Amy – flexi-time & often works from home
Couple 5	Katrina & John	Jake – age 6	John – accounting manager	John – can work from home sometimes

			Katrina – social worker	
Couple 6	Sarah & Adam	George – age 6 Richie – age 3	Adam - senior hydraulic modeller Sarah – statistician for British Transport Police	Sarah – works part-time
Couple 7	Melanie & Steve	Annabelle – age 2	Melanie – secretary in accountancy firm Steve – owner of plumbing business	Steve – works part-time/ is his own boss Melanie – can work time in lieu
Couple 8	Anthony & Elizabeth	Michael – age 16 Jonathan – age 11	Elizabeth – Partnership manager for the learning skills council Anthony - contract manager for adult care facilities	Both have flexi-time
Couple 9	Julia & Tom	Lewis – age 8 Nina – age 4	Julia – personal assistant Tom – graphic designer	Julia – works part-time
Couple 10	Emma & Richard	Andrew – age 11 Melissa – age 10 Joanna – age 10	Emma – secretary Richard - engineer	Richard – works flexi-time Emma – works part-time
Couple 11	Linda & Edward	Matthew – age 13 Oliver – age 11	Linda - secretary for big blue chip companies Edward – chartered surveyor with own company and lecturer	Edward – works flexi-time/ is his own boss
Couple 12	Jane & Carl	Thomas – age 7	Jane – administrator in an accountancy and finance office Carl – Trainee sales manager at a gym	Jane – works part-time
Couple 13	Marissa & Nick	Beth – age 12 Tobey – age 8	Marissa - development manager for the voluntary service charity Nick – production worker	Marissa – works flexi-time
Couple 14	Dave & Emily	Kyle – age 5 Suzanne – age 2	Emily – healthcare assistant at a pharmacy Dave – head chef	Emily – works part-time
Couple 15	Anna & Adrian	Isaac – age 2 Alex – age 2	Anna - veterinary surgeon Adrian - veterinary surgeon area manager	Adrian – some limited flexibility and opportunity to work from home at times that he is not required on site
Couple 16	Joe & Jasmine	Jack – age 7 Ellie – age 14 months	Jasmine – teaching assistant Joe - IT service manager for a telecommunications company	Joe – works flexi-time and can work from home
Couple 17	Kyle & Carly	Lewis – age 16 months	Carly – HR manager Kyle – Owns a small property business	Carly – works part-time Kyle – flexibility due to being his own boss
Couple 18	Janet & Rick	Bella – age 9 Gregory – age 7	Janet - IT service manager for a large telecommunications company Rick - business development manager for a small telecommunications company	Janet – works flexi-time and can work from home
Couple 19	Nathan & Mary	Imogen – age 3	Mary – personal assistant Nathan – Industrial paint sprayer for a steel company	Mary – working hours arranged around nursery times & she can work from home
Couple 20	Louise & Ian	Stephen – age 11 Peter – age 9	Louise – community matron/ PhD student	Louise – can work flexibly and from home

			Ian – hospital consultant	Ian – some flexibility outside of clinic hours
Couple 21	Nick & Angela	Suzie – age 12 months	Angela - personal advisor for a career advisory service Nick – research fellow at a University	Angela – works part-time Nick – Able to work from home when not teaching
Couple 22	Ray & Olivia	Marcus – age 9	Olivia – Inclusion officer at a school Ray – Learning manager and head of year at the same school	
Couple 23	Ellen & Alex	Christopher – age 5 Robert – age 2	Alex – freelance IT consultant Ellen – medical secretary	Alex – some flexibility due to being his own boss Ellen – works part-time
Couple 24	Neil & Hayley	Natalia – age 2	Neil – University academic Hayley – University academic	Both have flexibility when not teaching and are able to work from home

3.3 Designing the Diary

An important issue that I had to address was the design of the qualitative diary. There are three general categories of diary methods in the literature (Eckenrode and Bolger, 1995). The first is interval-contingent where experiences are recorded at regular and predetermined intervals of time as selected by the researcher. The second category is signal-contingent, where participants again report experiences at a particular point in time whenever the participant is contacted by the researcher, and this can be at fixed or random times. The third category is event-contingent where participants report every time a pre-established event takes place.

An event contingent schedule was required for this study, as providing reports at fixed times every day would not ensure that a work-family conflict had occurred and could be reported. This design requires a clear definition of the triggering event because any ambiguities to which events fall within that definition may lead participants to omit relevant events and a decrease in the number of events reported. In an attempt to ensure that this was minimised I went to great lengths to discuss the importance of recording minor, routine work-family conflicts.

Another possibility when considering diary design is the use of computerised diaries rather than simple paper and pencil formats. With the creation of Personal Digital Assistants (PDA's), which are essentially hand held computers that present custom

designed questions where responses are collected in a database program, there has been the development of programs specifically to conduct diary studies. However, there are issues of cost and programming the PDA's which can make this a less viable option. There is also the extra time needed for training participants on how to use these devices, and while some may be very familiar with such technology, others could be less comfortable. The use of these programs for conducting diary studies has tended to be used for more quantitative diary formats (e.g. Barrett and Feldman Barrett, 2000), and at present their feasibility for incorporating the open-ended responses required for qualitative diaries remains difficult.

Secondly, an issue that is raised specifically when designing qualitative diaries is how much structure, if any, to incorporate in your diary. This issue was addressed in two phases of pilot studies and is discussed in the following sections.

3.4 Pilot Studies

3.4.1 Phase One

The first phase of pilot studies investigated how qualitative interviews and diaries can be used when exploring issues of work-family conflict, what kind of data they produce and what kind of issues may be raised by using them. The aim of these initial pilot studies was to gain a greater insight into employing these research methods in the area of work-family conflict and to enable any changes or improvements to be made which would help to produce a more insightful piece of research for my thesis.

This initial phase of pilot studies used a sample of 3 working couples who were responsible for child dependents. Qualitative data was gained from diaries kept by participants, along with interviews before and after the diary was completed. A semi-structured interview guide was used, which began with demographic questions. Questions then focused upon areas of difficulty with regard to work-family balance, how decisions were made and potential conflicts resolved (see Appendix B). When the couples had completed the diary, they were then given an unstructured follow-up interview. This lasted approximately 30 minutes and acted as an opportunity for the couple to discuss any issues that had been raised while completing the diary and gave the opportunity for me to seek clarification regarding issues raised in the diaries.

The 3 couples were given two diaries, one for each member of the couple, to keep for three weeks. Participants were asked to report all incidents of work-family conflict experienced over time, as it occurred. All diaries had a front cover giving a brief explanation of what was required. Inside, the diaries consisted of a blank page for each day of the week for participants to write on without restriction but with a sentence at the top of each page reminding them of the general topics they were to write about, which might act as a prompt and help them to focus on the relevant issues (see Appendix C).

The use of qualitative diaries allowed the couples to express their experiences freely and without restriction, which produced richer data on the topic. I felt using interviews in conjunction with these diaries was particularly important and helped the participants to think in more depth about the incidents of work-family conflict that they experienced and the factors that impacted their decision making process. This set the scene for completing the diaries, and the follow-up interviews gave the opportunity to explore these issues further if necessary. In this way the methods used here enabled a great quality of rich data to be obtained. Therefore, based on the initial pilot studies this combination of methods was deemed successful and lucrative.

However, it was found that in some instances it was difficult to ensure that the participants explained all the factors they considered when they encountered an incidence of work-family conflict therefore a sense of the thought processes that were occurring were not always obtained. In order to obtain a more detailed view of participants thought processes during such decision-making it was considered useful to explore different diary formats in order to try to extract more detailed information from participants. In a follow-up interview with one of the couples they commented that it was tempting to simply talk about what had happened during the day and it was difficult to keep it relevant. They also suggested that more structure in the diaries may have helped them.

Another issue that was raised in these pilot studies, regarding the follow-up interviews, was the consideration of how raising certain topics from participant's diary entries may impact them and their partner in the interview. In many cases where sensitive issues and conflicts had arisen, it would simply not have been

feasible to discuss the topic in the interview, not only because of the sensitive nature of the topic, but also because it may have been a private issue for the individual and the interview was taking place with both members of the couple. Bringing up such personal issue in this situation would be unethical and show no regard for the individual's privacy, which it is obviously vital that I protect. Although initially the aim of the follow-up interview was to discuss issues that had been raised in the diaries in more detail to enable a more complete and in-depth understanding of the decision process and the experiences of the individual, this was simply not a possibility in many cases. Going back to interview participants for a second time, especially after reading what they have disclosed regarding personal incidents in their lives in a private diary, raises numerous ethical issues. In the past, other authors have chosen not to conduct follow-up interviews because of such difficulties, and have instead chosen only to undertake single interviews (Gatrell, 2009). However, the follow-up interviews had the potential to produce valuable information and therefore possible solutions were considered. It was deemed that the critical incident technique might be used in the follow-up interviews, where participants could be asked to talk through one of the work-family conflicts that they discussed in their diary, therefore allowing them to decide which incidents they were happy to raise and discuss further and, from there, questions aimed at gaining a greater insight into their decision-making process could be asked

3.4.2 Phase Two

The second phase of pilot studies used a sample of 3 working couples and were carried out based on the findings from the first phase. The results of the first phase of pilot studies suggested that it might be useful to trial different types of diary formats in order to try to extract more detailed information from participants. Therefore, in these studies couples were asked to keep a diary for three weeks, but where each week the diary would be in a different format.

The first type of diary was the same as the one used in the first phase of pilot studies, with blank pages for each day but with one sentence at the top of each page to act as a prompt (see Appendix C).

The second type of diary was slightly more structured, listing a set of questions to help to encourage participants to think about their decision-making process in more

detail and act as a reminder about what exactly they are being asked to include (see Appendix D). The four questions included were as follows:

- Please describe the conflict that you experienced and the difficult decision you had to make between work and family?
- What did you decide to do?
- How did you arrive at this decision? Please describe in as much detail as you can the decision process that you went through and all the things that had an impact on your decision.
- What was the outcome of the decision that you made? Please explain how you felt about the decision and anything that occurred as a result of the decision.

The third type of diary used was audio diaries which provide the participants an opportunity to record their experiences, perceptions and feelings about their daily activities relatively soon after they occurred but do not require writing skills and time for composition, so that participants may find it easier in terms of time and effort and may minimize the disruption to the participants' daily lives. It has also been reported that audio diaries encourage a more personal disclosure of private emotions and feelings, compared to that which occurs using the normal diary format (Plummer, 2001).

Previous researchers who have used audio diaries as part of their research have reported this to be a very useful method, which captures a rich form of data (e.g. Holt and Dunn, 2004, Boyd et al, 2004, Theodosius, 2006) For example; Boyd et al (2004) used audio diaries to investigate how site managers solve complex problems day to day. They asked site managers to keep an audio diary of problem solving events by dictaphone each week which contains their personal knowledge and thinking. After four or five audio diary recordings, the participants were visited by the researcher and a debriefing session was conducted. This lasted about half an hour to one hour and involved a review of the events with a question and discussion session. This helped the participants to be more analytical about their everyday experience. The authors concluded that this research method revealed a great deal of rich information about the complex decision making that managers have to

undertake. This seemed to be particularly relevant to my research on work-family conflict and decision-making, where my objective is also to obtain detailed information about a complex decision-making process.

However, in my pilot studies audio diaries did not prove to be very successful. Two out of the six participants had lost a great deal of their data due to confusion regarding how to use the recorder even though they had been instructed in how to use them and another two of the participants had recorded very little because they said that they felt uncomfortable using the recorder and felt that they could not express themselves as effectively as when they were writing. For example one participant said, "I was more comfortable writing it than speaking it" and another commented, "I didn't seem to be able to think as clearly when I was talking into that as when I was writing things down and you can see what you've written."

Although some of the participants preferred the blank diary because they felt that they could write more freely they also tended to acknowledge the benefits of the more structured diary. For example, one participant commented "I think I just found it easier to write it all myself, just to write it all in one go but maybe I did think about it more in the second one."

The problems that arose with the blank diary were that what was written was often not entirely relevant and participants tended not to discuss in any detail the factors that impacted the decisions they made. One of the participants said that they preferred the structured diary because "I think without the prompts I would just have written what happened and not any feelings or why." The diaries with some structure tended to produce more detail regarding the decision making process. However, one possible problem considered with this dairy format was regarding imposing a structure on participants that was not their reality. One participant mentioned there was not always something to say that fitted in with the questions so they could write more in the blank diary. Although this might not always be entirely relevant to the research questions it was considered important to avoid restricting their responses due to the focus of the current research on experiences from the point of view of the participants rather than imposing my own structure up on them. However, concurrently, some structure was required in order to focus the research and to draw a line around what can be investigated here and what is out of the scope of the

current research. In aiming to achieve this balance the structured diaries were decided upon, but with an extra space available each day for any further comments that participants might wish to include (Appendix D).

Having faced the dilemma of going back to interview participants for a second time in the previous pilot studies, one solution that was considered was the use of the critical incident technique in the follow-up interviews. Therefore, in this second phase of pilot studies the participants were asked to talk through one of the work-family conflicts that they had discussed in their diary, therefore allowing them to decide which incidents they were happy to raise and discuss further and, from there, questions could be asked to gain a greater insight into their decision-making process. However, this technique did not prove to be particularly useful as it was found that when asking participants to talk about an incident they had discussed in their diaries they tended to simply repeat what they had written in the diary and asking more probing questions about the conflict and their decision, if they did not offer the information, remained problematic. It also meant that other important issues discussed in the diary that might require clarification, or further development, were unable to be addressed.

This highlighted the difficulties of interviewing participants for a second time where the topic requires them to draw upon personal issues and also the difficulties regarding carrying out research with couples. When describing critical incidents regarding balancing work and family and conflict of these two domains participants may be required to draw upon experiences in which they have deep emotions invested (Gatrell, 2009). Qualitative researchers have a responsibility to prioritise the interests of the participants above the desire to collect data and achieve publications (Finch, 1993, Gatrell, 2009) and ethical guidelines iterate the need for researchers to protect participants from potentially harmful effects of qualitative research interviews (British Sociological Association, 2002, British Psychological Association, 2010). Having read the diaries of both members of a couple, and therefore being privy to information and personal thoughts which may be private to the individual, interviewing them together and attempting to ask any further questions on the issues raised in the diary became unacceptable. Since the same difficulties arose while using the critical incident technique it was decided that this technique would not be used in the follow-up interviews. Despite these problems, it

was understood that these interviews still had the potential to be extremely beneficial in terms of obtaining clarity and a detailed understanding of how decision-making factors impacted upon the decisions made. The ability to discuss particular incidents with individuals based on the information that they had given in their diaries and, where necessary, get them to expand on this could add great value to the data gained. Where some participants were very descriptive in their diary entries, others talked in much more detail in the follow-up interviews, therefore providing me with richer data on the topic. Although it could be argued that this again introduces problems of retrospection, by using the initial points that were raised in participant's diaries and simply expanding on these where necessary it limited the impact of accounts told in retrospect and greatly added to the depth of knowledge and understanding of the participant's experiences. As well as providing the ability to expand on that which was reported in the diary, this follow-up interview can also act as an opportunity to question the meaning and significance of events to the participant which again can add valuable depth of information (Zimmerman and Wieder, 1977). In this way using diaries in conjunction with interviews could help to counteract some of the limitations of using either method alone and allow for a detailed picture of events and experiences to be captured. Therefore, rather than losing this valuable data altogether, it was decided that when carrying out the follow-up interviews, it was best to interview participants separately to avoid any 'slip-ups' that could occur in a joint interview, which could potentially be damaging to participants' marriages/partnerships. It was also decided that these individual interviews would be conducted via the telephone; firstly because of time constraints and secondly as an attempt to make participants more comfortable talking about any sensitive issues as it allows personal distancing (Gatrell, 2009).

3.5 Conducting the Research

3.5.1 Interviews

Each initial interview lasted between 30 and 90 minutes and took place in the interviewees' own homes, with both members of the couple present. By having both members of the couple present each partner was in a position to enrich the other's narrative or challenge their points of view of a jointly experienced event, therefore creating the opportunity for a better understanding of the decision (Challiol and Mignonac, 2005). A semi-structured interview guide was used, which, as previously

mentioned, began with demographic questions before focusing upon areas of difficulty with regard to work-family balance, how decisions were made and potential conflicts resolved (see Appendix B). As is common in these kinds of interviews (King, 2004) the schedule was designed to allow participants to cover anything that they felt appropriate or significant and to convey their own personal experiences with minimal direction from the researcher. During these initial interviews participants were also assured of the confidentiality of the information they were divulging and that all names would be changed in the write-up process. It was also made clear that, should they decide they no longer wished to participate in the research, they were free to withdraw at any time without reason or consequence. This information had previously been included on the original information sheet provided during participant recruitment but was reiterated during initial interviews. At this stage each participant also signed a consent form agreeing to take part in the research and acknowledging that they understood what was involved. Four weeks later, when the couples had completed the diary, they were then given a follow-up telephone interview, this time with each participant individually. This lasted approximately 20 minutes with each participant and acted as an opportunity for the couple to discuss any issues that had been raised while completing the diary, as well as to clarify any unclear issues that they might have raised in their diaries.

3.5.2 Diaries

The diary's final format was decided following the 2 phases of pilot studies where a range of diary formats were trialled. The diaries consisted of a front cover explaining the purpose of the diary, what to include and the researchers contact details, and 3 pages per day for 28 days, where each day asked four open questions and included one blank page for any further comments (see Appendix E)

I contacted the couples, via telephone and/or email, at least once a week during the four week period in which they were keeping the diaries to ensure that they were having no problems, and to provide a further opportunity to ask any questions they might have once they had begun keeping the diary. The importance of maintaining close contact with participants while keeping the diaries was highlighted in the pilot studies. For example one participant commented, *"It was just when I went to write it down I'm sat there thinking well is it enough? Is it going to be useful to you? Am I*

doing it right?"*Although all participants received contact details, and were assured that they could contact me at any time to ask any questions, they were often less likely to do this and tended only to ask questions or discuss any issues they might be having when they were contacted. It was also important to maintain this contact in order to keep them motivated since completing a diary for four weeks is a significant undertaking. Diary studies require a certain level of participant commitment and dedication rarely required in other types of research (Bolger et al, 2003) and the burden of repeated responses places substantial demands on participants, and this is likely to be even greater when using qualitative diaries investigating work-family balance. It is difficult to maintain this level of commitment to the research over time, without your presence and especially when your participants are, by the very nature of your research topic, extremely busy people. This personal contact has been shown to retain participants more so than monetary incentives or dependence upon goodwill towards science (Bolger et al, 2003).

3.5.3 Analysis

A thematic template was designed to enable the data analysis. This type of analysis works well in studies examining different perspectives within a specific context (King, 2004), therefore it was deemed useful in this study where multiple perspectives were the focus. These included perspectives of both individuals within the couples, as well as different perspectives across couples and across time. It is also a flexible technique that enabled the data from both interviews and the diaries to be analysed in the same template. This method was chosen over grounded theory because this is largely associated with a realist methodology. However, the present analysis is conducted from an interpretivist perspective, meaning that multiple interpretations are thought to be able to be made of any phenomenon and 'real' internal states are not thought to exist (King, 2004). Grounded theory also specifies strict procedures for data collection and analysis that have to be followed (Strauss and Corbin, 1990) and is therefore not as flexible as template analysis.

The initial template was developed using a number of pre-defined codes in order to help guide analysis from the beginning (See Appendix F). The interview guide and diary instructions were not sufficiently detailed to serve as an initial template due to the minimalist approach used therefore this was developed by examining a sub-set of

the transcript data (diaries and interviews from one couple), defining codes in light of the research questions regarding experiences of work-family conflict and decision making. Codes were organized hierarchically with the highest-level codes representing broad themes and the lower levels describing more narrowly focused themes within these broader themes (King, 2004). The four main themes in the initial template were taken from the research questions regarding decision-making as participants' responses tended to follow this general pattern since the focus of the interviews and the diaries were on conflicts they had faced and how they had made decisions in each of these instances. These four headings are: type of conflict, decision made, reason for decision, and outcome of decision. Several themes were then listed under each of these headings, with lower level themes also identified under reasons for decisions and outcomes, based on the interviews and diaries of one couple.

The full sets of transcripts and diaries were then worked through systematically, identifying those sections of text that were relevant to the research questions and marking them with the relevant code from the initial template. The codes from the initial template were not rigid coding categories, but provisional codes held open to modification so that when inadequacies in the initial template were revealed, modifications were made. King (1998) outlines four ways in which a template may be modified; a code may be inserted if relevant issues are not covered by initial codes, codes may be inserted at different levels of the template hierarchy if the codes need to cover a wider or a more narrow scope, or codes may be deleted because they do not cover the issues discussed. Initially many new themes were inserted into the original template including higher order codes and lower order codes. For instance, more specific family-friendly policies were included under the broad theme of the availability of family friendly policies. Beyond this, the broad theme, 'unofficial work agreements' was inserted into the template, at this stage, to capture the support that some participants reported receiving from their place of work which was not part of an official family friendly policy. Many more themes were added in this way as the remainder of the data was worked through. Other themes also changed position at this stage; for example, the theme of 'turn-taking', which was originally a broad theme, was inserted as a lower order theme under the main theme of support. After all interview transcripts and diaries had undergone an initial analysis the

template had grown substantially (see Appendix G). All sections of the text, in all the transcripts that were relevant to the research question, were covered by a code in this template. Finally, the data was worked through again and subsequently further changes were made to the template; this time with several themes being grouped together in a more insightful and informative manner. For instance, 'the availability of support', 'job requirements and expectations' and 'financial considerations' were grouped together as lower order themes under the broad theme of 'enabling and constraining factors' as this more effectively described the impact that these factors were having on participant's decision-making (See Appendix H). In this way the template was developed to its final form, where no new themes could be identified and no further data could be added to the existing categories (Jarman et al, 1997). This template then served as the basis for the interpretation of the data set. The distribution of codes within and across transcripts helped to draw attention to aspects of the data that may be worthwhile investigating further (King, 2004). Based on this analytical method the most salient themes that had central relevance to gaining an understanding into the research questions were identified and considered in more depth, along with the uncovering of other key themes, such as the impact of gender differences. I was aware of the importance of remaining open while selecting these themes so that they were not limited by my own prior assumptions and so that themes that were not obviously of direct relevance were not disregarded.

Once all the data had been coded in this way it was deemed that another way to organise this coded data was still needed in order to be able to perceive any patterns and to successfully interpret the data. Subsequently, another analytic tool involving the use of diagrammatical representations of the data was employed in order to fully explore the complex connections between the different issues. Initially, decision-making diagrams were used as a means of attempting of organising the data from each couple in a way as to describe the decision-making processes they reported going through when faced with an incident of work-family conflict. Such diagrammatical representations of decision-making were used to describe each individual conflict made by all participants including; the type of decision, the decision that was made, the reasons expressed for making this decision, and the subsequent outcomes, displayed in a flow chart diagram (see Appendix I for an example). Three hundred and twenty-five decisions were reported and analysed in

this way; 101 from interviews and 224 from diary entries. These diagrams allowed for a clear picture of each decision-making process to be revealed, meaning that the analysis could be related more closely to the research questions. These diagrams also helped to retain the original context of the data and could therefore demonstrate a more detailed approximation of participant's decision making process and the way this progressed by allowing the important links involved in this process to be made, in a way that a list of themes could not. Within each of the diagrams, the codes from the final template relating the specific decision, decision-making factor, or outcome represented in that diagram, were reported therefore making links between the two easily apparent. From this sort of representation it was also much easier to move towards the comparison of decision-making within and between individuals as well as within and between couples, and to explore links between the different stages in the decision-making process. For instance, the decision-making process reported by both partners regarding the same decision could easily be compared side by side in these diagrams; or those outcomes most commonly associated with particular types of decisions or decision-making factors could be more easily explored. In this way, when these diagrammatical representations were used in conjunction with template analysis, they aided an effective and detailed analysis of the data regarding how couples made decisions in incidents of work-family conflict. The combination of analytic strategies allowed for the examination of the data without losing sight of the big picture, as well as allowing the examination of the big picture without losing sight of each individual voice. The following chapters will now go on to discuss the findings yielded using this methodological approach.

Chapter 4: Findings and Discussion – Anchoring and Daily Decision-Making

4.1 Introduction

In reporting the research findings I will address the research questions laid out at the beginning of this thesis which asked; how are incidents of work-family conflict and the decision-making process experienced? And how do couples negotiate their work and family responsibilities when they encounter a conflict between the two?

In addressing the first of the two research questions, through the analysis of the data it became apparent that there was a clear distinction between two different kinds of decisions which I refer to as anchoring decisions and daily decisions. Anchoring decisions are major decisions about the overall approach to work life balance taken by the couple. They provided a framework within which other day to day decisions were made and tended to be made at key points in the couples' lives, for example when they first had children. Examples are the decision that both would continue to work; the decision that one member of the couple would work part-time; or the decision to move to another job. These anchoring decisions were different from the daily decisions that couples made which focused rather more on immediate issues such as who would look after a child if they were sick and unable to go to school on a particular day, or how to resolve the conflict between a meeting at work which clashed with a school event. Furthermore, various decision-making cues had a differential impact on these different types of decisions. This will be explored further in the following chapters.

To address the second research question, in relation to how couple's negotiate their daily work family responsibilities when they encounter a conflict between the two, this research highlighted the use of pre-existing decision-making hierarchies. When faced with daily work-family conflicts couples tended to draw on their own personal decision-making hierarchy where the most favourable option for dealing with the conflict was at the top of the hierarchy, and the first point of call, and the least favourable option was at the bottom of the hierarchy and considered a last resort; if all other options were not deemed possible in that particular incident. In conjunction with this many couples used pre-established agreements of mutual reciprocation to

deal with daily work-family conflict, whether this was an agreement within the couple or with others such as friends or parents from school. Anchoring decisions, on the other hand, were made based on a different type of decision-making process drawing on personal beliefs and values to a greater extent.

Throughout the following chapters a more in-depth look at these findings will be provided. The first of these chapters will outline anchoring decisions in more detail, before exploring the processes that impact upon how daily decisions are made. The main anchoring decisions will be discussed, namely whether or not to return to paid work after having children, whether to return to work full-time or part-time, and whether or not to actively engage in progression at work. The two key factors that impacted upon these three anchoring decisions; enabling and constraining factors and the values, beliefs and consequently priorities with regards to work and family, will then be explored. Following on from this, the eight different types of daily work-family conflict which were reported by participants, will be discussed (see Table.2) before detailing the four different strategies used to resolve these daily conflicts; support seeking, integrating, taking time off work and rescheduling. The decision regarding which of these to employ was informed by three categories of factors labelled enabling and constraining factors, considerations of fairness and equity, and preferences, each of which will subsequently be addressed in detail.

The second chapter will go on to more explicitly answer the research questions and in doing so provide a decision-making framework. The current findings will be linked to previous literature throughout both chapters in order to provide greater insight into what these findings mean within the context of previous research findings.

4.2. Anchoring Decisions

4.2.1 Types of Anchoring Decisions

The main anchoring decisions discussed by the couples in their interviews were; whether or not to carry on working after having children and if so whether to work part-time or full-time. This was discussed by all participants as it was included in the interview topics raised in the initial interview as a way of obtaining background information on the couples. As imposed by the requirements of participants for this study (that they must be dual-earner couples) they had all made the decision to return

to work; both members of twelve of the couples returned to work full-time and within the remaining twelve couples one member worked full-time while the other returned to work part-time. It was the woman who returned to work part-time in all but one case. The other anchoring decisions that were discussed by the participants were the decision to change jobs as well as decisions regarding whether or not to seek opportunities for career progression, such as the choice to take a promotion or to engage in further studying. Three of the women discussed changing their jobs when realising that they were going to become parents, and two men and one woman made the decision to change their jobs after having children and finding their workplace to be somewhat unsupportive regarding family life. Three women decided to engage in further studying to enhance their career options, one woman discussed her decision to take a promotion which required an increase in her working days and another woman discussed increasing her working days to full-time in order to financially support her family.

4.2.2 Factors Impacting Anchoring Decisions

The following section will explore the various factors that were discussed by the couples as having an impact on their decision-making with regards to anchoring decisions. Through the data analysis, and the revisions of the template, it became clear that the numerous factors discussed by participants could be broken down into two general categories; enabling and constraining factors and personal beliefs, values and preferences. Each of these will now be discussed in turn.

4.2.2.1 Enabling and Constraining Factors

Enabling factors are those which enable a decision to be made more easily by providing a greater number of options to the couples when dealing with work-family conflicts. Conversely, constraining factors are those that constrain decision-making by limiting the couple's available options in dealing with such conflicts. The reason that these two seemingly opposing categories have been grouped together is because of their opposing nature. If a particular enabling factor was not present or was lacking this would usually become a constraining factor and therefore it made sense to discuss these in parallel. The factors discussed here which acted in this way are financial factors and the availability of support

4.2.2.1.1 Financial Considerations

Financial issues were frequently discussed in relation to all anchoring decisions and could act by either enabling or constraining decision-making. These were discussed in terms of necessity, the importance placed on having a certain lifestyle or in relation to childcare costs or financial security. In the current research financial considerations appeared to act both as a constraint, in that they put restrictions on the options that were viable for the couple's making the decision, and also by impacting upon decisions via the value placed upon having a more material lifestyle by the couples. In their interview Dave and Emily discussed how financial necessity was the constraint that limited their options when making the decision of whether or not to both return to work after having the children:

> Dave: "Work is very important, as it is the main source of income for the family. Without my wage we would not afford the mortgage, holidays, and general household financial commitments."

> Emily: "Our main priority is being able to pay the bills etc, whilst family is very important to us; if we have to work, we have to work.... It's always easy for people to say they put their family ahead of everything else but in the real world that is not always practical, as we work to provide for our family"

This highlights the importance of considering the constraints upon people's options when exploring how they make decisions. Janet also discussed how the constraints put on her by finances meant that she actually had little choice in her decision to increase her working days from part-time to full-time:

> Janet: "When Gregory was born I carried on doing two and a half days, then needing a bit more money I went back three days so I got Thursday, Friday with Gregory, which was absolutely brilliant. Then when Gregory went to school I went back to work for 4 days, money I would get for going back and I think it was £250 in my hand for that one day so I went back but I can honestly say it is probably the worst thing I have ever done. It tipped me over the edge which was really just financial, needing a bit more money because the bills were going up and weighing it up thinking I can't have him in school and me just being off on my own, lady of leisure. I managed 4 day for about a year and then again bills going up, looked at how much!"

Rick: "The mortgage went up quite a lot and that day virtually paid for the extra money for the mortgage so it's mathematics really."

Several of the couples also mentioned the impact of financial considerations upon their anchoring decisions in terms of the need to ensure that they maintain financial security. This highlighted how couples considered all possible eventualities when making important anchoring decisions which could have a great impact on their family in the long term. For example, Anna and Adrian discussed why this was an important factor in their decision to both go back to work after having their children:

Anna: "We work for contractors so if they lose the contract we don't have a job. It's never 100% secure."

Adrian: "You have no security. You have a mortgage; you have everything so the main reason for both of us working is job security. If one of us is losing the job, the other one can take care of the babies, take the money that we are paying for the nursery and keep going until we get another job or whatever but the main reason is job security"

The cost of childcare was also discussed by many of the couples as a further financial constraint placed upon their decision-making. Several of the women who made the decision to return to work part-time mentioned this as an important factor in making this decision due to the expense of childcare meaning that they were actually unable to afford to return to work full-time. For example, when talking about making this decision, Lucy said:

"That was a big decision to decide to work part-time. It would impact us financially if I worked full-time because it costs you so much to put your child in nursery"

Emily talked about how financial constraints not only meant that she needed to go back to work, but the cost of childcare also put further constraints on how, and when, she was able to work. It was not feasible for her to work during the day while her partner was at work because the childcare costs would negate her earnings. This constraint severely limited her options with regards to work and meant that she ended up working in a job that she did not enjoy, and working hours that she found to be far from ideal:

"On looking at our options we decided that I should work part time in the evening as Childcare during the day was far too expensive and I would be working just to pay the childcare and we would still be no better off than if I didn't work at all…. On the nights I am working I find it very hard to motivate myself to go as my shift starts at 7pm but I have already had a very busy day with the children, which starts at 7am in the morning.... I would love to work full time during the day, but this is out of the question, as I cannot afford the childcare for Scarlett."

This demonstrates how, in some cases, finances greatly constrained decision-making leaving little opportunity for other factors to affect the outcome. In such cases, as just expressed by Emily, participants expressed negative feelings with regards to this outcome. This implies that these individuals might suffer from stress, low motivation at work, and other such negative consequences when decisions were made under highly constrained conditions; allowing little room for other factors, such as the preferences of the individuals, in their decision-making. Marissa, on the other hand, talked about finances, not in terms of necessity, but rather in terms of her, and her partner's, desire to be able to go on holidays and afford other luxuries; and the impact this had upon their decision to both return to work full-time:

"When you were made redundant you were off for 6 weeks weren't you? And I quite liked having a house husband! But again its finances - to have what we wanted and holidays and things. Not that we're materialistic at all but you only work to be able to do these things don't you?"

This demonstrates how finances can, at times, interact with the values and priorities of individuals and in this way have an impact on the anchoring decisions made. Carly and Ken discussed similar beliefs regarding the value placed upon having the financial ability to provide their son with the particular 'lifestyle' that they desired for him:

Carly: "I mean arguably if Ken had been at British Gas and hadn't started his own business, arguably, I would have been able to quit work but we wouldn't have been able to have the lifestyle that we enjoy."

Ken: "I think Lewis can't have the life we've got unless we've got money coming in, it's as simple as that."

This demonstrates how finances have an important impact on decision-making in a variety of ways. On the one hand finances can act as a constraining factor, restricting the decision-making options available to the couple, but on the other hand they can also be incorporated within an individual's system of beliefs and values, for example the value they place on monetary reward or their beliefs about the importance of providing certain opportunities for their children; or what it means to be a 'good parent'. This will be discussed in more detail in a later section. Overall, these findings highlight just how vital the consideration of financial issues is when exploring how couple's make decisions regarding work and family since financial factors set the limits within which couples are able to make decisions about where to invest their resources. Despite this there has been relatively little discussion of financial issues in relation to work-family conflict and the decision-making involved in this, particularly in the occupational psychology literature. Promislo et al (2010) touched upon this area investigating the effects of materialism on work-family conflict. Materialism is defined as placing a high value on income and material possessions (Diener and Seligman, 2004) which means that financial success is a core aspiration and central to the value system of materialists (Grouzet et al, 2005). Success at work is highly instrumental to the achievement of this aspiration and in this way "One's values, such as one's level of materialism, drive behaviours and decisions in one's work and family roles" (Promislo et al, 2010). Such research begins to address how financial considerations can be incorporated into a person's value system and how this can impact upon their decision-making but it still fails to address financial factors in terms of the severe constraints that these can impose on decision-making. It addresses decision-making as though people have free choice to act based entirely upon their personal values and preferences which was clearly not the case for the participants in the current study.

The sociology literature has explored the constraints placed upon decision-making in much greater detail (e.g. Hakim, 1998, 2003, Crompton and Harris, 1999, Warren, 2004). Although this literature does not focus solely on the impact of finances per se, this issue has been incorporated within the debate regarding the impact of constraints

versus the impact of preferences on decision-making in relation to employment. This literature suggests that the availability of finances directly impacts the extent to which individual's preferences are able to act as deciding factors in decisions regarding how they balance home and work. For example, Gallhofer (2011) referred to a person's financial situation as influencing work-lifestyle choices in terms of either "facilitating the preferred decision or hindering it" (Gallhofer, 2011, p. 458) and Hakim (1998), who's main focus is upon the importance of preferences, even stated that preferences were "most important among highly educated women in rich modern societies" (Hakim, 1998, p. 140).This echoes the findings from the current study and also suggests a link between financial security and the incorporation of preferences in decision-making. This debate regarding the impact of constraints versus the impact of preferences on decision-making will be discussed in greater detail in the following chapter.

4.2.2.1.2 Availability of Support

The availability, or lack, of support in both the work and the family domains were also discussed to some extent by participants as factors that impacted upon anchoring decisions. This included the availability of support from their partner, usually in relation to the flexibility of their partner's job, as well as the support received from work in terms of the flexibility of their own job and the supportiveness of their boss.

When discussing support in relation to job flexibility aspects such as the terms of their job and workplace policies were raised. For example, Sylvia changed jobs once she became a parent and she talked about the factors impacting her decision of where she wanted to work:

> "One of the reasons I picked the health service to go back into is because they have very good family friendly policies after working in an office. They are very good and have never ever said "no" if I've needed time off"

Sylvia made the decision to work in a place where there was a supportive culture which would therefore enable her decision-making in future incidents of work-family conflict. Other participants focused on the lack of support available in their job and the impact that this had on their anchoring decisions. For example, although Mel had previously enjoyed her job, she decided to change jobs to work as a

secretary once she became a parent due to the general terms and requirements of her job not being supportive of her role as a parent:

> "I used to work in a hotel before we had Annabelle. I worked there for 12 years as a deputy manager and because of the role that I was playing then I wouldn't have just been given set hours....you sometimes have to work until 11pm at night or you do an early shift where you work until 3pm from 6am. But then they wanted me to stay overnight for a full weekend and that sort of really made me....I didn't want to do that, even though it was only one a month, I mean it's a full weekend away, and when Annabelle would have only been small, so I decided against it."

This demonstrates not only the impact that the amount of available support in the workplace has on individual's anchoring decisions but also how these anchoring decisions can be made in order to reduce the amount of constraints placed upon decisions made in the future. If Mel had continued at her previous job the implication is that the unsupportive nature of her work environment would have reduced her available family time and placed considerable constraints on future daily decision-making, due to her having to fulfil the requirements of her job. Olivia also discussed how a lack of support in the workplace led to her decision to change her job but for her this came from an unsupportive boss:

> "They were really awkward at that school. She (her boss) was horrible. She just didn't see....family life didn't exist, everything was work"

These findings provide examples of what Kreiner et al (2009) referred to as temporal tactics, and Maertz and Boyar (2011) referred to as physical withdrawal, as means of managing work and family by manipulating the time spent engaged in work activities and finding respite by withdrawing oneself from the work situation by leaving that particular job. These were some of the more extreme coping strategies discussed in previous research. This highlights how the lack of support, or pressures, from the workplace can have an important impact on anchoring decisions, which has considerable implications for organisations' retention of employees. Evidence of these implications has been clearly demonstrated in the previous work-family literature. For example, employees with higher work–family conflict have been shown to report less organizational commitment (e.g. Netemeyer, Boles, and

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McMurrian, 1996; Mesmer-Magnus and Viswesvaran, 2005b; Rothbard, Philips, and Dumas, 2005; Siegel et al, 2005). This reduced commitment has also been highlighted in studies of turnover intentions in particular, where employees with higher work–family conflict have been more likely to report intentions to leave their organization (e.g., Grandey, and Cropanzano, 1999; Greenhaus et al, 1997, 2001; Boyar et al, 2003; Hang-yue, Foley, and Loi, 2005). It is becoming increasingly accepted as the norm that "good employers" are "family friendly" (Kelly et al, 2008) suggesting that employees will now be more inclined to leave employment that is not perceived to be family-friendly. However, it must be considered that this would only be the case if this were a viable option for them in terms of other constraining factors which could also impact this decision, such as finances.

Support outside of the workplace was also mentioned by several couples as an important factor when making their anchoring decisions. For example, Julia and Tom talked about how they were both able to work due to her parents being available to offer help with childcare. On the other hand, Sylvia decided that she should only work part-time rather than full-time because of the lack of support she had available to her from others. Her partner worked long hours, including shifts, so was only able to help at certain times and they did not have support available to them from other family members:

> "I wouldn't have had any backup.....All my family work and Brian's too so we couldn't rely on anybody, we had to sort everything out ourselves so that was the only way of doing it really....you can't always rely on other people can you? If they're ill or you have like a system going and then something happens you're stuck then aren't you?"

This led to Sylvia's decision not only to work part-time but also to choose to work for the healthcare sector in a more family-friendly organisation. In this way the amount of support available can act to both enable and to constrain individual's decision-making. These findings support those of Greenhaus and Powell (2003, 2006) who incorporated the support from others in both the home and work domains under the category of role sender cues. They investigated support in terms of "the degree of support that they received from their spouse or manager" (Greenhaus and Powell, 2003) based on the idea that they can "offer varying amounts of support for

individuals' involvement in activities in the other role" (Powell and Greenhaus, 2006). The current research demonstrates that the availability of support also impacts decision-making in terms of the wider network of support available in each domain, as well as conveying the impact that this factor can have upon anchoring decisions.

4.2.2.2 Beliefs, Values and Preferences

Beyond the factors that enabled or constrained participant's decision-making, other important factors that were discussed as having an impact on individual's anchoring decisions were their beliefs, values and preferences regarding work and family. These manifested themselves here in terms of their beliefs regarding what it means to be a "good parent" and their own preferences regarding the personal benefits they derived from their work domain.

4.2.2.2.1 What it Means to be a "Good Parent"

One highly influential aspect of the beliefs, values and preferences for participants in relation to anchoring work-family conflict decisions was their beliefs about what it meant to them to be a 'good parent'. This included their beliefs regarding the amount of time that should be spent with their children, whether they valued organised childcare as being beneficial to their children and whether they believed that their working was beneficial to their children both financially and emotionally. Many of the couples expressed beliefs about the importance of parents spending a certain amount of time with their children and their preferences based on these beliefs. This, in turn, impacted upon their anchoring decisions. For example, Sarah explained why she decided to return to work part-time rather than full-time:

> "I did want to go back but I didn't want to go back full-time because I didn't want to have kids that somebody else had brought up.... When you work full-time somebody else sees more of your child than you do and I thought, I don't want somebody else to see them walk or hear them talk."

Mel also echoed this view in her interview. Initially her and her partner were both intending to return to work four days a week so that their daughter would not attend nursery more than three days a week and they could each spend a day at home with her. However, when her partner was made redundant she decided to work full-time to enable him to set up his own plumbing business. He was often able to fit his work

into three days per week meaning that their daughter was at home with him for the remaining two days. When talking about this Mel said:

> "I wouldn't want to put her in nursery full-time. I don't believe in having a child and then putting them into someone else's care for 5 days. That's my personal thing and I'd rather her stay with me one day.... even though she really, really enjoys it [nursery]; she loves being there I don't really want her in 5 days. It's a personal thing."

This clearly demonstrates how their decision-making was based on personal beliefs regarding what is best for their daughter and their preferences in relation to this. Ed, who worked full-time, but very flexibly in a way that his work could fit in around the needs of the children, talked about his decision to take on a less demanding career. He did this to enable him to be the main carer and this decision was impacted upon by his personal beliefs about what it means to be a good parent and the value he placed on this:

> "I think if it didn't mean that much to me [being a parent] I would possibly have decided to stay in a career and work all the hours that god sends. There are people who think that is their role as a parent and I'm not saying that is wrong but that's the way they decided to approach their life and this is the way I decided to approach mine."

Several couples expressed somewhat different beliefs regarding the value placed upon organised childcare with a view that this type of childcare was important and beneficial for their children. Anna and Adrian both shared this belief and discussed it at some length in their interview:

> Anna: "I think it's very good for the children to go to the nursery. We are very lucky because we deeply think that it's the best thing for them to spend time with other children and with so many activities, things that we would never do at home. You know they can paint with loads of paint. We would never give them paint to paint on the walls here! They have buckets of water, sand, and they go out like twice a day and also the other children to play with."

Adrian: "At the beginning we were thinking in money because we have two so it is double paying at the nursery so it is quite high. So if you are making numbers, a nanny makes sense. Maybe it would make sense but we think that we prefer the nursery because the contact of the babies with everyone, to different people and also, for instance, English is not our first language and we want them to learn English so as much contact they have with different people, the better. We don't know that many people here as well so it's an opportunity for them to meet people"

Anna: "So we really think it's a lot better for them to be in nursery than just home all the time and not meeting anyone else, especially, as we have said, they have to face English speaking people at school, you know when they start school they will have to be able to speak perfect English so they need to start now from the beginning."

This highlights the importance that parents can place on childcare in terms of the developmental benefits that they believe it provides for their children. In this way it can be their preference to enable their children to participate in some form of official childcare which can in turn affect their decision-making regarding returning to work in order to enable their children to engage in something which they perceive to be extremely beneficial. This view was also expressed quite clearly by Nigel in his interview:

"She [Natalia] gets so much out of socializing with children her own age, childcare, I don't think I'd be very good at it, or I don't think I'd be as good at it as a collectively organised system"

Several participants explained that going out to work was something that they felt was actually part of being a good parent and was beneficial to their children, not only because they felt it was their job to provide financially for their family (as discussed previously), but also because they considered that time spent at work enabled them to provide more emotionally for their family when they returned home. Mark clearly stated his beliefs about the importance of his job and the financial aspects of this in relation to being a good parent:

> "I have to do my job to be what I see as a good parent because I see a good parent as someone who can provide for their family"

However, several of the participants also discuss the emotional impact that they believed their working had on themselves, and subsequently on their child and their relationship with their child. Mel talked earlier about her beliefs that a child should not be raised in someone else's care full-time but she also discussed her beliefs regarding the positive emotional impact that she believed her working had on her as a mother:

> "When I'm with Annabelle you spend more quality time doing things with her whereas if you're with them all the time....you make more of an effort."

This was a common theme that ran throughout many of the participant's accounts of how they resolved their anchoring decisions; particularly the women's accounts of the perceived benefits to their children of their returning to some form of paid work. For example, Mary expressed similar beliefs:

> "I think the balance between working and not being a 24/7 mum means that Imogen gets the best of me as well because you put in 100% effort when we are there."

There is the direct implication here that being involved in a role other than their role as a parent actually enabled them to invest more energy in this role. They talked about being able to "make more of an effort" in their parental role when they had been able to spend time at work or investing their resources elsewhere. Rather than leading to a depletion of their energy it actually appeared to increase it in these cases, therefore having a positive impact on them and their children. Similar affects have been described in previous literature in terms of work-family facilitation whereby the experience of participating in one role increases the quality of performance in the other role (e.g. Wayne, Musisca, and Fleeson, 2004). The specific examples described by participants in the current study appeared to be more specifically related to energy-based facilitation, which describes a type of work-family facilitation whereby energy obtained in one role makes it easier to fulfil the requirements of another role (Van Steenbergen, Ellemers and Mooijaart, 2007). It is the self-awareness of such affects that impacted upon participants decisions to return

to paid work in that they viewed this as a strategy that actually enabled them to be "better" parents. However, such examples could also be viewed as a form of emotion-focused coping (Folkman and Lazarus, 1988) meaning that participants might have changed the way they think about the stressor, by making justifications about their desire to work in terms of the importance this work has in providing for their family both emotionally and financially, in order to cope emotionally with this work-family conflict. In this way, such justifications could be viewed as an attempt to alleviate feelings of guilt about spending time away from their family. In the current study, such emotional coping strategies are incorporated within the factors discussed here as impacting upon decision-making as they were usually part of participant's discussions or thought processes which led to them arriving at a particular decision regarding how to resolve a work-family conflict. In this way, these examples of emotion-focused coping could be seen in the current findings usually in terms of justification of the decisions, or the more practical coping strategies that participants made.

4.2.2.2.2 Personal Benefits of Work

In direct relation to this, participants also discussed the personal benefits they received from work such as the importance of work to their self-concept, their achievement motivation, or the importance of the social aspects that work provided. Several of the women talked about the personal benefits of work in relation to their self-concept; their own perceptions or evaluations of who they are. For instance, Amy discussed the importance of her work to her self-esteem and Mary discussed similar benefits that she derived personally from her work:

> Amy: "I still feel that I need something for myself and I want to achieve things and do well otherwise I will be let down with myself. In a way I guess I need it for my self esteem"

> Mary: "My job is another way of kind of....I feel I wouldn't necessarily be me if I wasn't working in a way. It's important to me to have values. I don't believe I'm changing the world in any drastic way. I'm not going to be finding the cure for cancer or anything like that but the job satisfaction is important"

As discussed in the Literature Review, behaviour is expressive of self-concepts; we do things because, by doing them, we establish and affirm an identity for ourselves (Shamir, House and Arthur, 1993) and people strive to maintain this. The importance of work is addressed here in terms of how it can help to build and maintain the individual's self-concept. This self-concept, and their desire to maintain it, can affect priorities regarding returning to work or striving to achieve more in the work domain. Participants also discussed this in terms of their desire for achievement and their position on the career ladder and the impact that this had on their anchoring decisions; whether it was that they did not want to lose the achievements that they had accumulated so far, or that they felt that they had not yet achieved enough and desired to achieve more. This was discussed by, or in relation to, the women and their careers in all cases but one. Steve was the only male who worked part-time and when talking about his desire to continue working rather than giving up work all together he explained how he had not yet achieved what he wanted as his business was in its early stages:

> "My job is something that I enjoy. It's something that I want to take further because I'm only really at the initial stages."

Several of the female participants expressed how they felt they had to go back to work in order to maintain their position on the career ladder that they had already worked hard to achieve. For example, Mary and her partner Nathan discussed this in their interview regarding her decision to return to work full-time after finishing maternity leave:

> Mary: "I knew before I got pregnant that I wanted to go back full-time because of where I was in my career."

> Nathan: "I think after 3 or 4 or 5 years out you'd never get back to that sort of position. She'd have to go back to employment where she sort of started off at 18."

Whereas Steve's decision was impacted mainly by the value he placed on achievement in his new business, for Mary this factor also involved some constraints placed on her decision-making. Although during her interview she expressed a clear desire to stay on the career ladder in a challenging job as this was something she

valued, the unsupportive nature of the workplace also impacted upon her decision, acting as a constraint. Similarly, Carly made it clear that her most preferred choice would have been not to return to work until her son started school but she also expressed the desire to return to her current position at work eventually in terms of the negative impact that she felt not doing so would have on her self-concept. She explained that, due to the constraints of the work environment, she made the decision to return to work part-time once her maternity period was over:

> "I've interviewed women who've been HR managers like me, or higher, and they come and apply to me for admin jobs because they've had four years off with the kids. I would have liked to have had longer off or worked less"

Previous research has found that women experienced downward occupational mobility across the break from work for childbirth and this was more likely, the longer they stayed out of work at this point (Dex et al, 2006).These examples highlight how individual preferences and constraints were entwined in the decision-making process and emphasise how compromises often had to be made in terms of values and preferences.

Several of the participants also focused on the social benefits that work provided for them, including the impact of these benefits to their sense of self, and how this influenced their decision-making regarding returning to work after having children. Again this tended to be discussed by the female participants. For example, in her interview Sylvia talked about why she decided to go back to work after having her daughter:

> "I enjoy the company as well.... I need to speak to people because if Ben was going out to work and coming back I'd feel like I had nothing to say really. I knew that I needed to work even if it was only part-time. I don't think I could stay at home all the time"

The social benefits provided by the workplace appeared to enhance participants' general well being and happiness therefore influencing participant's priorities. Sarah and Mel also discussed very similar considerations in their interviews when talking about their decision to return to work:

Sarah: "I just didn't want to let go of that world completely I felt very lonely that first year actually when I was on maternity leave and I really looked forward to going back. I even thought about going back after six months! I really missed the people"

Mel: "I do enjoy it though and I think it's nice that I'm getting that balance. I don't think I would have been able to stay at home all day, every day. Although maternity leave was nice, when I went back it was nice getting that adult conversation again and being me. I did enjoy going back to work."

In this way the social aspects of work can provide them with a greater sense of their identity outside of their role as parent as well as simply providing variety and a different type of mental stimulation in the form of adult conversation. Ian was the only male to talk about these personal benefits of work in relation to the need for social interaction:

"It (work) gives you a....I suppose a bit of a social structure so for me by the time I've done the social structure at work I'm not desperately bothered about going out on the town when I get home because I've talked to that many people during the day."

It could be that females tend to place more importance on friendships at work than men and that for men friendships at work are simply considered to be a bonus (Morrison, 2009) which could explain why social aspects were more vital to women's decision-making. Prior research consistently demonstrates that women tend to place more importance and value on their friends than men, and to devote more time and energy to maintaining their friendships in general (e.g. Andrew and Montague, 1998; Markiewicz, Devine and Kausilas 2000) and more recently it has also been reported that women's, but not men's, intention to leave an organization are significantly negatively correlated with friendship variables (Morrison, 2009). This suggests that women are more likely to be directly affected by the presence or absence of close friends at work and therefore are more likely to base anchoring decisions, at least in part, on social aspects of the work environment.

In contrast Angela decided to work part-time rather than full-time because of the social life she had created with other mums outside of work while she was on

maternity leave. She was reluctant to give this up completely by returning to work full-time:

> "I wanted to be at home with her I suppose a bit because you know I had a whole year off on maternity, you know made new friends and stuff and went to classes with her and stuff like that and I didn't want to give up some of that. I think it was a mixture of all those things"

Angela suggested, during her interview and throughout her diary entries, that she was not particularly happy at work and that she did not feel people at work were supportive. It appears that she created a social life outside of work which she did not have at work which therefore influenced her decision to work part-time rather than full-time. This implies that it is the need for social interaction that is important rather than the desire to actually be in the work place and suggests that employees wishing to retain staff should help to create a good social life for employees at work

The discussion of values and priorities incorporates some aspects of Powell and Greenhaus' (2006) 'internal cues' which they described as pertaining "to the priorities of the individual facing the conflict situation." They used measures of work and family role salience to "capture individual's general priorities regarding work and family roles". This was based upon Greenhaus and Beutell's (1985) proposition that the more important a role is to an individual's self-concept the more time and energy that person will invest in that role therefore allowing less time and energy for other roles. Based on this they postulated that those who had a strong family role salience would tend to choose the family event in a work-family conflict situation, and vice versa. The importance of a given role to a particular individual's self-concept indeed had an impact on anchoring decisions for participants in the current study which can be incorporated within the beliefs, values and priorities expressed here. However, by looking at the wider system of beliefs and values it became clear that the internal factors that had an impact upon decision-making were not limited to role salience alone and were actually much more complex. For example, the importance of one role did not always lead to the individual investing less time in the other role as this could depend upon other beliefs and values held by the individual such as their beliefs regarding what it means to be a good parent. Some participants actually discussed how they made decisions to invest more in their

work due to their strong beliefs about what it means to be a good parent in terms of providing financially for their family as well as the value placed on ensuring that their children have the opportunity to socialise with other children. In this way, investing in work, as they saw it, actually enabled them to be better parents. The complexity of the impact of participant's beliefs, values and priorities was succinctly expressed by Joe in one of his diary entries:

> "Currently with school runs and my desire to spend quality time with my family, I am just managing to work my contracted 37 hours a week and sometimes I'm not as focused on my job as I should be. I do feel that you need to put the extra hours in to get noticed and move up the ladder. I am reluctant to do this because I want a good family life. However, my desire to move up the ladder and ultimately earn more money has increased tenfold since having my own family. A bit of a conundrum."

It is clear from this entry that the importance that he places on his role as a father increases his desire to invest more time and energy in both the home and work domains meaning that the importance placed on this role would not necessarily lead to a decision to invest in the home domain in work-family conflict situations. Other important beliefs and values, as well as other factors such as the constraining and enabling factors previously discussed, will come into play when such a decision is required. It is important to highlight that a focus on role salience also fails to take into account any consideration of the constraints that might be placed upon the person in the work-family conflict situation and the impact that these would inevitably have on the decisions made.

4.2.3 Conclusion

The main anchoring decisions addressed by participants in the current study were whether or not to return to paid work after having children, whether to return to work full-time or part-time, and whether or not to actively engage in progression at work. The data for this research has demonstrated that the two key factors that impacted upon these anchoring decisions were enabling and constraining factors, mainly in the form of financial considerations and available support options, and the values, beliefs and consequently the priorities held by the participants in relation to work and family. These factors interacted to help guide participants anchoring decisions.

Beliefs and values were a key aspect considered by participants when contemplating important anchoring decisions. The impact of such cues has been addressed previously, to some extent, by Greenhaus and Powell (2006) who highlighted the effects of role salience. The majority of the participants here appeared to have strong work and family role salience, suggesting that for these individuals work and family roles were both important to their self-concepts. This could be a particularly prevalent occurrence due to the selection criteria used in this study since it has focused on individuals who are present in the work place. In such situations, where the role salience within both domains tends to be somewhat equal, this alone cannot explain how couples make their anchoring decisions, meaning that it is important to look at the complexities of the interactions of the beliefs and values held by individuals; beyond a simple hierarchical view of role-salience. The present findings highlight beliefs surrounding what it means to be a good parent as key to the decision-making process in terms of anchoring decisions. The findings here have also demonstrated the importance of focusing on the constraints placed upon couples as these have a considerable impact upon such decisions. It is clear that however strong a person's family role salience, or beliefs pertaining to the idea that a good parent is one whom is always with their children, if they cannot adequately provide for their family unless they work full-time due to financial constraints then this will impact upon their decision in that they will return to paid employment. Based on their beliefs they might make the decision to work the bare minimum required with regards to financial considerations, or they might choose to exceed this. It is only within these constraints that couples and individuals have the capacity to make decisions based upon their beliefs, values and preferences.

4.3. Daily Decisions

4.3.1 Types of Daily Decisions

The daily work-family conflicts discussed by couples in their interviews, and reported in their diaries, were broken down into eight general categories of work-family conflict incidents. It is important to note that these different types of daily conflicts were not mutually exclusive. In using this typology the different daily decisions appear to be somewhat divided into those conflicts that could be described as work interfering with family (WIF) and those where family interfered with work

(FIW). There were certainly conflicts reported that could have been tentatively divided in this way however the categories discussed here have not been specifically broken down in this manner because such a distinction was not always clear. Research which utilizes a levels approach to work-family conflict implicitly assumes that there is always a discernable direction for conflict however work-family conflict theory suggests that conflicts can be experienced without immediately recognizing a direction of cause (Greenhaus and Beutell, 1985). Assuming that either "work" or "family" is the cause is also unnecessarily limiting as such a categorisation implies that there are set boundaries between time that is designated for work and time that is designated for family, which was not always the case here. The most pertinent examples of this come from those participants whose jobs were very flexible in that they were more or less able to choose their own working hours. This can lead to blurred boundaries between work and family time making distinctions between WIF and FIW less clear and more subjective. In these cases the particular daily decision was included in more than one category. The template used here to describe the different types of daily decisions was deemed to be the most useful because it most clearly described the majority of conflicts reported by participants and because there was a tendency for couples, even with a great deal of work flexibility, to impose their own structure distinguishing between time that was for work and time that was for family; in other words segmenting these two domains to some degree (Nippert-Eng, 1995). Regardless of this it is important to be clear that there were occasions where these boundaries were still somewhat blurred and WIF and FIW were not quite so distinguishable from one another. The perceptions of a particular conflict as work interfering with family or family interfering with work could depend upon how a particular individual views the specific situation. Poposki (2011) found that the placing of blame when a work-family conflict occurs depends on the order in which events were scheduled. Most often, the second event, whether work or family related, was more likely to be blamed than the first. It has also previously been suggested that factors such as an individual's personality or the characteristics of a particular job or family might have an impact upon how an individual views a particular conflict situation and that the perception of conflicts as WIF or FIW "do not necessarily stem from objective realities of the work and family situations" (Friede and Ryan, 2005, pg. 203). In other words this distinction between these two types of conflict could actually be quite subjective. For example, when children are

involved in school activities held during the day at times when parents are at work some might consider this to be a family responsibility interfering with work responsibilities whereas others might consider the same conflict to be work responsibilities interfering with a family event. Based on these considerations the categories of daily work-family conflict discussed here were not broken down in this way but instead were intended to remain more fluid to allow for overlapping and the aforementioned subjectivity.

Table 2. An overview of the eight different types of daily conflict discussed by participants

Daily Conflict		
Work Event	Family Event	Example
Getting to work on time	Family distractions	Organising children while trying to leave for work on time
Completing work	Time with family	Meetings overrun at work while trying to leave in order to pick the children up from childcare on time
Distractions of work at home	Time with family	Phone calls regarding work matters while at home
Time at work	Family distractions at work	Phone calls regarding family matters while at work
Working extra hours	Time with family	Decision whether to engage in extra work on their day off or spend time with family
Time at work	Children's events	Children's performance at school during regular working hours
Time at work	Childcare falls through	Grandmother who generally takes care of the children while they are at work is away
Time at work	Children unwell	Child is off school because they are unwell

The first category of daily conflict discussed was the conflict experienced when participants were striving to leave the house in order to arrive at work on time but family distractions were making this difficult. This was discussed by two couples in their interviews but many incidents of this were reported throughout the diary entries. For example, Jasmine discussed wanting to help her son with his reading and

Ben talked about his daughter requiring help on the computer at a time when they were in the process of leaving the house in order to arrive at work on time.

A similar conflict also occurred where participants were striving to leave work on time to pick their children up from childcare, or simply to spend time with their families, but there was still work to be completed, or their help was required further at work. This was discussed by four couples in their interviews, for example Janet talked about this type of conflict as something that occurred regularly because, "I get stuck on loads of conference calls at work and I can't get to pick the kids up". Similar incidents were frequently reported in participant's diaries.

Another frequently mentioned conflict was regarding the decision of whether or not to engage in work-related tasks while at home. For example, Lucy and Angela both discussed the decision to answer work calls out of hours in their diaries, while Mary and Nathan both talked about the decision to check their work emails during what would usually be classed as family time. It was only Angela who mentioned this as an issue during her interview but seven couples reported such incidents in their diaries.

Likewise, the conflict that occurred when family distractions were experienced while at work was also mentioned frequently in participant's diaries and by 3 couples in their interviews. This type of conflict was particularly pervasive for those who worked from home, such as Amy who talked about her desire to play with her daughter during the hours that were designated to work. However, other participants who worked away from home also discussed incidents where they experienced family distractions while at work, for example Janet wrote about calls from home while she was on a conference call at work and on another occasion being required to ring school while she was busy at work.

Another major daily decision for many couples was whether or not to participate in extra work outside their normal working hours. Rather than simply engaging in minor extra work tasks while at home, such as taking phone calls or checking emails, this category describes more pervasive forms of extra work such as situations where there is the option, or expectation, of overtime at work, or when meetings requiring their attendance were held outside of their normal working hours. Lucy talked about this type of conflict in her interview involving a meeting regarding a patient being

scheduled on her day off and at a time when she should be looking after her son. She expressed that such conflicts occurred regularly saying, "work has been quite demanding of late". Similar conflicts were discussed by nine couples in their interviews and reported on numerous occasions by the majority of couples in their diaries.

There was also the conflict that occurred when children's events were scheduled during working hours. Such daily decisions were mentioned frequently by participants in both their interviews and their diary entries and included events such as children's doctor's appointments or school parent's evenings, open days and plays. For example both Louise and Olivia discussed this in their interviews:

> Louise: "One of the things, especially at this time of year [Christmas], is all the things they have on at school"

> Olivia: "The one thing we both miss is like when we can't have time off when Marcus has a play at school or something."

 Many participants talked about the conflict that occurred when the usual childcare arrangements fell through. On many occasions this occurred when their partner had extra work at a time that they would usually be responsible for childcare. For example, Jasmine and Emily both wrote about this type of conflict when their partner's were working away. This also occurred when grandparents, or childminders, were sick, or on holiday. A regular and prolonged period of time where the usual childcare arrangements were no longer available was during school holidays and this was discussed by seven couples during their interviews as well as incidents reported in those participant's diaries who happened to be participating during a school holiday period.

Finally, an issue discussed by the majority of participants, was their children being unwell and therefore unable to attend nursery or school. This was discussed as an issue by fourteen of the couples, seven of which were incidents actually reported as they occurred in participants diaries.

4.3.2 Types of Resolution

The couples dealt with these daily conflicts in four ways, each of which was not mutually exclusive and, in many cases, a combination of strategies were used.

Although in some cases it could be argued that these conflicts were not actually amenable to couples making decisions, in that they had little decision-making latitude, it is important to point out that in all cases discussed the participants themselves identified engaging in at least some form of decision-making, even in those cases where this was limited by various constraints.

 The most frequently discussed strategy decided upon was support seeking, which could be sought in either the work or the family domain. This included obtaining support from their partner, another family member, a friend or from official childcare to enable them to participate in the work domain; or seeking support from their boss, work colleague or work client to enable them to participate in the home domain. Seeking support from others has been well established as a strategy for coping with work-family conflict in previous research (e.g. Kreiner et al, 2009, Maertz and Boyar, 2011). All participants in the current study discussed engaging in some form of support seeking at some point during their interviews and/or diary entries and most frequently this was support in the home domain, in particular from their partner or another family member. This strategy often relied on previously established support hierarchies and/or reciprocal arrangements with others. These will be discussed in greater detail later.

Another strategy used by participants to deal with daily work-family conflicts was to integrate the two domains by either working from home or even taking the children with them to work. This could also be viewed as making a compromise so that both responsibilities could be at least partially met. In these cases participants integrated their work and family domains in an attempt to resolve a work-family conflict. This involved, what Kreiner et al (2009) referred to as physical tactics; where physical boundaries are adapted in order to achieve integration between the two domains. Working from home was a strategy often used when children were ill or during the school holidays as an alternative to taking large amounts of time off work. Only three couples talked about taking their children to work with them and this was seen as a last resort, to be used in an emergency, rather than a preferred strategy. For example, Anna made this decision on an occasion when her sons' nursery was unable to look after them in the morning. She took the children to work with her for the couple of hours that her boss was unable to cover for her to enable the abattoir, where she worked, to open.

A more frequently used strategy was simply to take time off work in order to fulfil the requirements of the home domain. This could be officially using annual leave or flexi-time, or unofficially based on an understanding with their boss or simply not informing their boss of their absence, whether this meant turning up for work late or seeking support from a work colleague to cover for them. This strategy is an example of participants making the decision to prioritise the family domain.

Finally, on several occasions participants decided to reschedule an activity in one of the domains so that they could still fulfil both commitments but at different times. This last strategy would usually require some degree of support or job flexibility. As was the case for the strategy of integrating, this strategy could be viewed as making a compromise so that both responsibilities could be at least partially met. However, in case of rescheduling work and family domains, individuals tended to strive for segmentation. In such instances some degree of compromise on the part of others was also usually required. For example, when Neil's new teaching timetable coincided with a time that he needed to be available to pick his daughter up from nursery he sought support from his students to reschedule the class so that he was still able to fulfil both commitments.

4.3.3 Factors Impacting Daily Decisions

From the analysis several factors that impacted upon how daily decisions were made were also identified. These could be categorised into; enabling and constraining factors which included the availability of support from various sources, how appropriate the available support was, financial considerations and job requirements; considerations of fairness and equity which incorporated considerations regarding the impact on others as well as the amount of time and resources previously invested in each domain and the expected investment in the future; and finally preferences which tended to be regarding the individual's desire to spend time with their children, although financial preferences such as lifestyle choices also had an impact. I will continue by explaining these factors in greater detail, addressing each of them in turn.

4.3.3.1 Enabling and Constraining Factors

As previously stated when discussing anchoring decisions, these two seemingly opposing categories have been grouped together because if a particular enabling

factor was not present or was lacking this would usually become a constraining factor and therefore it made sense to discuss these in parallel. For example, if an individual's partner had a flexible job this would often mean that they were more able to offer support and in this way acted as an enabling factor when making work-family decisions. However, if their partner had an inflexible job, they would frequently be unable to offer support at times of work-family conflict therefore making this job inflexibility a constraining factor. Due to the capacity of these factors to have opposing enabling and constraining properties, each separate factor will be discussed in turn while focusing on the ability of each of these factors to both enable and constrain decision-making.

4.3.3.1.1 The Availability of Support at Home

The first factor which had this capacity was the availability of support at home which included; considerations of the work responsibilities and work flexibility of those in the home domain, as well as their non-work commitments or needs, and their general willingness to offer support. These factors were mentioned by all participants at some point throughout their diaries as extremely important in their daily decision-making. Although such considerations were touched upon by several participants in relation to making anchoring decisions these factors were represented as having a much greater impact on daily decision-making.

The job flexibility of others had a great impact on the availability of support in participants' home domain. This was most frequently discussed in relation to the flexibility of their partner's job. For example, Lucy's partner Paul had a particularly flexible job which she frequently relied on and she clearly expressed the importance of this to their ability to deal with work-family conflicts:

> "It really helps if one of you has flexible working arrangement or works from home a bit. I don't know how we'd manage otherwise; it would be a real struggle"

It is clear that the flexibility of her partner's job acted as an enabling factor regarding decision-making when faced with daily work-family conflicts. This was further emphasised throughout their diary entries as she discussed relying on her partner's

job flexibility on a daily basis; and all the conflicts raised in his dairy were in relation to this with him relying on his job flexibility on all occasions. Melanie, Emma and Jasmine also talked about the flexibility of their partner's job as an important factor impacting upon their decisions regarding how to deal with conflict situations. In their diaries, Melanie and Jasmine both reported relying on their partners when their daughters were ill and Emma discussed how they often relied on her partner to cover childcare during the school holidays; due to them having greater job flexibility.

For those participants whose partner had an inflexible job this also had an impact on daily decision-making by acting as a constraining factor, meaning that this was an important source of support that they were usually unable to rely on in work-family conflict situations. Both Mary and Janet wrote about the difficulty of not being able to seek support from their partners on occasions where they were required to work away. Mary's partner Nathan was unable to take their daughter to nursery because "Nathan has to leave the house at 6:45am and nursery opens at 8am" and Janet's partner Tim was also unable to participate in the school run "because of work constraints". In both cases they turned to grandparents for help. Janet also wrote about occasions where she had to leave work early because there was "No one else to pick up the children." This demonstrates the impact that job inflexibility can have on the dynamics of decision-making within a couple. This will continue to be addressed throughout this section as it is an important and recurring theme which ran throughout participant's diary entries.

As well as general job flexibility, specific work task flexibility at the particular time of the conflict situation was also frequently mentioned as an important factor in decision-making. Couples where one partner had a more flexible job than the other tended to result in the partner with the more flexible job dealing with work-family conflicts more frequently, whereas when both individuals within a couple had a similar degree of flexibility within their jobs, conflict was often dealt with on a day by day basis, assessing who had the most flexible work tasks on that particular day. For example, Anthony and his partner Elizabeth, who both had fairly flexible jobs, explained how they tended to deal with work-family conflicts. Anthony said:

"We sort of look at priorities really. Like today and tomorrow I can't get out of these meetings whereas Elizabeth's got more flexibility"

A similar arrangement was clearly demonstrated throughout Ian and Rebecca's diaries. They dealt with day to day conflicts by assessing who had the greatest task flexibility on any given day and it was this that formed the basis of their decision-making:

Day 4 - Rebecca asked her partner to call to make their sons' doctor's appointment because she was in a meeting: "I couldn't make an appointment because I was in a meeting 9-12 so Ian had to ring surgery....My meeting was fixed this morning so couldn't change it"

Day 5 – Rebecca asked her partner to collect their sons from school because: "Ian finished work before I finished university....Ian's day is more flexible than mine. He didn't have afternoon clinic and so was able to finish work on time"

Ian: "Rebecca is at a meeting and will be home late"

Day 10 - Rebecca collects the boys from school because: "Ian's work schedule means he can't pick up on Fridays so I have to make sure I am available"

Day 12 - Ian asked Rebecca to take the children to school in the morning because he had to start work early: "We have been doing this for so long now so it's almost unconscious. We quickly note who has fixed responsibilities that day"

Rebecca: "I took boys because Ian is on call therefore it was too early for him to drop the boys off"

This shows how both enabling and constraining factors work together to impact daily decision-making. Couple's simultaneously consider enabling factors, as well as the opposing constraints, placed upon each of them on a daily basis and these considerations form the basis of their decisions regarding how to deal with each work-family conflict. Those couples where one partner had a more flexible job than the other also considered task flexibility in their decision-making process in certain

situations, usually when the partner who tended to be more flexible had a period where their work tasks were less flexible. In these instances the other partner, with the generally less flexible job, would often make arrangements to take time off work. For example, Emma discussed this situation in her interview when talking about how they dealt with the conflict that arose when their son was ill and her partner, Richard, whose job was usually very flexible, was particularly busy at work:

> "Richard works on projects so depending where they are on a project, there could be lots of deadlines that need to be met and then he can't take time off. I had to take it as holiday on that occasion."

If both members of a couple had limited task flexibility on a day when a conflict situation arose, being bound by these constraints, this frequently led to seeking outside support. For example, Joe generally had more job flexibility than his partner Jasmine so when faced with a work-family conflict the decision regarding whether or not to seek outside support would often depend on his task flexibility. For example, on day 12 of his diary his daughter was ill and he decided to pick her up from the childminders and work from home because:

> "The fact that I had no conference calls scheduled for the afternoon did help, considering that I would be at home alone with Ellie until Jas got home"

However, on day 22 when the childminder was sick he decided to seek support from his mother because his tasks at work that day were less flexible and more work constraints were placed upon him:

> "I am working from home today anyway but it would be impossible to look after her alone and do my job....I had some conference calls that I really needed to be on today and reports I could do with completing"

In these cases where both members of a couple had limited work flexibility they then looked at other available support options, also taking into consideration the job and task flexibility of others. For example, Mel asked her niece to look after their daughter when Steve (who works part-time) needed to carry out some work for an inflexible client on a day that he would not usually be working. Mel's job is not very flexible and there was not enough notice for her to ask for time off work, so they sought support from her niece. Steve talked about how they arrived at this decision:

> "If I need to go and do that (work) on a Friday then we'll look at who's available and ask whoever the best person is on the day really. That day it was your niece wasn't it? It must have been the Easter holidays or something so she wasn't teaching."

Anthony and Elizabeth also discussed a similar decision-making process when they needed to find alternative arrangements for taking their son to school because her mother, who usually did the school run, was away on holiday. In this case they asked her brother for support because he was working from home on that particular day and therefore had some flexibility. Elizabeth explained:

> "And often he's out and about with work isn't he? Because he does sales but he's actually at home tomorrow, because he has an office at home so he said he was in so he would take him."

Although the considerations of availability in terms of work were the most frequently mentioned considerations in relation to support seeking, particularly with regards to support seeking within the couple, when considering availability other non-work commitments, preferences and the willingness of the person in question were also taken into consideration, as well as more practical issues such as transportation and location. Non- work commitments were more frequently considered when deciding whether or not to seek support from family or friends rather than from one another. For example, Elizabeth and Anthony asked her brother to take their son to school when the usual childcare arrangements fell through but they did not ask him to collect their son because they knew that he would be playing golf. Emily also decided to ask her mum to help with childcare rather than her sister (who would usually be their first port of call) because she knew that she had plans with her friends on that particular day. This was probably due to the feeling that responsibility for the children lies within the couple and that any outside help should only be requested when convenient for the other person. These types of considerations will be discussed in greater detail later, in the section on Fairness and Equity. This was also true when talking about the preferences, and willingness, of others from whom they were seeking support. Janet talked about why they would sometimes ask their neighbours for support with childcare:

"They used to offer and say honestly just give us a shout and drop them off here at 8am, if you're having to go anywhere, like getting an early train and that's fine.

This demonstrates how the open expression of willingness to help from others acts as an enabling factor and can affect the decision to seek their support. In her diary, Amy also discussed how her parents made it clear that they were happy and willing to help with childcare in order to support her continuing with her work, and how this frequently affected her decision to seek their support:

Day 5 - "My parents are always very helpful and want to help me with my work so I knew they would try to help any way they could.... they are always so supportive which helps so much"

Day 14 - "I asked my parents if they could look after Logan for a few hours in the day because I know they are very supportive when it comes to fulfilling my work commitments"

However, there were in fact several occasions where females discussed their partner's non-work commitments and preferences in relation to their decisions regarding whether or not to seek their support. For example, Louise finished work to pick her son up from his school concert rather than seeking support from her partner, because her job allowed for such flexibility, but also because, "Ian goes out on a Thursday evening". Similarly, Amy looked after her son at a time when she should have been working rather than seeking her partner's support to allow him to "have the extra sleep". Conversely Lucy, who frequently dealt with work-family conflict situations by seeking the support of her partner, wrote about how her decision to ask for his support on one particular occasion was impacted by his general willingness to offer support in such situations:

"Paul's great and tries to be as flexible as possible. As it was a bit of an emergency he finished early to help out. He said he can make up his time on other days"

He confirmed his willingness to offer support wherever he could by writing in his diary:

"I was happy to finish early as it was an emergency and would have finished earlier if required."

This demonstrates how the expressed willingness to give support from a partner can act as an enabling factor in decision-making. Marissa also demonstrated consideration of her partner's preferences and non-work commitments when she asked a friend to pick her son up from school on a day that her partner had an appointment. However, on another occasion, when she was required to attend a work event in the evening and her partner had rehearsals for a play she sought his support despite his other commitments. In this case, although the constraining factors of both her job and his activities outside of work came into play ultimately his commitments were more flexible than hers, meaning that relatively more constraints were placed upon her in this instance so a compromise was reached that enabled her to fully participate in her work commitments and him to at least partially participate in his out of work commitments:

"I spoke to Nick and explained that I was required to work late. He already had a commitment the same evening; he is currently rehearsing for a show....We agreed that I should attend the event and he would go to the rehearsals when I arrived home"

This implies that the non-work commitments, preferences and willingness of others are considered as important factors when assessing the availability of outside support but that such factors are often considered as secondary when making the decision of whether or not to seek support within the couple, from one another.

The decision to use official childcare as part of a general strategy enabling both parents to return to work was entwined within the previously discussed anchoring decisions and impacted upon by beliefs and values as well as financial constraints. However, couples also discussed daily decisions regarding whether or not to enlist the support of extra official childcare in situations of work-family conflict. For example, the availability of suitable official childcare affected how couples dealt with daily work-family conflicts such as Sylvia, Hannah and Mel who all reported incidents where they are able to arrive at work early due to their children's schools having breakfast clubs. However, for the majority of participants the discussions regarding whether or not to seek support from official childcare tended to be

discussions of constraints in terms of financial and inflexible aspects. This often impacted upon their decision-making when faced with work-family conflicts by limiting their options due to official childcare being too expensive and somewhat inflexible therefore not frequently having the capacity to be the solution to work-family conflicts. Mary highlighted the problem of the inflexibility of such childcare when she wrote about how she dealt with a conflict she faced when she was required to work away, meaning that she was unable to take her daughter to nursery. When looking at support options her and her partner decided to ask her mum for support because the nursery did not open early enough to allow her partner to take her to nursery before work as he started work at 7am and the nursery did not open until 8am. Anna and Adrian also discussed this problem in their interview due to both their early starts at work, and the nurseries opening times being later.

> Anna: "We see that no one is flexible. Not because they are bad people, they just don't understand flexibility. They just want to follow the protocol that is written in the papers."

> Adrian: "....I don't mean that the babies would spend more hours in the nursery but the hours of the nursery should be more wide. Of course they are running a business and maybe there are not a lot of people who would do that but I think that would help. My feeling is that the system is pushing for only one parent to work."

Others suggest that while using extra official childcare would be an easy and convenient option for them in solving work-family conflicts but that the considerable financial expenditure required to rely on this type of support was a constraining factor when deciding upon the best solution. Janet and Rick talked about this in their interview when discussing how they dealt with childcare before and after school when she had to work away.

> Janet: "So that meant me then planning two full days, morning and evening, of childcare which could cost money for before and after school club or we get the parents on board."

> Rick: "We try to go for the easiest or the cheapest option. The cheapest option is obviously not to use official school care.... the easiest option is to

send them to before school club and after school club but it isn't cheap! So the second option is usually my dad."

Linda and Edward demonstrated similar considerations in their diary entries when talking about how they decided to deal with childcare during the school holidays. He was often able to work from home but on one occasion, when he was unable to do this, she arranged to work from home because "rather than having to "pay" for any childcare this seemed like the most sensible option." On another occasion they did decide to use official childcare by sending their son's to summer camp as neither of them were able to work from home, but they made it clear that this could not be a regular solution:

> Linda wrote: "The option of sending them to this child care is often prohibitive because of the cost as to send both of them together costs in excess of £50 per day – so we only use this option when there is no other choice and we budget for this accordingly."

> Edward wrote: "The cost is too prohibitive for us to take advantage of this on a regular basis"

It appears that for many couples using extra childcare to solve daily work-family conflicts would be a last resort due to the constraints imposed by this form of support. Financial constraints were an important issue discussed by the majority of participants, and not only in relation to childcare costs. This will be explored further in a separate section on financial constraints.

4.3.3.1.2 The Availability of Support at Work

Organisational factors also proved highly important to couples decision-making acting by both enabling and constraining the search for a solution to daily conflicts. The availability of support at work included the availability of official family-friendly workplace policies such as Flexible working, which encompasses a variety of features, ranging from employment flexibility in the length of time an employee works, the location and hours of work, and periods of leave that may be taken from work (Houston and Waumsley, 2003; Anxo and Boulin, 2006). In some cases the lack of such policies acted as constraints upon decision-making. Other less official

forms of support in the work domain included how supportive their boss and/or work colleagues were.

At least one person within eighteen of the twenty-four couples worked flexitime and there were four couples within which both partners worked flexible hours. Flexitime refers to participants being allowed to choose their own working hours, within agreed limits, so that they could choose when to start and end their working day. These participants also tended to be able to work all or part of their contracted hours from home. In his interview Joe talked about how the flexible nature of his job enabled him to work around the needs of his family:

> "What I tend to do quite a bit as well, if I've had a short day at work for whatever reason, say if I've started late because I've dropped the kids off, or I've had to come home early say one of the kids is ill, what I find myself doing quite a lot now is, when the kids have gone to bed, is logging on here and catching up with work then, doing emails and whatever.... I get the kids to bed then just do an hour catching up really you know what I need to catch up for the day after."

In his diary entries, he also discussed the flexibility of his job as a type of support that he frequently relied on to resolve daily work-family conflicts. For example, on one occasion he discussed taking time out of work to pick the children up when his partner was unable to do so. He was able to make this decision due to his flexible working arrangements meaning that he was "in a fortunate position that the nature of my job allows me to do this". This was a common strategy for those couples where at least one member had a job with some flexibility. Jane wrote about how she was able to easily change her working days to look after her son so that her partner could work and the impact that this had on their decision-making:

> "It is ok to change my day off because my job is very flexible so I can just send my boss an e-mail saying I won't be in tomorrow and I will be in on Thursday instead. It is a lot less hassle for me to stay off work than for Carl"

This also highlights how such factors are used in conjunction with the consideration of the flexibility of the other partner's job which was discussed previously as having a great impact on the availability of support in participant's home domain. Flexi-time

was shown to be a highly important factor in decision-making and enabling non-work events to be met. The dynamics of this within a couple were also highly important. In their interview, Lucy talked about the impact of her partner's job flexibility on how they dealt with work-family conflicts:

> "If there's a crisis Paul tends to get it because he has this flexibility working from home...It is very much determined by the type of jobs you've got. Paul works on a sort of more flexi-time basis and I can't do that"

Although flexibility at work acted as a form of support often enabling more freedom in decision-making, when one member of a couple had a much more flexible job than the other, as mentioned previously, this often meant the more flexible individual took on more of the responsibility of dealing with work-family conflicts. The lack of flexibility in Lucy's work acted as a constraint when making decisions of how to deal with work-family conflicts, whereas the flexible nature of Paul's job acted as an enabling factor. Given these factors, it is unsurprising that this often lead to a reliance on Paul's flexibility at work to resolve work-family conflicts. Rick also discussed a similar situation in his interview; in their case his wife Janet had the job flexibility whereas he did not:

> "The hours....there isn't a sort of....if I wanted to work say 8am until 4:30pm or 7:30am until 4pm there isn't that opportunity. The premises open at 8:30am and closes at 5pm every day and everyone is expected to be there in those hours. It heaps pressure on Janet [who has a very flexible job]....There's no pressure on me as such because I'm not here"

In her diary Janet appeared to be frequently stressed and often this was due to the flexible nature of her job, the extra responsibility that she felt, and her lack of home/work boundaries. She constantly talked about feeling under pressure to be engaged in both roles. Although her flexibility enabled her to leave work to pick her children up from school every day and to continue with her work later in the evening, this also led to increased conflict due to continuous feelings that she should be working. For example, her decisions tended to be related to conflicts such as; whether to continue with work in the evening or help her son with his reading

homework; or whether to work in the morning or prepare sandwiches for the children:

> "Thinking I could do a bit of work but knew I would be rushing and stressed so decided to sort the children out"

This implies some possible drawbacks of flexible working arrangements, especially for those individuals whose partners do not have the availability of such arrangements as this can "heap pressure" on the individual with the flexibility. These issues raise questions regarding the relative benefits of flexible working and other similar family-friendly initiatives. In general, previous research regarding the relationship between flexibility and work–family conflict has provided mixed results (Allen and Shockley, 2009) with some research suggesting that there is actually a positive relationship between such work–family initiatives and work–family conflict (e.g., Brough, O'Driscoll, and Kalliath, 2005; Hammer et al., 2005b) meaning that work-family conflict actually increased with the use of these initiatives. In the current study both positive and negative aspects of flexible working were frequently reported by the couples demonstrating the double edged sword of "family-friendly" polices. Along with the clear benefits of flexible working in enabling couples to more easily resolve conflict situations there also often came frequent feelings of guilt and stress, particularly for the females, associated with a lack of boundaries between home and work that might prevent them from ever "switching off" from either domain to allow themselves to be fully involved in the other domain. Rebecca expressed this in her diary when describing a conflict that was created due to the lack of routine imposed by the highly flexible nature of her job:

> "Have done hardly any work today. Managed to print some articles but will have to do a few hours work tonight....My "flexible" timetable is infringing on my work time and I am having to stress because I don't have a routine! Feeling resentful but not at anyone in particular"

This shows how her lack of structure was actually adding to her work-family conflicts and creating feelings of stress. These findings concur with those discussed by Poppleton, Briner and Kiefer (2008) who investigated two contrasting organisations in terms of their availability of flexible working. Their findings highlighted both the strengths and limitations of flexible working, in terms of

fostering facilitation, in that they found flexi-time to be the most important contextual factor enabling non-work events to be met, but also creating conflict and negative spillover in the form of issues such as blurred boundaries between work and non-work. They went on to report how individuals within the organisation in which there was a lack of acknowledgement of home life, reported very few work–non-work conflicts because they were "governed by the principle of routine, and this, coupled with the clear boundary rules set by the organization, may have exerted a preventative effect"(pg. 492). This effect was clearly seen in some of the couple's in the present study where one individual had a fairly structured job with limited flexibility such as that previously discussed by Janet's partner Rick who mentioned very few incidents of work-family conflict throughout his diary. The same applied for Hannah's husband Nigel as she explained:

> "He just sort of goes to work and comes home and he doesn't really get involved because his hours are longer than mine so it's easier for me to leave work if necessary than him really.... he's on a building site and he's supervising others he just can't leave really."

For those with set working hours like Hannah's husband Nigel, the boundaries set by the organisation can, to some extent, shield them from many of the daily work-family conflicts because they are forced to separate the two domains. Due to these constraints, arrangements have previously been made around this, usually involving relying on the support of others, which in Nigel's case was his wife. It is a presupposition within their relationship that he is not available as a means of resolving any conflicts that may arise within his set working hours therefore shielding him from many of the daily conflicts. This was further highlighted throughout their diary entries, where he reported very few work-family conflicts. For example, on day ten their son had an inset day which Hannah discussed in her diary writing about her decision to take some time off work because her mother-in-law was not available to help with childcare all day. However, in his diary he simply reported that he had "no decisions" on this day implying that it was never a consideration that he might take some time off work due to the lack of flexibility of his job. On day twenty-four the children were on holiday from school and she discussed her decision to seek support from her mother-in-law because their eldest daughter, who they could usually leave in charge, had a job interview so was unable

to watch her younger brother on this occasion. Again, Nigel appeared to be unaware of this change despite the fact that it was his mother who they were relying on for support, as he wrote in his diary that it was their daughter who looked after their son. These incidents demonstrate that he did not experience any work-family conflicts on these days because he was entirely left out of the decision-making process involved in the conflict resolution. The second example however does not relate directly to the lack of flexibility in his job as this would not prevent him from being involved in the decision-making process, despite the fact that he was not available to demonstrably resolve the conflict himself due to the nature of his job. This raises the related but separate issue of job flexibility and gender which was also highlighted in the current findings.

When an individual had a lack of job flexibility this usually prevented them from resolving the conflict situation by engaging in the family activity (unless they used annual leave but this was limited, as will be discussed later). However, males and females often appeared to differ in their involvement in the decision-making process involved in reaching a resolution to the conflict and hence whether or not they actually experienced the event as a conflict that had any impact on them. Several other males who had a less flexible job than their partner also made it clear that they had little involvement in conflict resolution and that this was left up to their partners. For example, in his interview Tom said "Generally when making decisions I just go with Julie says!" Throughout participants diary entries it was noted that women with less flexible jobs than their partner's still reported regular daily work-family conflicts and that there were very few conflicts reported by males that were not also discussed by the female in their diaries as a conflict; however this was a much more frequent occurrence vice versa. Although women did discuss their partner's job flexibility as being extremely helpful this did not prevent them from experiencing daily conflicts themselves. This implies that females whose partners had more flexible jobs were still actively involved in the resolution of the conflict, even when she was unable resolve the conflict herself directly. For example, Edward had a much more flexible job than his partner Linda and he was usually able to work from home. They relied on his flexibility to resolve many of the daily childcare issues, such as during the summer holidays. Despite this they both reported the same incidents throughout their diaries showing that the daily conflicts were issues for

them both which they discussed and resolved together even if she was unable to actively help with childcare. She demonstrated an active involvement in seeking conflict resolution. In one particular incident when her partner was unable to work from home during the summer holidays she wrote:

> "We both spoke about leaving the boys home alone but felt that 3 hours was too long so we discussed alternatives....Decided to ring the mother of one of our youngest son's friend to see if he could go and play there for a few hours"

This demonstrates not only that she experienced this incident as a conflict but that she was involved in its resolution despite the fact that she was unable to take the time off work herself. He also wrote in his diary that he "was uncomfortable leaving the boys home alone for that amount of time" and this type of synchronicity was common throughout their diary entries. They appeared to resolve any conflicts together, playing equal roles in the decision-making process. A similar pattern could be seen in conflicts reported by other couples where the male had the greater job flexibility. For instance, Steve was the only male participant to work part-time and he also worked flexibly due to running his own business. Despite this his partner Melanie still reported regular work-family conflicts in her diary. For instance, if he was unable to look after their daughter at a time that he normally would, she would always discuss this in her diary as a conflict that she was also working to resolve. This was a stark contrast to those couples where the man had the less flexible job in which case, as previously demonstrated, they often appeared uninvolved and, in many cases, did not even acknowledge the conflict in their diaries.

Beyond simply maintaining involvement in the resolution of daily conflicts, females who had limited flexibility at work themselves, but whose partners had fairly flexible jobs, continued to report frequent daily conflicts because they were still actively involved in daily family-related activities. For example, Lucy's partner Paul had a particularly flexible job which she frequently relied on however, she still reported daily conflicts throughout her diary including those related to the daily picking up and dropping off of the children which sometimes conflicted with meeting the requirements of her set work schedule. A similar situation was observed in Jasmine's diary whose partner, Joe, worked flexibly, while her job, working at a school, meant

that her hours were fairly rigid. Despite this she reported numerous daily conflicts including issues surrounding collecting the children from childcare and leaving work on time. This implies that, while women's flexible working arrangements might severely limit their partner's experience of daily work-family conflicts; when men worked flexibly this did not have the same shielding effect for their female partner's.

These findings could suggest a more subtle gender divide where the females using flexible working experience an extreme increase in demands from the home domain with little help from their partner; whereas this effect is not as extreme for males who work flexibly due to the continued support offered by their partner. Women were more inclined to take on the majority of the day to day responsibilities for childcare and domestic duties if they were engaged in flexible working, whereas when it was the men with the more flexible jobs their partners still maintained involvement in these duties. This could at least partially provide an explanation for some of the less than positive findings related to flexible working reported in previous literature. For example, Hammer et al. (2005b) carried out a longitudinal examination of employee's using work-family supports and found that employees' use of work–family supports was not significantly related to later work–family conflict and that wives' use of these initiatives actually increased family-to-work conflict. This could be due to the female's tendency to take on the majority of the responsibility for family related issues which is exacerbated when they are able to do this due to flexible working. Morehead (2005) also talks about "additional labour" which describes the work that is done to maintain the arrangements that parents have in place with regards to managing work and family in the form of negotiations with partners and other support networks, arranging support, and mothers managing father's domestic work or childcare responsibilities. Medved (2004) described a similar concept termed "relational work" which is embedded in women's daily routines and is required to maintain social support as well as relational stress that may result from not having support. The embeddedness of gender in practical actions was also touched upon in relation to this. This kind of work is done on a daily basis to maintain the relationship between home and work. It is suggested that such "additional labour" is mainly taken on by women. For example, in Rick's interview with his partner Janet he talked about being involved in driving the children to, and

from, their after school activities but made it clear on several occasions throughout their interview that it was Janet who was in charge of organising this:

> "Janet tells me what's going on. I have very little impact on the running of the family to be quite honest. Unless it's written down on the notice board or the calendar"

> "Bella's gymnastics have kept moving but it's now Thursday and Friday nights. There are three other girls involved with that and the parents, the mothers in general, share so I've not got involved with that because it's 4 children and 3 mothers swapping and changing who takes them and who brings them back so I just don't worry about that at all unless someone says to me 'I can't do this' and then I'll do it."

This highlights that although he is involved in childcare and related family tasks he is not involved in the organisation of such tasks which is an extra workload taken on by his partner. Working flexibly could also lead to an increase in additional labour in the form of time-management due to a lack of structure imposed upon their time as would be the case in a less flexible job. From the findings presented here it appeared to be the females who tended to take on this extra work by taking on the role of family organiser and, even within those couples where the childcare appeared to be somewhat equally shared, the women more frequently took on this extra responsibility. It has been suggested that the natural ability of the individual to easily and effectively plan and organise time could also have a large impact on the extent to which flexible working actually reduces work-family conflicts and related stress (Lapierre and Allen, 2006) which could be another interesting avenue to explore in relation to the possible impact of flexible working on work-family conflict.

Despite some of the apparent problems associated with flexible working, as previously discussed, it was still clear that many of the couples frequently relied on job flexibility as a means of resolving daily work-family conflicts. The benefits of such flexibility were highlighted by the clear problems experienced by those participants who were lacking in the availability of such flexible work arrangements. This was particularly salient for Adrian and Anna who were both veterinarians with extremely limited job flexibility due to the nature of their jobs, and a similar lack of

support available to them in their home domain due to their family living abroad. As they explained in their interview:

Adrian: "If we are not there this plant cannot work"

Anna: "Cannot operate. You cannot leave, if you break a leg or...."

This lack of flexibility accompanied by their limited available support options from either domain meant that on certain occasions they had to resolve daily conflicts encountered by, what could only be considered as, absolute last resort options. Throughout their interview they discussed several incidents where this was the case including how they dealt with their children being unwell and what they decided to do when nursery was closed and they were both unable to arrange cover at work. The following excerpts capture some of the measures they had to take in dealing with these conflicts under such constraints:

Anna: "So I called my boss and he was in Germany and he said I cannot cover for you, I am in Germany so the best thing you can do is take the kids with you to the abattoir! Sit in the car, be with them and at least you are there so they can open it....I had them in the car just filling them with breadsticks, balls, toys, anything they wanted to eat, I didn't care! It was just like keep quiet in the car for one hour. The poor babies were in the car seat, you know no movement or anything"

Adrian: "I wouldn't be happy I would feel guilty taking the babies, putting them in the car, to work with me. Taking them to this place and coming back with me but that is a possibility as well!"

Anna: "Sometimes we have just filled the babies with paracetamol you know hoping for the best and monitoring him all night saying "I think he's not that bad, I think he's not that bad!" Give him some medication before leaving and fingers crossed he can stay (at nursery) and just calling them and saying how has he been?"

These examples demonstrate the impact that not having such options can have particularly for those with little alternative support and, in doing this, highlight the importance of the availability of flexible working in order to provide employees with

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much needed support options at times when work and family conflicts arise. These examples also show the severe impact that constraints can have upon daily decisions; making such decisions extremely difficult. It is vital to take into account the constraints faced by couples when attempting to understand how, and why, they make decisions regarding how to deal with work-family conflicts. An entirely inaccurate picture of the decision-making process would be acquired if attempts were made to understand this process separately from the constraints acting upon it. The problems associated with flexible working do not imply that these policies should be discarded but that they should be considered within the context of the couple, perhaps tailoring them to individual needs and preferences where possible. Further research is needed to engage in an in-depth exploration the actual daily impact of using various family-friendly initiatives on work-family conflict decisions and outcomes, in both the short-term and the long-term.

When discussing the impact of organisational factors participants also talked about the availability and amount of annual leave offered by the organisation and the impact that this had on their decision-making when faced with a work-family conflict. Annual leave could be used by either member of a couple to resolve work-family conflicts however, the amount of annual leave available frequently dictated decision-making because participants had to ensure that they retained adequate annual leave to cover certain events, such as school holidays. This meant that the annual leave available for other events was limited, therefore either enabling or constraining their decision regarding whether or not they could afford to use annual leave to resolve a particular conflict. Ben talked about this consideration when discussing his decision not to take time off work to attend a family christening:

> "You've only got limited days so you've got to be frugal with these days because otherwise you'll have none left when you get to holidays.... when you've got to take 9 days off in the summer, well it doesn't sound like that much out of 21 but then you've got Easter to think about."

In other cases annual leave was simply not available to participants therefore acting as a constraint upon decision-making and usually meaning that in situations of work-family conflict other solutions had to be depended upon. For example, Jasmine works in a primary school therefore her holidays are those dictated by the designated

school holidays meaning that she was generally unable to take leave during term-time or as she explained, "I can't take any time of during term time apart from medical things"

For several of the couples the availability of less formal sources of support at work was a more important consideration than the availability of official family-friendly policies. One type of informal support was that offered by their boss. Social support has previously been found helpful in reducing or managing stress associated with combining work and family life (Carlson and Perrewé, 1999 and Greenhaus and Parasuraman, 1994) usually focusing on the relationship between supervisory support (or spousal support as discussed earlier) and work–family conflict. Participants in the current study discussed a type of unspoken, informal agreement with their boss based on a mutual trust and understanding that they were a valued employee. Nathan and Mary discussed this type of arrangement in their interview and the benefits that this had in incidents of work-family conflict:

> Mary: "I think it's more a favour for you because you're classed as a good worker so it was like go on but be as quick as you can kind of thing."

> Nathan: "Yeah, just sort of nipping out then getting back as quick as I could. But I mean policy wise, if you're away two hours they can make you make that back up on a Saturday....I had to just call the works manager over and explain, the wife's away, mother-in-law's gone with her and she'd normally pop down so like nursery doesn't open until 8am so I'll have to come in late and he just said don't worry about it. But he's alright if you're alright with him so he just said don't clock on and basically he paid me for an hour and a half when I wasn't there which is nice."

Similar arrangements with managers were also demonstrated throughout participant's diary entries and clearly had an impact upon individual's daily decision-making. For example, although Carly did not officially work flexi-time, on one particular occasion she made the decision to take the afternoon off work to look after her son and to work in the evening instead, explaining that this was because:

> "This was only a one off. My job does allow this on a one off occasion as my boss is very supportive regarding childcare difficulties".

These examples highlight how informal agreements with a boss or manager can act as a source of support in the work domain which can enable decision-making. Such agreements appear to describe another kind of reciprocal relationship based on equity and fairness therefore requiring input from the participant in order to be maintained. Anna also relied heavily on support from her boss when faced with work-family conflicts due to the lack of support available to her in her home domain and the highly inflexible nature of her job. This meant that she was unable to leave work unless her boss was available to cover for her; therefore her decision-making was often highly dependent on this informal arrangement with him:

> "The only way for me to escape from work is if my boss is available and he comes and covers for me.... my boss basically and he has always been as supportive as he can be but if he is working as one of us he cannot cover for me end of story"

Although her boss tried to be supportive it is clear that his support is not always available. This highlights how the lack of available support from the workplace can impose great constraints upon decision-making. This is particularly apparent in the case of Anna and Adrian who, as previously discussed, both had fairly inflexible jobs as well as a lack of available support in the home domain due to their families living abroad. This meant that when faced with a work-family conflict, if support in the work domain was unavailable, their decision-making was severely constrained leading to them dealing with such conflicts by relying on options that would usually be considered an absolute last resort (see previous discussion on flexible working).

Other participants discussed the constraining impact that having an unsupportive boss had on their experience of dealing with work-family conflicts. In her interview, Jasmine talked about the difficulty she has in taking any extra time off work in order to accommodate her family:

> "He [her boss] makes life awkward for you, he'd be inflexible and he'd tell you that the school hasn't got a lot of money and budgets have cut back and things."

This impacted upon her daily decision-making in that she would rarely ask her boss for support in order to deal with a work-family conflict and instead the responsibility

would usually fall to her partner who had a more flexible job and an understanding boss. In her interview, Janet, who did generally have a very flexible job, also reported experiencing constraints placed upon her decision-making by an unsupportive and inflexible superior at work on an occasion where she was required to work away from home:

> "For me to go for a two day trip, I said to management, for that day we had to be there for a 9am start and I said can I not get there at 10am so I don't have to stay over, and straight away he came back....and you can tell straight away that person who makes that decision will not have children or an understanding....because he turned round straight away and said no you have to get there for 9am."

In these cases they had to seek support from elsewhere in order to meet their work commitments. It was clear that this was not due to preference but restrictions placed on their decision-making by their unsupportive boss. Although this usually meant that they were more likely to take part in the work domain, these constraints tended to have a negative impact on participants. For example, in this instance, Janet reported in her diary that she was "Still worrying about this decision" which continued to have a knock on effect on both her work and personal life over the following days. This worry resulted in further daily conflicts due to her thinking about the situation while at work and consequently creating a conflict in which she was deciding whether or not to take time out of work to try and make arrangements for the time that she would be working away. This in turn resulted in conflict with her partner when she rang him at work to discuss the arrangements. He wrote about this in his diary:

> "Got a ticking off from Janet about not organising the school run [for when she is away]. It's next week – plenty of time in my book"

The longitudinal nature of the current research enabled the observation of the impact that imposing such constraints on decision-making can have over time. Although the immediate consequence of the lack of support offered from management meant that she invested her resources in the work domain on that occasion there were further consequences which involved distractions at work and conflict with her partner. This draws attention to the importance of considering the longitudinal impact of daily

conflicts and constrained decision-making as the decision that participants arrive upon may not necessarily be the end point. A decision that is constrained is shown here to have a negative impact not only on the individual, in the form of increased stress, but also on her partner and on her subsequent concentration at work. Past research has shown a significant relationship between employees' perception of the supportiveness of their supervisor with regard to work and family issues and lower levels of work–family conflict (e.g., Allen, 2001; Behson, 2005; Lapierre and Allen, 2006). Supportive supervisors have also been found to be positively related to perceived success in work and life (Moen and Yu, 1999), the organization's helpfulness in balancing work and family (Berg, Kalleberg, and Appelbaum, 2003), loyalty to the organization (Roehling, Roehling, and Moen, 2001), and job satisfaction and turnover intentions (Anderson, Coffey and Byerly 2002). The evidence clearly indicates the important impact of perceived support from supervisors (Kelly et al, 2008).

Another type of informal support obtained in the work domain that has received relatively less attention in the literature, but that was discussed by participants in the current study, was that received from their fellow work colleagues. This type of support was not addressed by Greenhaus and Powell (2003, 2006) as a possible factor that might have an impact on decision-making in incidents of work-family conflict. Their factor labelled role support (which was later included in role sender cues) referred only to the degree of support that participants received from their spouse or manager. The findings in the current study emphasise the importance of exploring a wider variety of sources of support and the impact that they can have on decision-making. Lucy talked about how the availability and supportiveness of her colleagues enabled her to make decisions when faced with work-family conflicts in both her interview and her diary entries. For example, in her diary she talked about how she is "lucky enough to have understanding colleagues who are great when it comes to covering if I need to look after our kids for whatever reason" and in her interview she discussed a specific incident where her daughter had sprained her ankle and she needed to take the afternoon off work to look after her. She was able to make this decision because:

> "My colleague is really good and I said do you mind if I hop off this afternoon and he didn't mind"

Counter to this, Lucy also discussed an incident where she had to attend a work meeting regarding a patient on her day off because "there was no one else to bring it forward so I had said that I would do it" demonstrating how the lack of available support from work colleagues can also act as a constraint. Janet discussed a similar scenario in her diary; where she made the decision to stay at work late to help a colleague rather than getting home to her family. This was due to the lack of available support from other work colleagues. She wrote:

"Decided at first that someone else could help. Then realised that no one had replied"

Although previous research has tended to focus on supervisory support when addressing support in the workplace there are some exceptions (e.g. Van Daalan, Willemsen and Sanders, 2006; O'Driscoll, Brough and Kalliath, 2004 ;Carlson and Perrewé, 1999) providing some evidence that support from work colleagues does have an impact on conflict between work and family. For example, Van Daalan et al (2006) found that social support from colleagues was related to men and women's time-based family to work conflict and suggested that a possible explanation for this was that colleagues may stand in for each other when time is lacking, for example, by taking over some tasks to enable the other to leave earlier, knowing that the other will return the favour if needed. Although the current research has refrained from drawing on a distinction between work-family conflict and family-work conflict, due to reasons stated earlier, examples of the type of support described here can be seen in the current findings showing how such instrumental support from work colleagues can enable individuals to resolve conflict situations. On the other hand a lack of such support cannot only constrain decision-making when conflict incidents arise but can also lead to an increase in conflicts between work and family as highlighted in Janet's example.

Support has previously received a great deal of attention in the literature but the focus has frequently been on whether or not the availability of support reduces work-family conflict either directly or via its potential to alter the impact of stressors that lead to work–family conflict, such as role conflict and role ambiguity (e.g. Carlson and Perrewé, 1999; Thomas and Ganster, 1995). These studies tend to be quantitative in design and investigate work-family conflict and support using a levels

approach and therefore tell us little about how support seeking works in practice. Powell and Greenhaus (2006) included the impact that support had on decision-making in terms of the varying amounts of support received for individuals' involvement in activities in the other domain, in their "role sender cues". They concluded that some managers or spouses are more supportive of individuals' needs to attend to responsibilities in the other domain than are other managers or spouses and that this would have an impact upon which domain participants decided to invest their resources in. The current research goes beyond this by exploring, in greater depth, how support is experienced within participant's daily lives and the impact that it has on daily work-family conflict and the subsequent decision-making involved in resolving these conflicts. By using a qualitative and longitudinal methodology and taking an episodic approach the many complexities of support seeking became apparent. The focus on couples as the unit of analysis also highlighted how the dynamics of support-seeking worked within the couple and how the flexibility of each of their jobs, as well as other support available in the work domain, had an important impact on each other's conflict negotiations. The methodology employed has also led to an explanation of the circumstances under which couples tended to seek outside support and the factors taken into consideration, such as non-work commitments and expressions of willingness. It also highlights the importance of exploring a wide variety of sources of support, and the impact that these can have on decision-making. Although the availability of different types of support was clearly crucial in negotiating situations of work-family conflict and the decision-making process involved, this alone did not explain why participants decided upon a particular strategy to resolve their work-family conflicts. Considerations of fairness and equity in relation to support seeking will be discussed in a later section.

4.3.3.1.3 Job Requirements and Expectations of Organisations

The impact of the flexibility of a person's job has previously been discussed in terms of support offered in the workplace. However, whether or not an individual's job has official policies for flexible working, certain specific expectations will still be in place within each individual's working environment. These expectations often acted as constraining factors upon decision-making as they laid down specific elements that were vital to a given job role or within a specific workplace. The impact of such

job requirements has already been touched upon when discussing the availability of support in the home domain in terms of the task flexibility of their partner's job and the impact that this had on their ability to offer support when work-family conflicts arose. The job requirements and organisational expectations discussed here often determined how flexible or inflexible a specific work task was given the specific requirements of that person's job. In this way job requirements highlight the criteria that people used to base their decisions upon with regards to how flexible a given work task was deemed to be. For example, job requirements explain the integral parts of the job, lay down important deadlines, and provide guidance on the type of behaviour that is expected of employees while at work. A task was considered to be less flexible if it affected the person's ability to effectively do their job, if there were important deadlines to adhere to, or if they perceived that others at work would judge them negatively if they did not participate in the task. Therefore, if a work task was considered to be an integral part of the job and involved imminent deadlines which would be perceived as highly important by others, that particular task would be considered to be inflexible. This would make it extremely difficult to deal with any work-family conflict by taking time out of work therefore putting constraints on the available options for resolving the conflict. In this way individual's job requirements were important factors that were considered when making decisions in incidents of work-family conflict.

Examples of job requirements in relation to tasks which affected the person's ability to do their current job included meetings and work related courses. Sylvia explained why she decided to attend a work course and seek outside help with childcare stating that "Courses are important for me to be able to do my job". For Amy conducting an interview was integral to her research and therefore being able to do her job, which meant that cancelling a meeting would have been a last resort:

> "I was worried it would be really difficult to get them to commit to another date and I desperately needed this meeting"

Adam made the decision to stay late at work to attend a late meeting rather than spending this time with his family because the meeting was providing information that was vital to doing his job in that he "needed to know the outcome and

understand a process" and it "would be difficult to pick up the information the next day."

It was apparent from such examples that the importance of a specific task in the work domain, in terms of how essential it was to that person's job, had an impact on decision-making and usually led to participants seeking support from elsewhere so that they were able to participate in the work task. Whereas, if the specific work task was not deemed to be vital to their ability to effectively do their job, they were more likely to deal with a work-family conflict by taking time out of work or choosing to take part in the family event. For example, Joe reported an incident in his diary where he was invited onto a late conference call but declined this invitation because:

> "Conference calls that I get invited to that I get little value from really piss me off!....I am sure that if there is anything that I urgently need to know it will come out in the wash"

Another important job requirement which impacted upon daily decision-making was the presence of specific and immanent deadlines. This tended to be a ubiquitous trait of all jobs; whenever there were important deadlines to meet at work it was considered an important job requirement to effectively meet these deadlines. However, some jobs involved working to deadlines more frequently than others which would therefore have an impact upon the frequency that these constraints would be placed upon decision-making. If there were deadlines for a given task this meant that the task was considered to be less flexible therefore discouraging individual's to take time out of work in order to resolve a work-family conflict. For example, Lucy felt that she had to attend a meeting on her day off because "there was a deadline so we had to do it and they wouldn't extend it again" and Emma decided to work at the weekend because she had "a big time critical project to deal with by close of business Monday" and there was "no way to finish on time if I don't work some extra hours". In his diary, Nathan explained why he worked on his day off rather than spending time with his family:

> "There was a load of steel that had to be finished for site on
> Monday....needed to be done so there was not much to think about"

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However, when there were no deadlines or work tasks that were particularly urgent this increased the likelihood of participant's choosing to invest their resources in the family domain. For example Joe mentioned, on several occasions in his diary, making the decision to finish work early in order to have some extra family time when there were no deadlines to meet at work:

> "As long as the weekly report is sent out any time on Friday for consumption by the recipients on Monday morning it is fine"

Another related requirement of many jobs was that extra time and effort would be invested during busy periods. Therefore, during particularly busy periods at work participants were less likely to deal with a work-family conflict by taking time off work and in these instances they were more likely to seek support from their partner, or to seek outside help, in order to resolve the conflict. Hannah provided a clear example of this in her diary when she explained why she decided to ask her mother-in-law for help during the school holidays:

> "As it is my busiest time of the financial year I am unable to take holidays so I have had to find childcare for Liam"

Mike also reported how this job requirement impacted upon his decision to work late rather than spend that time at home with his family in one excerpt from his diary:

> "End of the month at work so had to make sure all monthly targets were hit. Also had to do audits so a busy day altogether"

In relation to this, the importance placed on being 'seen' to be meeting these job requirements also affected individual's decision-making. In this way, the requirements of an individual's job, or the specific expectations within the workplace, also had an impact on daily decision-making via the anticipated perception of others if they considered that there was a possibility that they may be perceived as not meeting these requirements. For instance, in her diary, Sarah reported not wanting to be late for work because she was worried that others would notice that she was not meeting the requirements of her job:

> "If I'm in nearer to 9am someone will surely notice I'm not fitting in all my hours"

Joe also reported feeling obliged to attend a work meeting in London despite his concerns regarding how difficult this would make childcare while he was away. Rather than discussing the importance of this meeting in terms of any value that he would derive from it to better enable him to do his job, he simply explained that "It will look bad if I am not there". This implies the importance placed on being seen by others to be fulfilling specific job roles or workplace expectations, and the impact that this can have on decision-making. Olivia and Ray, who both worked at the same school, discussed similar concerns in their interview when talking about incidents where they would have both liked to take time off work to attend their son's school events or to take him to hospital appointments:

Olivia: "You still think will people say something if we're both off together."

Ray: "I suppose it's not leaving yourself wide open for any criticism at all"

However, as discussed earlier in the chapter on anchoring decisions, Olivia and Ray both made the decision to leave their previous employment due to their experiences with an unsupportive boss, but also due to a generally unsupportive work environment. They discussed the factors leading to their decision to leave their previous organisation in their interview:

Olivia: "And they interfered so much didn't they. I actually....I mean I've never had a day off sick and I actually walked out and I said I'm not coming back and I didn't did I?"

Ray: "No"

Olivia: **"It was the best decision I ever made. It was a build up of everything"

Ray: "I knew I wasn't wanted there even though I did a really good job and worked well with the kids. Everything that's in place now there with the sports, we did."

Olivia: "where we are now, up until with the academy, I haven't had a day where I haven't wanted to go to work....But they were really awkward at that school."

During this interview there was a clear sense that they felt as though they were being continuously scrutinised, judged, and criticised for their attempts to meet family needs; regardless of the effort that they put into their jobs. This highlights how the long-term impact of a working environment which creates constraints or pressures can have negative consequences on employees, which in turn can have considerable implications for organisations and the retention of these employees.

The need to continue to meet workplace expectations frequently acted as a constraint upon decision-making as doing so was obviously essential if individuals were to maintain their job roles. The consequences that not meeting these requirements could have on both the individual's and their families is implicit. Furthermore, it was clearly important to participants that they were 'seen' by others as satisfactorily performing their job roles and meeting all requirements and expectations so that they could avoid being prey to any criticism which might, perhaps, have a negative impact on their job in the long-term. The importance of this aspect was further highlighted by the impact that a lack of visibility regarding meeting job requirements had on participant's decision-making. For example, on several occasions, Mary reported deciding not to wake her daughter in the mornings but to allow her to continue sleeping instead, meaning that she would arrive at work late, because she knew that her boss was out of the office:

Day 4: "I didn't have any meetings and the boss said he wouldn't be in until later"

Day 5: "The boss doesn't come in on Fridays normally"

Day 19: "The boss isn't in on a Friday and I had no meetings."

The factors discussed here could, to some extent, be explained by what has been referred to as 'organizational norms' in previous literature. These are "unwritten rules that prescribe the ways in which all members of an organization should approach their work and interact with one another" (Hammer et al, 2004) or

collectively agreed-upon behaviours, attitudes, and beliefs that give employees a shared meaning or understanding of the workplace and their roles in it (e.g., Cooke and Rousseau, 1988; Schein, 2010) and the importance of being seen to be abiding by these. The domain of behaviours covered by these norms varies across organizations, but implicit rules about work performance, attendance, commitment, social relations, and interaction patterns will exist in most workplaces (Hammer at al, 2004). These are inclusive of, but not limited to, the availability of flexible working arrangements and the supportive nature of managers or supervisors in the workplace. They refer to the general expectations and etiquette within a workplace which, as demonstrated here, can have an impact on daily decision-making beyond that of workplace flexibility and the support offered by a supervisor. Similar to the demonstrated impact of having an unsupportive supervisor, it would appear, on the surface, that those who work within environments with high organizational-level norms will more frequently invest their resources in work tasks in incidents of work-family conflict. However, as was shown previously with regards to unsupportive supervisors, the long term impact of such constrained decision-making can have negative consequences for the individual, their family, and consequently for the organisation due to the strain created. Hammer et al (2004) found that the relationship between work-to-family conflict and job stress varied across firms as a function of organizational level norms. In those organisations with norms that emphasized job performance, attendance, and organizational commitment, work-to-family conflict was more salient, and had a greater effect on job stress. In other words, within organisations with strong work performance norms, conflict at the work–family interface was more likely to lead to job stress. Such organisations accentuate the expectations that employees place the demands of their work role ahead of demands of non-work roles. These findings draw attention to one of the possible negative consequences of decision-making under such constraints. In the current study participants making decisions under such constraints reported feelings of guilt, frustration and stress. For example, when Janet felt obliged to attend a meeting during her lunch hour, rather than shopping for her son's birthday present, she reported feeling "frustrated and angry that I hadn't managed to buy presents". When Nick felt "obliged to get back to people who had been in touch," meaning that he was responding to work emails while he was away with his family on holiday, he discussed how this meant that he had less time with his family and consequently

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"felt distracted, stressed and a bit guilty." Other participants also discussed negative consequences in terms of the impact that this had on others in their family domain, as well as the conflicts that this sometimes subsequently led to. For instance, Kyle reported an incident where he had to stop work to pick his son up from nursery because his partner Carly had to work late. This was due to the assumptions within her job that she would work longer hours during busy periods and, on this occasion, led to conflict between her and her partner. He wrote in his diary that they "disagreed and argued but Carly had no choice and I do having my own business (not true!)" clearly demonstrating his frustration with the situation. Lucy also talked about the increasingly demanding nature of her job; including expectations that she should attend meetings and answer phone calls outside of her official working hours without any reward. This caused conflict with her partner, Paul, on an occasion where he looked after their son while working from home to enable her to attend a meeting at a time that she was usually responsible for childcare. In her diary she reported:

> "The meeting went on and on so in the end it took up most of his working day and he was really narked when I got home."

When discussing such increasing demands and expectations placed on her at work in her follow-up interview she also explained:

> "My job could be a lot more flexible and I'll probably be looking around for another one really because it's getting quite bad"

These examples highlight the importance of considering the long term impact of job characteristics and work environments on work-family conflict. It is clear that, although a demanding work environment might increase the likelihood of individuals initially choosing work over family in instances of work-family conflict, this can lead to negative consequences for others, and consequently for the individuals themselves. There is also the implication in the current findings that repeated exposure to such demands and expectations can lead to individuals seeking employment elsewhere, as previous research has demonstrated that turnover intentions have been consistently found to have a strong positive relationship with turnover behaviour (Griffeth et al., 2000).

4.3.3.1.4 Financial Constraints

Financial considerations tended to be discussed in terms of the constraints which they placed upon decision-making. Although financial constraints had a huge impact on anchoring decisions, as previously discussed, these were also discussed in relation to daily decision-making. This has already been touched upon when looking at the availability of official childcare, where financial constraints were shown to impact upon the viability of using this option to resolve work-family conflicts. For many couples, financial considerations made this option unviable, or at least a last resort. Financial considerations were also discussed in relation to restricting participant's ability to take time off work for family events regardless of preferences. For example, in his diary Tim wrote about being unable to take the day off work for his son's birthday because "no work, no pay and no annual leave left" and he also wrote about going into work ill on a different occasion, for the same reason. In the interview with his partner they had discussed how it was essential for both of them to work so that they could afford to pay the bills and this also meant that on a daily basis they could not financially afford to take unpaid leave from work. This constrained their decision-making by limiting their available options when faced with such a conflict. Dave and Christina wrote about similar conflicts in their diaries when talking about their decision that he should work on his days off despite his preference to spend the day with his family:

Day 14   Dave: "I would have preferred to stay at home with Christina and Scarlett and have picked up Matthew from school but with bills and a new garden to pay for I chose extra work" "I feel that I could have spent my time today with the family, but as a result of working I will be able to treat them all when I get paid"

Christina: "We need the extra money now that Christmas is fast approaching"

Day 21   Dave: "We need extra cash to pay for home improvements and Christmas"

Dave also wrote about their decision to seek support from Christina's family so that she could still go to work while he was working away and unable to look after the children because:

> "Christina has to work as we need her income so if I am not there to look after the kids we have to make alternative arrangements"

In these cases their daily decisions were constrained due to the essential financial needs of the family. Samantha also demonstrated similar considerations when deciding upon the best solution when their son had to stay off school because he was unwell:

> "If he isn't (well) it goes without saying that it will be me who will have to take the day off work as I get the paid holidays and Alex doesn't....Financially it is the only sensible option"

Although Alex being self-employed allows him some flexibility it also introduces other constraints. The responsibility to take time off work falls to her because she can take paid leave, whereas her partner cannot, meaning that they would suffer financially if he was to take time off. This also captures the impact that the difference in income of both partners' in a couple has on daily decision-making. It was mentioned by several participants that the partner who earned the least would often be the one to take time out of work to fulfil family obligations when conflicts arose due to the other partner's job having greater financial 'importance' to the family. Louise acknowledged this in her interview when discussing how they generally dealt with daily conflicts between work and family:

> "And I think as well, at the end of the day, you're (husband) the main breadwinner and you'll always be the main breadwinner.... And that's always a factor. I know it's a bit of a shame but you know if it wasn't for your job I wouldn't be able to do what I do, we wouldn't be able to afford the childcare so if it came down to it, your job is the most important"

Although they generally balanced family commitments between them, if they both had something important at work it would be Louise that would be expected to take responsibility for the family and rearrange her working day due to his job providing the most financially. Ian also demonstrated the impact of this in his diary when

talking about how they decided what to do regarding the school run when the children were finishing early for school holidays. They decided that she should finish work early due to her having greater flexibility and because it "boils down to my job being the main breadwinner". These examples clearly highlight the importance of considering the financial constraints when looking at how people make decisions regarding work and family. They also draw attention to gender differences in terms of the relative financial earnings of the male and female within the household and the impact that this has on daily decision-making. Whose career takes preference when making decisions within the dual-earner family is clearly impacted by the relative financial earnings. Morehead (2005) addressed such issues when talking about what she termed 'gender skewed work arrangements' where the distribution of pay is uneven between parents. In theory it could be either the father or mother doing most of the paid work but in reality it is usually the father that does more paid work. In this kind of household the father's work usually takes priority, fathers help with housework but don't take responsibility for it, and the fathers tend to have a large influence on the mothers paid working hours. She demonstrated that this type of arrangement still has strong institutional support, partly due to part-time work being available to women and mothers being low paid while fathers are better paid. She explained that "The most useful way to understand how mothers allocate time to work and family is to focus not so much on the labour market or the work place, but on the extremely strong influence of the household on the mother's labour force participation" (pg. 3). Other research has suggested that, as wives' incomes rise relative to those of their husbands, household decisions more closely reflect wives preferences (e.g. Thomas, 1990) demonstrating that relative earnings within a household often take precedence over preferences in decision-making. Practical issues such as who is able to work part-time or who it is more easily able to take time off without incurring financial cost for the family play a big role in daily decision-making and this is impacted upon by society and the modern workplace and usually means that women are often relied upon to attend to family tasks when work-family conflict occurs. This can clearly have an impact on women's careers in the long-term. As Morehead (2005) explained; "forces external to the household help determine the domestic arrangements within it".

<u>4.3.3.2 Fairness Judgements</u>

As well as the more practical considerations of enabling and constraining factors, which have a clear impact upon daily decision-making, considerations of fairness regarding those affected by the particular work-family conflict incident, and in relation to achieving balance between different important life domains, also frequently impacted upon decision-making.

Social exchange theory, which posits that social behaviour is the result of an exchange process with the purpose of maximizing benefits and minimizing costs, is useful in understanding the supportive relationships developed by participants as a means to resolving work-family conflicts. According to this theory, people weigh the potential benefits and risks of social relationships. When the risks outweigh the rewards, people will terminate or abandon that relationship. Social exchange comprises actions contingent on the rewarding reactions of others, which over time provide for mutually and rewarding transactions and relationships (Cropanzano and Mitchell, 2005). Social exchange theory is a corollary to equity theory which can also help to explain some of the findings in the current study in relation to support seeking and the decision to accept support. According to Adams (1965), people seek to determine whether there is a proportional relationship between their inputs, such as the degree of effort, ability or time, and the outcomes they receive such as payments and other rewards as well as costs or punishments. Therefore, equity is attained if the ratio of one's rewards to one's costs is perceived to be equal to a partner's rewards to costs ratio. If an individual concludes that the ratio of inputs to outputs in a particular instance is disproportionate, therefore perceiving themselves as either under-rewarded or over-rewarded, psychological distress will be experienced. In terms of emotional responses, those who are under-rewarded are assumed to feel angry and resentful, whereas those who are over-rewarded are assumed to feel guilty (Cook and Hegtvedt, 1983). This distress then leads to efforts to restore equity within the relationship (Huseman, Hatfield and Miles, 1987). The concerns relating to overpayment are more relevant to the current findings in explaining why participants were sometimes less willing to rely on available support to resolve work-family conflicts. This will be explored throughout the following sections. The specifics of moral obligations, such as how much and how soon you

should reciprocate, are vague and can vary across relationships depending on the nature of the relationship. Partners do not necessarily have to immediately receive equal benefits or make equal contributions as long as the ratio between these benefits and contributions is similar in a way that both parties consider the exchange to be just and fair over the long-term (Silverstein et al, 2002). This directly relates to the turn-taking frequently discussed by participants as the basis on which reciprocal relationships were formed and maintained, as a way of dealing with daily work-family conflicts. The impact of the desire to maintain equity in relationships on participant's decision-making will be demonstrated throughout the following sections.

It was also clear from the current findings that equity theory is not the whole story. Fairness in a broader sense was also shown to have an impact on participant's daily decision-making, not only in relation to support-seeking but also to fairness in terms of the amount of time invested in each life domain. Previous literature has shown that Equity theory should be incorporated into a more comprehensive framework that takes a broader view of what people base decisions of fairness and justice on. For example, Leventhal (1976b) proposed the justice judgement model which described a multidimensional approach to fairness; assuming that people's judgements of fairness may also be based on other distributive rules. For example, a needs rule dictates that recipients with greater needs should receive higher rewards and the equality rule dictates that rewards should be divided equally regardless of contribution or needs. In different situations a person might believe that one distribution rule is fairer than another and an individual usually deals with contradictions between rules by offering a compromise. Interactional justice, the degree to which the people affected by a decision are treated with dignity and respect (Schermerhorn et al, 2010), also proved to be relevant in the decision-making processes engaged in by participants in the present study. Considerations of interactional justice have previously been shown to have an important impact on people's interpretations of fairness (Bies and Moag, 1986; Greenberg, 1993). All of these factors were found to be intertwined in considerations of fairness by participants and together had a strong impact on their decision-making.

As previously addressed, fairness and equity were usually discussed as important factors effecting decision-making in relation to support seeking but they were also considered more generally in terms of making decisions based on the balance of resource investment within each domain. This section will explore both of these areas in turn, focusing on the impact of fairness and equity considerations on decision-making in greater detail.

4.3.3.2.1 Support Seeking

Although the availability of different types of support was clearly crucial in decision-making, as previously discussed, this alone did not explain why participants decided upon a particular strategy to resolve their work-family conflicts. It is important to specify not only whether support is available but also whether or not available support is actually used (Tardy, 1985). When considering whether or not to rely on the available support to deal with a particular work-family conflict participants frequently considered more specific aspects of the support on offer, usually in relation to fairness judgements regarding others affected by the decision outcome. Accepting support was more likely when they believed that doing so would be beneficial and they were unlikely to accept support if they believed that doing so would be ineffective or would result in negative consequences for themselves or others. The impact of considerations of fairness on the decision of whether or not to rely on the available support will now be addressed by discussing, in turn, those who are most frequently impacted by the decision; those offering the support, the children involved and the impact of accepting the support on the participants themselves.

4.3.3.2.1.1 The Supporter

The impact that resolving a work-family conflict by relying on another person for support would have on that individual was frequently mentioned by participants as part of their decision-making process. This was usually discussed in relation to support seeking in the home domain and tended to include considerations of the supporting individual's needs and the importance placed on treating them with consideration. Lucy and Paul both discussed the possible impact on their parents when they offered help with childcare, mainly due to the fact that they are elderly, and how this impacted their decision-making:

Paul: "Lucy's dad seems happy with the responsibility. We check with him on a weekly basis and would change our routine if it was too much for him"

Lucy: "we don't want to ask them [mother and father-in-law] unless we're desperate as we worry about them not being able to cope with an energetic little boy"

In the latter example, they only asked his mother and father for help for a couple of hours one afternoon. Although on both occasions they still made the decision to rely on their support it was clear that they considered the impact on them, and that this would affect the likelihood of continuing to rely on this support in the future as well as making this type of support a last resort only to be relied upon in specific circumstances. Such considerations also impacted decision-making in instances where participants were required to invest more time at work; making them more reluctant to do this. For example when Jasmine, who relied on her mother for childcare after school, was required to stay late at work for a school staff meeting, she made the decision to go to the meeting but to leave early because she was considering the impact on her mother:

"This is a really hard one to decide what to do. On one hand I need to stay at the staff meeting as the things that get discussed I need to be part of and if I leave I may miss some vital information but on the other hand my mum has both Jack and Ellie and she has had to walk to and from school in all weathers as she cannot drive anymore due to her medical condition. I really need to get back home so she can go home"

It was clear that she was taking into consideration the needs of her mother as well as the fact that her mother had already contributed a great deal of help. For other participants, such considerations led to the rejection of support seeking as a viable option altogether. For example, when Hannah's son had a hospital appointment during working hours, her father-in-law was the only person who was available to help but she considered the impact on him to be too great and therefore decided that it would be unfair to seek his help, which led to her decision to take the time off work herself:

> "The only other person who could have taken him was my father-in-law and he has to take portable oxygen with him when he goes anywhere so it isn't really practical for him to take him, it's not really feasible."

Such considerations were not only made in the cases of support-seeking from grandparents, or solely based on concern for the physical health of others. Considerations of fairness in support seeking were also related to the person's other commitments and/or their ability to easily take on the extra responsibility. In their interview, Janet and Rick discussed their reluctance to seek support from their neighbours in situations of work-family conflict, despite them offering this support, because they were aware that they had their own needs and commitments to attend to:

> Janet: But they've now started doing a little job of their own so I feel I can't now ask
>
> Rick: And one of them has had a new baby.
>
> Janet: So I feel like I'm putting on them even though they say....I just wouldn't do it now. It would be a last, last resort, in an emergency.

Christina often relied on support from her younger sister to deal with work-family conflicts but she reported an incident in her diary where she decided to go into work late rather than seek her support based on the consideration of how fair it would be to seek her support in this particular situation:

> "Had no choice as there are four kids in the house so it's difficult to get my sister to come over as it's a big responsibility"

The expression that she felt she had "no choice" in this situation demonstrates how important considerations of the appropriateness of the available support are in decision-making. These examples highlight that it is not simply the availability of support that is important but also that the type of support available is fair and appropriate given the particular situation. As previously explained, accepting support was less likely if participants believed that doing so would be ineffective or would result in negative consequences. In this last example it seems highly possible that fairness with regards to the children themselves and their needs, ensuring that they

should receive appropriate care, was also a consideration. The impact of fairness considerations regarding the children involved will be discussed in more detail shortly.

4.3.3.2.1.2 Previous Support

In direct relation to the above considerations, participants also frequently discussed consideration of the impact on those offering support in terms of the amount of support that they had previously provided, or agreed to provide in the future. Powell and Greenhaus (2006) did recognize "the ongoing, interrelated, and complex nature of work and family decision-making and the influence of individuals' decision and relational histories" (pg. 1180) but decided that "there was value in exploring individuals' decisions in specific incidents of work–family conflict" (pg. 1180) and therefore their framework for how couples made decisions in incidents of work-family conflict did not include factors relating to previous incidents of support-seeking. The current findings demonstrate the importance of considering this aspect of decision-making, and in taking a longitudinal approach. Decisions discussed by participants were almost always made in the context of past events. In general, participants were less likely to seek further support from someone who they deemed as already doing more than their fair share. On several occasions, throughout her diary, Amy reported that she had considered asking for support from her mum so that she could continue with her work but then had decided against doing this based on the amount of support her mum had already provided, and considerations of whether or not it would be 'fair' to seek this extra support.

> Day 15: "I could have asked my mum to babysit and she probably would have said yes but I feel like she is mine and Keith's responsibility and we ask for my mum's help enough so I didn't want to ask even more of her when there were other options. She is already looking after Logan over night once this week."

> Day 23: "My mum had been so great looking after Logan yesterday even under such horrible circumstances [death of her brother] so that I was able to make my appointments therefore I felt it would have been unfair to ask her to do this again today"

This highlights how, although certain support options might be available, other factors, namely relating to fairness considerations, had an impact on whether or not this support would actually be utilised in the conflict resolution. Lucy and Jasmine both reported similar considerations in their diaries when discussing their decisions not to spend extra time at work. Lucy decided not to attend a work meeting outside of her working hours and Jasmine made the decision to bring her work home with her rather than stay at work to complete it. In both cases the main reason for this decision was that they did not want to rely on further help from their parents who had already provided them with invaluable support.

> Lucy: "I hate asking dad and his partner as they do enough already looking after James on Tuesdays to save us paying more nursery fees"

> Jasmine: "It was easier and quicker to do the work at school as I had all the facilities I needed to do it there. But I already felt guilty enough that my mum had Jack all day and although she loved it I knew they were back at ours in the morning to do the school run when Joe was in London."

In all of these examples participants expressed a feeling that they could only seek a certain amount of support based on what they deemed to be fair. In this way, there appears to be some kind of support-seeking threshold which they do not wish to cross, or would not deem it fair to do so. Participants appear comfortable, at least to some extent, accepting support from their parents but only up to a particular limit or threshold. This support-seeking threshold is perhaps different for everyone depending on specific relationships and circumstances but the threshold for support from those outside of the family would generally be expected to be much lower. For example, Jasmine expressed a similar concern regarding feelings of fairness in relation to the support previously received from her boss, in the form of finding cover for her at work, so that she was able to attend her son's, fairly frequent, hospital appointments. This meant that when her daughter became ill with measles she asked her mother-in-law for help rather than asking her boss for further time off work, explaining:

> "I know my boss would frown upon me taking more time off especially when he has been very good regarding Jack's hospital appointments."

Again, this highlights the role that feelings of equity and fairness can play in decision making. This idea of a support-seeking threshold was also discussed by couples in relation to seeking support from each other, which again relates back to the turn-taking that has been demonstrated to be in place within many of the couples as a means of dealing with daily conflicts. This type of arrangement has been discussed in previous literature. For example Medved (2004) referred to this as the practical action of "trading off" which "took place in the relational context of marriage when spouses took turns staying home from work to manage childcare needs" (pg. 137). This type of arrangement, whether spoken or unspoken, is highly entwined with beliefs regarding fairness and equity within the couple. For example, Amy also reported incidents where she decided to take some time out of her work so that she was not relying on her partner for support, in one case so he could sleep, and in another so he was able to play football. She based these decisions on considerations of the times that he had made similar sacrifices in the work domain for her:

> Day 12 - "He tries to let me sleep a bit longer in the mornings if he can which
> I really appreciate so I wanted to return the favour"

> Day 25 - "He is very supportive of me keeping in shape and looks after
> Logan so that I can work out so I feel that I should return the favour"

However on another occasion Amy considered it to be fair to ask her partner to look after their daughter while she worked in the evening because she had looked after her daughter in the day while he was at work which therefore informed their decision-making as well as appearing to negate any feelings of guilt that she might have experienced had she not felt a sense of fairness:

> "My work has to take priority in the evenings as his does in the day and we
> had already discussed this.... I was mainly ok with this decision because I
> looked after Logan in the day while Keith worked so it is fair that he looks
> after him while I work and he didn't complain about it"

In this way there is an unspoken reciprocal agreement between partners based on feelings of fairness and equity. It appears that these factors not only had a great impact on decision-making but also on how happy or satisfied individuals were with

this decision. In Amy's case these considerations often meant that she took extra time out of her work, choosing the family domain, in an attempt to maintain some kind of equitable balance within her relationships at home. The impact of such considerations of equity within couples on their daily decision-making was frequently reported in diary entries as well as during interviews. It was these considerations that usually led to participants making the decision to take time out of work and engage in family related tasks.

Kyle: "I was out until 7:30pm and felt Carly would feel hard done by to do drop off and pick up as well as cooking dinner and full night time routine with Lewis....Carly dealt with Lewis after nursery while I worked"

Nick: It's partly to do with fairness because you know she'd only been back at work a week (after maternity leave) and she'd (their daughter) only been at nursery a week and you'd had to go off again so I was trying to help out with that.

Angela: "Nick had her in the morning so felt it was only fair I had her for some of the day"

The importance placed on maintaining equity within a couple often had an impact on decision-making, regardless of the willingness of the other person to continue to offer their support, which demonstrates the strength of the impact of this consideration when making decisions. For example, Lucy decided to take time out of work to take her son to his hospital appointment despite it being clear from her partner's diary entry that he was happy and willing to take the time out again himself:

 Lucy: "Paul had taken him to the initial hospital appointment so I wanted to take him this time and this allowed Paul to get a full day's work in!"

Paul: "I was ready to take some time off if required. If I had to take time off I would need to build it back up later"

Previous theory and research focused on interpersonal relationships suggests that individuals strive to maintain equity (Adams, 1965; Hatfield, Utne and Traupmann, 1979; Walster, Walster and Traupmann, 1978). Moreover equitable relationships are depicted as the most satisfying for relational partners. It is believed by many

researchers that equity theory can provide a greater understanding of intimate relationships (e.g. Hatfield et al, 1979, 1985) noting that individuals in close intimate relationships often desire to maintain their relations with one another, rather than taking advantage of their relational partner. Consequentially, individuals often reciprocate behaviours in an attempt to maintain their ties with those with whom they share close and intimate relationships (Peterson, 1986). According to this view, the desire to sustain these close relationships would mean that, if individuals perceived themselves to be over-rewarded within a given relationship in terms of the support previously offered by their partner or other close source of support, they would experience feelings of guilt, an emotion that was frequently expressed by participants in relation to support-seeking in the current study. This goes some way to explaining why, in such instances, they would be unlikely to seek further support from this source, even if the support was available, at least until they had restored the balance in some way, perhaps by offering support themselves. This can be seen in the previous example where Lucy decided to take time off work to offer her support in the family domain. This also offers an explanation for the previously discussed turn-taking engaged in by many participants, both within the couples themselves, and with others.

Some scholars dislike the application of equity theory in close relationships, since a premise of equity theory (and exchange theories in general) is that individuals are selfish, and self-motivated (e.g. Adams, 1965; Peterson, 1986). Conversely, other researchers suggest that equity plays an important role in intimate relationships (e.g. Hatfield et al, 1985, Wagstaff et al, 1993) and those individuals in intimate relationships are deeply concerned with considerations of fairness. However, it is less clear whether this holds true for participant's relationships with their parents. Although satisfaction for parents has been found to be in accordance with equity theory, in that the highest levels of satisfaction were reported by parents who perceived their relationships with adolescents as equitable (Vogl-Bauer et al, 1999), children are accustomed to receiving benefits from their parents and often expect to be over-benefited in these relationships therefore an equitable state may not be satisfactory (Vogl-Bauer et al., 1999). It is clear that the relationship between the parent and the child changes dramatically over its life course but it is unclear as to whether or not all parent-child relationships come to be based on equity once the

children become adults. Therefore, although equity theory offers some explanatory power in looking at how, and under what circumstances, participants engage in support seeking from various sources in order to resolve a work family conflict, it is by no means suggested that it can provide a complete explanation in all situations and for all relationships. As stated at the beginning of this chapter, fairness considerations here can only be partially explained by equity theory. Fairness is a complex concept which is open to interpretation by each individual and in each different circumstance.

4.3.3.2.1.3 Impact on children

The same considerations of fairness regarding the children involved were also applied when making decisions in incidents of work-family conflict. Such considerations were usually concerned with ensuring that due care was paid to the welfare and happiness of the children, and that they were not negatively impacted by whatever decision was made. This could most frequently be explained as a concern with the needs of their children and the interpersonal treatment they would receive when decisions were implemented. When writing about factors that had an impact on their decision to seek support, many of the participants reported considerations of the impact this decision would have on their children. For example:

> Steven: "I needed someone to look after Annabelle who we trusted....Mel's niece has looked after Annabelle before so we are comfortable to leave Annabelle with her"

> Mel: "....And Annabelle is used to my niece I felt comfortable leaving Annabelle in her care

> Jasmine: "Once she had said she was fine and playing I knew she would be fine with her grandma. If she was upset then I would have had to leave work"

> Ellen: He was slightly better than the day before so....mum to the rescue!

> Olivia: If it was something he really wanted us to see [at school] then we'd go but I think most of the time he's quite happy if your mum's there.

It is clear from these examples that participants tended to take their children's feelings into account when deciding upon the best strategy for dealing with a work-family conflict, and the implication is that, if their children were not happy with a particular solution, this would probably have led to them making alternative arrangements. As well as considering the feelings of their children participants also considered what they personally thought would be best for them in terms of safety and responsibility. In this way the perceived effectiveness of the available support for the given situation was considered. Linda and Edward both discussed a specific occasion when they considered whether or not to leave their son's (aged 13 and 11) to take care of themselves at home for three hours while they both went out to work during the school summer holidays:

> Linda: "We both spoke about leaving the boys home alone but felt that 3 hours was too long so we discussed alternatives."

> Martin: "I was uncomfortable leaving the boys home alone for that amount of time so this was the best solution."

They decided to ask a friend and neighbour to keep an eye on them, having clearly arrived at the decision that this was the best available option for the children; giving them some freedom while also ensuring that they were safe. The issue regarding whether or not the children were at an appropriate age where they could be responsible for themselves, and therefore act as an extra form of support during incidents of work-family conflict, appeared to be an issue shared by other participants who had teenage children. However, in making the decision of whether or not this form of support was appropriate they consistently considered the impact on the children in each specific situation. For example, in her interview, Elizabeth talked about allowing their eldest son to look after their youngest son during the school holidays. They discussed the circumstances under which they deemed this an appropriate option:

> "I mean again it is a lot easier because of Aaron [who is now 16] because that would always be a fall back but we don't intend to leave Chris [younger son] with him for full days."

These examples convey how participants considered the impact on others when making decisions regarding how to resolve work-family conflicts particularly when it came to relying on external support. In doing this they took into account which of the available support options they deemed to be most fair, generally in terms of the health, happiness and well being, for all who were involved in the particular scenario, specifically their children and the individuals who were offering their support.

4.3.3.2.1.4 Impact of accepting support

Participants also discussed the impact of accepting support as a means of dealing with work-family conflict in terms of their ability to reciprocate as well as the amount of responsibility felt towards the person offering support and their capacity to deal with this. As previously addressed, reciprocal relationships were frequently developed with others outside of the couple themselves. It was often the likelihood that they would be able to reciprocate, if they received outside support, which had an impact on whether or not participants decided to seek such support from others in the first place. This was usually discussed in relation to seeking support from non-family members. For example, in her interview Sylvia discussed her decision to ask another mother from her daughter's school to pick her daughter up on occasions when she was unable to leave work on time:

> "She's done it with me though as well to be honest. It got like a pattern at one stage where I'd pick Hannah up for her and she'd pick Fiona up for me."

This can be explained in terms of equity theory and the idea that individuals who perceive a relationship or exchange to be inequitable will experience feelings of distress. This distress then leads to efforts to restore equity within the relationship (Huseman, Hatfield and Miles, 1987), in this instance by offering support in return. This can explain why participants were more likely to accept support from those whom they also provide support, therefore creating a sense of equity. Linda also wrote about similar reciprocal relationships they had with other parents on more than one occasion in her diary, relying upon these when both she, and her partner, needed to work away from home during the school holidays:

Day 18 - "We often have reciprocal arrangements with other parents (who are also working full-time/part time) and in the summer in particular we help each other out....I Felt comfortable about the decision as we have often looked after the boy who our youngest went to play with"

Day 23 - We have often looked after their children and we have an "arrangement" whereby we reciprocate with childcare. In July we had their children for a whole day so we did not feel awkward asking them to help out."

These examples demonstrate the increased likelihood of seeking help when they themselves had already given similar help previously and in this way it enabled both parties to maintain a feeling of equity while seeking necessary support. Building these types of reciprocal relationships with others was a strategy used by some to deal with daily work-family conflicts. On the other hand when participants felt that they would not be able to offer any support in return, therefore leaving them unable to sustain such a reciprocal arrangement, this made them reluctant to accept support from others. Emma talked about this in her diary when discussing different possibilities of childcare during the school holidays:

"Difficult to get friends/neighbours to help out and I find it difficult to ask when I am limited in what I can offer in return."

Again this can also be explained in terms of equity theory and the idea that individuals who perceive the relationship to be inequitable will experience feelings of distress. Based on this it would follow that, for those participants who felt that they would be unable to reciprocate the support offered to them, accepting this support would then cause them to perceive themselves as being over-rewarded which would induce feelings of guilt (Adams, 1965; Perry, 1993; Van Dierendonck, Schaufeli, and Sixma, 1994) making it less likely that they would accept this support in the first place.

The impact of accepting support was also considered in terms of the amount of responsibility felt towards the person offering the support and therefore the impact that this extra responsibility would have on them. In their interview, Nick and

Angela discussed how such feelings of extra responsibility, involved in seeking support from others, often deterred them from asking their parents for support:

> Angela: I mean Nick's mum would have come down at a push or my mum would have but....
>
> Nick: That might have been more a hindrance than a help really (Laughs)
>
> Angela: Yeah I think because they only see us every 6 weeks, I think they don't have an understanding of how we work.
>
> Nick: Yeah, you'd just have to be explaining a lot and just basically be on call all the time while you were away. It would probably just end up being more stressful than just dealing with it yourself to be honest. You'd have to tell them where everything's kept

Neil and Hayley also discussed similar concerns in their diary when talking about seeking support from others to help with childcare:

> Neil: We did make the mistake once of having....erm we arranged for childcare once didn't we for Natalia while we were both at a conference and we realised it was as much work managing the childcare as it was managing Natalia. We realised that we couldn't both go to a conference at the same time. We wouldn't want to do that again would we?
>
> Hayley: No, well I think it's complicated because whoever's looking after the child you then feel responsible for....you know particularly if you're organising a conference you then feel responsible for the people who are at the conference who you're organising, responsible for your child, responsible for your partner and that they're involved, responsible for the people looking after your child and there's sort of like so much feeling responsible! You know making sure that they're ok

These examples highlight how support seeking, while it often acted as a solution to work-family conflicts, could also raise problems; such as the feeling that the help must be reciprocated in some manner or the engendered extra feelings of responsibility towards those who were offering support. In some cases this meant extra 'work' and pressure for these couples who already had numerous pressures

emanating from a variety of sources. In this way, relying on support from others actually entailed a certain amount of work in itself. It has previously been suggested that because the specifics of moral obligations, such as how much and how soon you should reciprocate, are vague and can vary across relationships, depending on the nature of the relationship, individuals must interpret and resolve this ambiguity in a way as to balance their own needs and interests with moral obligations and sometimes to resolve conflicts between moral principles themselves (Etzioni, 1988; Uehara, 1995). This relates back to the "additional labour" involved in maintaining arrangements with support networks (Morehead, 2005) and the "relational work" needed to maintain social support (Medved, 2004) previously discussed in the chapter on the availability of support. Recent research findings have actually suggested that support receipt can increase distress in recipients (Gleason et al, 2008, Seiger and Wiese, 2009). The receipt of daily support has not only been associated with greater feelings of closeness but also with a greater negative mood (Gleason et al, 2008). In her diary, having decided to seek help from another parent from school, Sylvia talked about why she did not feel comfortable relying on support from others:

> "I felt really guilty about it. The parents were alright about it actually, I think that's just me because I never like to rely on people, I'd rather do it myself really but sometimes you just can't can you?"

There is the implication that accepting support from others enters them into a type of unspoken but binding contract, leaving them with extra responsibilities and feelings of guilt if these are not met. This pressure generally appeared to be internal, rather than coming directly from those offering support, demonstrating the importance of maintaining an internal equitable balance and the impact that this can have on work-family conflict.

It is clear that the decision to seek support is complex and feelings of fairness and equity play an important role in the decision-making process. Engaging in social support is frequently useful in resolving, or even avoiding, work-family conflicts but is also fraught with moral issues and dilemmas that the individual must resolve in the context of the actual social relationship.

4.3.3.2.2 Time investment

Other factors that were considered in relation to fairness judgements, when making decisions about how to deal with work-family conflict, were those relating to time investment. These were considered in terms of striving to maintain some kind of balance between the amounts of time spent in each domain. In making daily decisions regarding work and family individuals were deciding how to distribute their resources in which case it is unsurprising that rules of distributive justice were considered as part of their decision-making process, including those pertaining to equality, need and equity.

The amount of time that participants had previously invested in each domain, or the future expectancy of time invested in each domain, frequently impacted upon participants decision-making when faced with work-family conflicts. There was a general tendency for participants to strive for some kind of "balance" between their different life domains so that they were investing their resources relatively equally. This meant that if they had recently invested more time in work they would be more likely to invest their resources in a family event if faced with a work-family conflict and vice versa. Amy explained this thought process in her interview:

> "I want to be a good mum and a good partner and a good daughter and a good employee but it is difficult to do a good job in all of these areas and I think my decisions were often about trying to do as good a job as possible in these all these areas and it's a balancing act....so if I've been giving a lot of attention to one area then I might need to pay more attention to others or if I've been taking a lot from one area I might feel I need to take a little less and give a little more. It's complicated!"

Amy also gave numerous specific examples of how this impacted her daily decisions between work and family throughout her diary:

> Day 4: "I decided that I couldn't go out for tea with my family as much as I would have liked to because I was feeling stressed that I hadn't done any work at all and that I hardly had any time at all to do any tonight already"

> Day 12: "I really needed to focus on work today because I hadn't done anywhere near enough during the week"

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Day 23: "I spent a little time playing with him (her son) because I had done some work and I knew Mark would be putting him to bed soon so I decided to play with him for a little bit"

This was a common theme running throughout many participants' diary entries when explaining how they made decisions between work and family events on a daily basis. For example, Rebecca explained that she decided not to catch up on her work at the weekend, despite having work to do, because, "I spend a lot of time at work and have very little family time". Sylvia decided not to work late, but instead delegated the work tasks that still needed completing to others, so that she could leave on time because she had previously worked late on several occasions making her late picking her daughter up:

"I decided to delegate quite a few items of work today as I could not be late picking Fiona up again today"

She had recorded a diary entry regarding arriving late to pick her daughter up from school the previous day in which she had discussed how "Fiona (her daughter) was not happy" and how she had apologised to her and said that she "would do my best to be on time in future". The longitudinal approach adopted here, in using daily diaries over a period of four weeks, enabled such connections to be made between different conflict incidents. The impact of previous work-family conflicts on subsequent work-family conflicts clearly demonstrated how each conflict cannot be truly understood as an isolated incident. Each incident, the way it was resolved, and the consequences of this could have an impact on how decisions were arrived upon when future incidents occurred. This was particularly important when demonstrating the impact of factors such as past and future time investment, which were key to participant's decision-making. Another example highlighting the importance of such considerations was seen in Kyle's diary. He wrote about his decision not to take his son Lewis to nursery one morning reasoning that he had started work late to do this on the previous day. He also expressed how he felt that he had invested time with his family this week, making sacrifices at work to do so and therefore felt that he needed to even the scales:

> "As it is Wednesday and I've had a slow start to the week it is essential that I have a couple of solid days....its fine as had some good family time at the beginning of the week"

This 'balancing', or attempt to maintain some equality in the distribution of resources, was also impacted by future expectancy of time investment. If participants expected or planned to be spending a great deal of time with their family in the near future they were often more likely to invest in the work domain and vice versa. Jasmine talked about this in her diary when discussing her decision to go into work and ask her mum for help when her daughter was off nursery with measles:

> "The other BIG factor was knowing that today was the last day before the half term holiday so I knew that I would be able to spend the whole week with both Ellie and Jack....The guilt wasn't too bad knowing that I was going to be with Ellie and Jack for the next 9 days"

In accordance with seeking to maintain some kind of equality or balance in terms of time invested in each domain, it also follows that the expected amount of time required for a task, or the amount of time expected to impinge on the other domain, were also considered by participants when making decisions. This meant that in incidents where a task involved in the conflict scenario was not expected to require a great deal of time participants were more likely to engage in that task. For example, when Joe talked about dropping his step-son, Jack, off at school he explained how waiting to make sure that "he makes it safely inside" would mean that he was a little late for his work's conference call. Despite this he decided to wait with Jack and see him into school because of his concern for his safety but also because "If I hurry back to the car hopefully I won't be too late and miss much on the call" suggesting that the outcome of the decision might have been different if the family related task was one which required greater time investment. Similarly, when Mary forgot to take her daughter's teddy bear to nursery for "teddy bear day" she decided to return home to retrieve the bear, despite this making her late for work, because she was considering the impact on her daughter, but also because she "would only be another half an hour anyway". Again the time element was demonstrated as part of the decision-making process, highlighting the fact that participants were often more willing to invest small amounts of "extra" time in either domain as it was not

impinging too greatly on their time in the other domain. This was highlighted further by an incident reported in Emma's diary. She made it clear that, while she found it acceptable to engage in extra work for a short amount of time on her day off, if she was aware that a task would take longer she would refuse. She reluctantly agreed to do some extra work on the Saturday of her children's school fete because:

> "I just thought it was going to be a quick job and that once I'd said I was there ready to check it (it would be done) At 3pm I said this is it now, I'm not available for the rest of the day but up until that point I kind of thought I would get it out of the way.... I wasn't very happy really because I only work there three days a week and I'm very mindful that their policy is that they don't pay for overtime. I mean to a point I don't mind working the odd half an hour or the odd hour but I do mind working....in the end it came to about 4hours at the weekend. I do mind that"

From these excerpts it can be seen how participants generally engaged in tasks that did not take a significant amount of extra time away from that which would usually be spent in the other domain. However, from Emma's report it was clear that tasks which took longer would be looked upon much less favourably, particularly if this extra time investment would go unrewarded. This would not only have an impact on the sense of balance or equality strived for between investments in the two domains, but would also be viewed as unfair and inequitable, therefore leading to a lesser likelihood of making the decision to engage in "extra" investment in that domain. If such incidents did occur, as reported by Emma above, it is likely that individuals would strive to regain a sense of equality and equity whether by requesting rewards for their contribution and/or by investing extra time in the other domain. Emma demonstrated such a reaction:

> "I'm not going to let that happen. So I mentioned it on Monday when I went to work and they said I can take some hours off in lieu so that kind of worked out ok."

The amount of time invested in each domain was also considered with a greater longitudinal aspect as part of participant's decision-making. The frequency with which a task would be required was considered, addressing the amount of time that this task would be impinging on the other domain in the long-term. If it was a "one-

off" participants were often more likely to engage in the task, and expressed greater willingness to do so, in comparison to a task that was going to impact upon their time investment in the other domain in a more permanent way. For example, in her interview Sarah talked about deciding whether or not to engage in extra days at work:

> "My work did ask me to go in one morning when I wasn't supposed to be working which I don't mind doing occasionally.... I chose to go in because they don't ask that often so it isn't all the time"

This also applied for tasks outside of the work domain that were considered to be "one-off" events such as birthdays or school events. For example, when writing about why she decided to attend her son's school assembly she wrote, "This is a one off event that I needed to attend" and Samantha wrote in her diary explaining that "I just decided that me finishing early for one afternoon was ok" on her son's birthday. Similar responses were made to events that would occur on more than one occasion but that would only be occurring for a definable period of time, such as engaging in extra work during busy periods or engaging in less work for a limited time due to circumstances at home, implying the inclusion of the distribution of resources in terms of relative need in their decision-making process. In his diary, Kyle talked about being responsible for all the nursery runs for a particular period of time during which his partner, Carly, was unusually busy at work:

> "If it's one of Carly's busy days it's all me. Won't be like that after Christmas but something we discussed before it kicked off and here we are"

Participants tended to make a particular effort to accommodate those events that occurred infrequently or, at least, were only for a specific length of time, making decisions in these cases that they would not be willing to make on a regular basis or for an indefinite period.

The decision-making processes described by participants in the current study have clearly demonstrated the impact that their desire to achieve, and maintain, a feeling of fairness and equity, both with others and within the different areas of their own lives, can have on decision-making. It is also suggested here, based on the current findings, that judgements of fairness in decision-making involved in resolving daily

work-family conflicts can be related to previous literature on distributive and interactional justice. It is also important to note that different people place more value on morals and fairness in decision-making than others depending on their personal values and priorities (Smetana, Killen, and Turiel, 1991, Myyry, 2003) and in this way the impact of fairness judgements on decision-making is directly related to the values of the individual.

4.3.3.3 Preferences

The impact of preferences was discussed relatively infrequently, as compared to other factors taken into consideration when making daily work-family decisions. Preferences were occasionally raised as factors impacting daily decision-making by participants, usually in relation to the desire to spend time with their children. Preferences regarding work events were also discussed to a lesser extent. For example, in her interview Ellen talked about an incident when her children were ill at a time when there was an event at work that she really wanted to attend:

> "There was one time when I was supposed to be going out on a site visit to Buxton and I really wanted to go; I really needed to go so luckily my mum had him for the day.... I just really needed to go. It was something for the job we were working on and I just thought, I really want to go and see this to get my head round this job we're doing and I thought it was important to go and I wouldn't have got another chance. That was like the last chance to go so I thought I really want to."

Throughout the analysis of the data it was often difficult to distinguish preferences from other factors discussed. For example, in many cases when participants expressed a desire to attend a work event they often gave reasons relating to "needing" to attend to fulfil the requirements of their job, in which case it could not really be described as a preference. However, in the example from Ellen's interview, although she also implies that it is something that will be helpful in doing her job, the repletion of the phrase "really wanted to" highlights that attending the visit was also her preference and that this had a strong impact on how she decided to deal with this particular conflict.

More frequently participant's preferences were expressed in relation to making the decision to take time out of work in order to spend time with their children due to the value that they placed on this. Carly wrote about her decision to take her son to nursery, rather than asking her partner to do this, even though this would make her late for work, simply stating her reason as, "I Like doing it. I Love Lewis more than I care about work". Similarly, in Tom's interview he explained why he decided to take some time off work during the school holidays; simply because, "I just wanted some time with the kids" and in her interview Amy talked about how she often ended up playing with her daughter instead of working because "I usually enjoy it more than my work!" She mentioned this again in her diary as a deciding factor in her decision to take time out of work to play with her daughter:

> "I was really anxious to get on with my work but I really wanted to play with her for a minute. I find it more enjoyable than my work and I guess more immediately rewarding"

Conversely, on another occasion, Amy made her preference to spend time with her family explicit in her diary entry but was unable to base her decision-making on this preference. She wrote that:

> "It was a lovely sunny day which I feel like we have to make the most of so I would have loved to go out for tea as a family",

Despite this she was unable to have tea with her family due to the amount of work that she needed to complete and the fact that she had not invested enough time in her work previously, an important factor as discussed in the previous section. Throughout the analysis of the data it was apparent that preferences were usually not the deciding factor for participants when making day-to-day decisions regarding work and family due to the many other factors that came into play; contrary to Hakim's preference theory (Hakim, 1998; 2002; 2003). It was due to these other competing factors that preferences were infrequently the deciding factor when faced with daily work-family conflicts, although this is not to say that they did not have an impact in decision-making. The findings reported here suggest that preferences might have a greater indirect impact on daily decisions, via anchoring decisions, as preferences were more frequently discussed with regards to the anchoring decisions made by participants.

4.3.4 Conclusion

The eight different types of daily work-family conflict discussed here by participants were resolved using four different strategies; support seeking, integrating, taking time off work and rescheduling, none of which were mutually exclusive. The decision regarding which of these to employ was informed by three categories of factors: enabling and constraining factors, considerations of fairness and equity and preferences.

The findings demonstrated how enabling and constraining factors collaborated to impact daily decision-making. Couples simultaneously considered enabling factors, and opposing constraints, placed upon each of them and these considerations formed the basis of their decisions regarding how to deal with each conflict. These included financial considerations, availability of support and job requirements. Although considerations of support were touched upon by several participants in relation to making anchoring decisions, this factor was shown to have a much greater impact on daily decision-making, subsequently revealing a more in-depth exploration of this key factor. The focus on couples highlighted how dynamics of support-seeking worked within the couple, and how the relative support received in their individual working environments had significant impact on conflict negotiations. Within these findings, positive and negative aspects of flexible working emerged demonstrating the double-edged sword of "family-friendly" policies. The methodology employed also enabled an explanation of the circumstances under which couples seek outside support and the factors taken into consideration in these instances, such as non-work commitments and expressions of willingness. This also highlighted the importance of exploring a wide variety of support sources.

Although the availability of different types of support was crucial in decision-making, this alone did not explain why participants decided upon a particular strategy to resolve work-family conflicts. Considerations of fairness and equity were also frequently discussed as important factors effecting decision-making. Such considerations within couples manifested themselves in unspoken reciprocal agreements between partners, and regarding external support the decision to rely on this option for conflict resolution hinged on the likelihood that they would be able to reciprocate. In exploring the importance of fairness and equity in participants daily decision-making it was also demonstrated how their desire to achieve, and maintain,

a feeling of fairness and equity not only applied directly to their relationships with others but also within the different areas of their lives. There was a general tendency to strive for some form of "balance" between different life domains so they were investing their resources relatively equally. This brought to light the important impact that previous work-family conflicts have on subsequent conflicts, demonstrating that each conflict cannot be understood as an isolated incident. Each incident, the way it was resolved, and its consequences could have an impact upon decision-making in future incidents.

The impact of preferences on daily decision-making was discussed relatively infrequently. Preferences were rarely the deciding factor in daily decision-making and the findings suggest they might have a greater indirect impact on daily decisions via anchoring decisions, in relation to which preferences were more frequently mentioned. Preferences and constraints were shown to be entwined in the decision-making process emphasising that compromises must usually be made. The negative, longitudinal impact that highly constrained decision-making can have was also highlighted, not only for the individual themselves but also for their family, and consequently for their employer. Based on findings reported here it is clear that an inaccurate picture of the decision-making process would be acquired if this process were understood independently of the constraints acting upon it.

This chapter has outlined anchoring and daily decisions by exploring the processes that impact upon how these different types of decisions are made. The following chapter will endeavour to more directly answer the research questions laid out at the beginning of thesis by incorporating some of the important findings highlighted here, as well as making links between these two different types of decisions.

Chapter 5 - Making the Links

In this chapter I will aim to offer possible answers to the initial research questions. First I will look at how incidents of work-family conflict and the decision-making process are experienced by the couples in the present study by addressing the distinction between anchoring and daily decisions and the interaction of these two types of decision-making as well as considering the dynamics of interdependence within couple's decision-making processes and outcomes. In answering this question I will also explore the possible gender differences in how work-family conflict and the decision-making process are experienced. I will then go on to address how couples negotiate their work and family responsibilities when they encounter a conflict between the two by exploring the impact of preferences and values versus constraints and looking at the differential impact that different cues have on anchoring decisions as compared to daily decisions. I will finally address this question by proposing a general decision-making framework.

5.1 Question One: How are incidents of work-family conflict, and the decision-making process, experienced?

5.1.1 Linking Anchoring and Daily Decisions

It was immediately clear from the initial analysis of the data that participants experienced two distinct types of work-family decision. As previously discussed, these were labelled anchoring decisions; describing those decisions that addressed the overall approach to work life balance decided upon by the couple, and daily decisions; focusing on immediate issues which occurred on a daily basis. All participants talked about their experiences of both types of decision-making. This important distinction has not been made in previous literature on work-family conflict yet it offers significant insights into the reality of how work and family are experienced. Medved (2004) touched upon such a distinction in her categorisation of the daily practices used by women to maintain their daily work and family routines. Within this categorization she reported a category termed "Restructuring practical actions" which was described as being "categorically different" to the previous categories which focused upon daily routines. These restructuring practical actions described processes which led to a new set of daily routinizing behaviours and were

described as being triggered by "family turning points" or "A trigger such as job loss, promotion, or a new child might beget the process of restructuring" (Medved, 2004, pg. 142). This categorization has apparent similarities to what has here been termed "anchoring decisions" which were also demonstrated to occur due to similar major life events.

As well as being triggered by major life events, several participants in the current study also discussed how anchoring decisions could occur due to recurring problems in their daily decision-making. This could be seen in the example of an anchoring decision made by Olivia and her partner Ray. They both decided to leave the school where they were working together in order to move to a new school as a result of their boss' lack of flexibility when it came to family commitments. Olivia explained how she finally made the decision to leave based on her boss's disapproval of how they had handled the daily conflict that occurred when their son burnt his hand on the radiator:

> "Marcus was only a tiny baby and when we were getting him ready in the morning he banged his hand on the radiator and he burnt his hand and he was only a tiny baby so, as any normal parent would do, we got him in the car and took him to hospital. We phoned in work and said we'd be late in work, this has happened to Matthew. We got him sorted then took him to my mums and both went in work. Half an hour after being in work we both got told off because we'd both been to the hospital with him....But they were really awkward at that school. She was horrible. She just didn't see....family life didn't exist, everything was work"

> "I actually walked out and I said I'm not coming back, and I didn't, did I? One of the things that finally made me do that was when we took Marcus to hospital. It was the best decision I ever made. It was a build up of everything"

Lucy also discussed her intention to leave her current job based on the increase in daily work-family conflicts that she was experiencing due to the expectations of her workplace. Although this anchoring decision had not yet been decided upon at this point it was clear from her description that the decision-making process had been initiated as a result of the frequent daily conflicts that she was experiencing:

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"Work have been quite demanding of late and they've wanted some meetings outside of my working hours and then obviously again Paul's had to look after the kids and he's done it....My job could be a lot more flexible and I'll probably be looking around for another one really because it's getting quite bad....They said I've only got 11 hours left I can take off until next April!"

These examples highlight possible consequences of experiencing recurrent daily work-family conflicts that were problematic to manage in terms of leading individuals, or couples, to make an anchoring decision in an attempt to reduce these daily conflicts. An anchoring decision occurs when significant changes in either domain are considered to be required. In both of the examples above these anchoring decisions were focused on whether or not to leave their current employment as it was clearly their place of work which was viewed as being the cause of the frequent daily conflicts.

As well as demonstrating how daily conflicts can lead individuals to making anchoring decisions, the findings reported here also highlight the impact that anchoring decisions inevitably have on future daily conflicts and decision-making. This impact was implicit in the way that couples daily conflicts were resolved in that the anchoring decisions helped to create an overall strategy for how couples managed their work and family commitments on a daily basis. In making these anchoring decisions individuals, and couples, frequently aimed to reduce the occurrence of such conflicts but also ensured that options for conflict resolution were more readily available when conflicts did occur, therefore enabling the daily decision-making process. One example of this was provided by Paul, who, after having their first child, chose to give up contract work to work for the council because "working for the council is more flexible and involves less travelling than contract work". This anchoring decision meant that he had flexible hours and was also able to work from home two days a week. The impact of this on the daily decision-making experienced by him, and his partner Lucy, was clear throughout both their diary entries. He was regularly able to be involved in the school run as his hours were flexible reporting, for instance, "I chose to cater for the family before work" or that him and his partner had "talked in the morning and I could take the children to school and still get to work relatively early". From these examples it can be seen how the anchoring decision he had made enabled daily decision-making in

many incidents of work-family conflict. This was also apparent in his partner's diary entries. For example, on several occasions Lucy was required to work extra hours at times when she also needed to look after the children. This type of conflict tended to be easily resolved by relying on Paul's flexible work arrangements. For instance on an occasion when she needed to work late, at a time when the children needed to be picked up from school, she was able to ask Paul for help reporting that "it really helps that my husband works from home" and on another occasion when she was required to work extra hours she wrote:

> "It really helps if one of you has a flexible working arrangement or works from home a bit. I don't know how we'd manage otherwise; it would be a real struggle"

These examples emphasise the importance that his anchoring decision had on the resolution of work-family conflicts that they both experienced on a daily basis. Conversely, it was also found that anchoring decisions could be the cause of daily conflicts; increasing daily conflict occurrences and/or limiting the options available for conflict resolution. Marissa provided a clear example of this when talking about the impact that her decision to engage in extra studying had on her daily work-family commitments. For instance, she reported an incident where her daughter arrived home from school upset and wishing to talk to her about what had occurred, at a time when Marissa was attending her evening course. In this way her decision to engage in extra studying had created this conflict between her work and being available to speak to her daughter when she returned home from school:

> "Danielle [her daughter] had been upset and didn't get chance to talk to me as I was at college until 7:30 and by this time she had gone to Judo. When Danielle got home from Judo she burst into tears about her day. She had held back until I came home" "If I was home at my normal time Danielle would have had the opportunity to talk to me" "Not sure how to avoid this in the future? I struggle with feeling I should be home more often and definitely home earlier to spend time with my children as they are still very dependent on me"

This example highlights how her anchoring decision not only created this conflict but also meant that such conflicts would continue to be difficult to resolve in the

future. This anchoring decision constrained the options available to her as she had made the commitment to attend this course making her unavailable to her family during those times. A similar example was demonstrated by Carly and Kyle. In their interview, Carly discussed her anchoring decision to take a promotion at work because:

> "...if I have to go back to work I want to go back to a job that satisfies me in terms of a challenge, in terms of the position, in terms of seniority"

This decision meant that she had to increase her working days and an expectation that she would work increased hours and be actively involved with helping her company through a particularly busy period at work due to the acquisition of a new company. Consequently, during such periods, Carly was less able be involved with the nursery run or childcare in the evenings therefore creating greater possibility for work-family conflicts and constraining available options for resolving the conflicts that arose. Examples of the daily impact of this decision could be seen in both their diary entries. For example, Carly reported having to work late therefore being unable collect their son up from nursery, writing that "I don't enjoy it and miss Lewis lots but know it's relatively short-term." In his diary, Kyle, talked about doing the nursery run and being unable to work late because "If it's one of Carly's busy days it's all me." This highlights how her anchoring decision to take a promotion, and be involved in extra work due to this extra responsibility, impacted upon their daily decision-making as a couple, and the subsequent outcomes of this. This further emphasises the interrelated nature of work-family conflict and decision-making within dual earner couples which will be discussed in greater detail in the following section.

5.1.2 Experiences of Decision-Making as Part of a Couple

The individuals in the current study negotiated demands of the work-family interface within the context of a couple. It would, therefore, be expected that this negotiation would be experienced and managed, and the decisions made as a consequence be influenced by, both parties in the relationship. This is apparent from the examples in the previous section where incidents of work-family conflict, the decision-making processes involved in resolving these, and the outcomes of these decisions were

experienced as part of a dynamic interrelationship between the members of a couple. The conflicts experienced and the decisions made, whether together or individually, inevitably affected both parties.

As was highlighted in the previous section, 'Linking Anchoring and Daily Decisions", the decision-making process experienced by one member of a couple, whether regarding anchoring or daily decisions, and the factors involved in this, had an impact on the decision-making process experienced by the other partner. In other words, the factors that were involved in an individual's decision-making process were directly impacted upon by their partner. The lives of the individuals within these couples were intertwined; constraining and enabling factors were inextricably linked and, beyond this, it was not only the individual's own beliefs and values which had an impact on decision-making but also those of their partner. Finally, all outcomes of the decision-making process also had an impact on both members of the couples.

5.1.2.1 Constraining and Enabling Factors Within Couples

As previously discussed, the amount of support available at home acted as either a constraining or an enabling factor when making decisions in incidents of work-family conflict. A significant source of such support within couples came from one another. Subsequently, when an individual reported a work-family conflict, factors such as their partner's job and task flexibility had an impact on decision-making comparable to that of such factors in their own jobs, via availability of support in the home domain. These factors are strongly interrelated and can often be experienced, to differing degrees, by each member of a couple depending, to a large extent, on the relative availability of support offered in each of their places of work. If one half of the couple had a great deal of support available to them in the work domain, but the other did not, then that individual often experienced less support in the home domain, unless they had a great deal of support outside of their dyadic unit. If this was not the case the partner experiencing little support in the work domain was usually dependent upon the support provided by their partner. One example of this was seen in the anchoring decision made by Carly to take a promotion at work, which, as previously discussed, meant an increase in working hours and consequently, particularly at busy periods, that she was less frequently available to

resolve any work-family conflicts. This had a clear impact on both her, and her partner Kyle's, decision-making, with Kyle being required to take on more of the family responsibilities. On a particular occasion Kyle had to stop work to pick his son up from nursery because Carly had to work late and this caused conflict which was expressed in his diary, but not in hers:

> Kyle: "We disagreed and argued but Carly had no choice and I do having my own business (not true!)"

> Carly: "My husband struggled with work as he was having a very busy day and needed more time to work"

This also highlights the impact that decisions made by one partner can have on the other and the tension that can be created due to the complex interrelated nature of resolving work-family conflicts within dual earner couples. It was apparent from Kyle's aside, "not true!", that he felt his decision-making was somewhat unfair and constrained, based on factors which he, perhaps, did not entirely agree with. The negative impact that the decisions made by one partner could have on the other partner was seen throughout participant's diary entries. Another example of this was provided by Dave and Emily when Dave made the decision to carry out extra work in the evenings, mainly due to financial constraints. Writing about this in her diary, Emily said:

> "As this is the second night home alone I do not look forward to being here. The more consecutive night shifts that Dave does the more lonely I feel."

Whether decision-making was constrained by their own job, their partner's job, or general financial necessity, this could lead to negative feelings for at least one member of the couple. This was frequently the case due to the number of possible constraining factors at play when considering those that can arise from either, or both, of the jobs and careers of two interconnected individuals trying to balance work and family life. There were, however, also incidents reported where work-family conflicts were resolved in such a way that the decision-made by one partner, usually a decision to provide support, had a positive impact on the other partner. Here we see how one partner's job can actually act as an enabling factor when making such decisions. For instance, in their diaries both Paul and Lucy discussed

Paul's decision to take the elder two children to school rather than going straight into work. This was despite it being her day off work and he explained that this was so Lucy could focus on looking after their youngest rather than leaving her to organise all three children and that he "was happy to take the children to school". His decision to do this, and his clear willingness to offer support, had a positive impact on his partner, which she expressed in her diary:

> "Thankfully Paul took the kids to school which left time for me to get James ready for mums and tots"

However, she also acknowledged the negative impact that this decision would have on Paul in terms of work:

> "It does mean Paul gets to work later and never gets to start at 8:30am like some of his colleagues do – some even get into the office at 7am!"

The fact that she mentions this here perhaps implies feelings of guilt, particularly as Lucy had previously discussed feelings of guilt in relation to relying on her partner for support elsewhere in her diary. This further demonstrates the real complexity involved in dealing with daily work-family conflicts between members of a couple as it was not only the direct result of the decision made by her partner that had an impact on her, but also her considerations of the impact that this decision had on him. Negotiating work and family within the context of a couple is multi-faceted and involves a range of practical and psychological consequences for those involved.

Although there has been an increase in research investigating crossover effects within couples. (e.g. Westman et. al., 2009; Hammer et. al., 1997; Matthews et. al., 2006), demonstrating that there is indeed a bi-directional transmission of positive and negative emotions, mood, and dispositions, relationship tension and negative health outcomes, between intimately connected individuals such as spouses, there is still relatively little published research using couples as the unit of analysis. The findings presented here point to the critical nature of partner perceptions in understanding an individual's work-family conflict and the interdependence of the dynamics involved in work-family conflict negotiation and resolution. Decisions in incidents of work-family conflict were not made by individuals in isolation, but as part of a dyadic unit. The factors upon which decisions were based were impacted by

both members of the couple and both were subsequently impacted, practically and emotionally, by the decisions made.

5.1.2.2 Considering each other's beliefs, values and Preferences: the importance of congruence?

Decision-making within dual earner couple's also incorporates the beliefs, values and preferences of two individuals. Husbands and wives may have different views of the world, themselves, each other, and how to solve problems. Intuitively, it makes sense that couples with similar beliefs and values would adopt similar approaches to problem solving and decision making therefore increasing the likelihood of more easily arriving at a joint decision with which both parties agreed upon. Kurdek (1993) concluded that couples with different values or attitudes may have difficulties in their relationship because they appraise events from different perspectives. It would follow then, that decisions were more straightforward where there was congruence between individual's beliefs regarding how conflicts should be resolved. This was particularly important when making anchoring decisions since a disagreement at this level of decision-making would be much more fundamental. For example, Anna and Adrian both clearly shared very similar beliefs regarding what it meant to be a good parent in terms of the importance placed on sending their children to nursery due to the opportunities this can provide for them. Their discussion of these beliefs in their interview was raised previously, where Anna highlighted that:

> "I think it's very good for the children to go to the nursery. We are very lucky because we deeply think that it's the best thing for them to spend time with other children and with so many activities, things that we would never do at home.

Her partner Adrian echoed these views:

> "....we prefer the nursery because the contact of the babies with everyone, to different people and also, for instance, English is not our first language and we want them to learn English so as much contact they have with different people, the better."

Dave and Emily also demonstrated shared beliefs and values, in this case these were regarding the importance of financial security and the necessity of extra time spent at work in order to achieve this. The congruence in their beliefs regarding such issues often helped to minimise disagreement on how work-family conflicts should be resolved. For example, when Dave decided to work on his day off he explained that this was due to "....bills and a new garden to pay for" and that "....as a result of working I will be able to treat them all [his family] when I get paid". Emily's diary entry concurred with the values expressed in his, stating that:

> "We need the extra money now that Christmas is fast approaching....Dave's decision to work didn't upset me in any way at all as I understand the need to earn extra money"

Their congruent beliefs and values tended to enable decision-making and help to prevent tension and disagreement during the decision-making process. Other couples also expressed shared beliefs and values regarding what they considered to be involved in good parenting. For example, Neil and Hayley discussed their decision to balance the nursery run between them which was impacted upon by their shared beliefs about the importance of being "hands on" parents. Neil expressed this during their interview:

> "The other factor that is important is that we are both of an equal mind that we both want to be involved in Natalia's formative years or parental relationships, we both want to be parents and that was really important I think. You know is it a sacrifice or reallocation of your priorities or is it a learning experience that erm....why do you have children unless you want to be a parent?"

In this way, they both agreed to balance childcare between them; an agreement which appeared to be the result of a straightforward decision-making process due to their congruent beliefs regarding the importance of this. Unfortunately this was the only couple who did not keep diaries so a daily account of how this worked in relation to daily decision-making was not obtained, however their retrospective accounts of how they dealt with such conflicts echoed their congruent beliefs regarding parenting, and the shared responsibility that this automatically led to. For example, when they discussed how they decided to deal with the conflict of

collecting their daughter from nursery, at times when they both had work commitments, they explained how they took it in turns to rearrange their work commitments. Hayley explained:

> "Some weeks when I really wanted to go to the seminar you left at 5pm and picked Natalia [daughter] up late and some weeks when it didn't matter if I went to the seminar or not, like it was not a topic that...."

It is not clear that this decision would always be such a straightforward one if real time accounts were available, but it does suggest that a pre-established understanding based on congruent beliefs and values regarding parenting made the experience of negotiating daily work-family conflicts more manageable. Both partners expressed a preference to be actively involved with childcare which would often enable daily decision-making in that both parties were willing to offer support in the family domain wherever possible. Joe and Jasmine also emphasised the importance they both placed upon spending time with their children. Joe frequently expressed his preference to spend time with the children, and the value he placed on this. For instance, when discussing occasions when Jasmine's parents were away on holiday, making them unavailable to provide the usual childcare, he clearly expressed that he was happy to take time of work to resolve such conflicts:

> "So if they went on holiday, usually I'd have to take the Tuesday and the Thursday off and spend the day with Ellie which isn't any hardship for me really! I quite enjoy those days."

As a result of these beliefs and values, he and Jasmine appeared to have a fairly equal relationship regarding sharing family responsibilities, which again was beneficial in terms of resolving daily work-family conflicts. However, a possible negative consequence of such equality was that they both appeared to be somewhat conflicted regarding what it meant to them to be a good parent, which caused them both frequent feelings of guilt. For instance Jasmine often expressed the view that she would "feel guilty no matter what choice I make." In one particular diary entry, as previously discussed in relation to beliefs about what it means to be a good parent, Joe expressed what he termed "a bit of a conundrum" in that his "desire to move up the ladder and ultimately earn more money has increased tenfold since having my own family" but that he is "reluctant to do this because I want a good family life."

Jasmine also demonstrated a similar internal conflict in her diary when she wrote about how she sometimes wished she didn't work full-time so she would be able to pick her son up from school or easily speak to his teacher's. When she had difficulty speaking to her son's teacher because of the lack of flexibility in her job she wrote:

> "It also made me wish that I could reduce my hours so that at least a few times a week I could collect, or even drop Jack off, at school so I could do things like speak to his teacher when I need to....Then again my kids want for nothing and I guess I feel happy I can give them what they need through working full-time"

One interpretation of this could be that, in both of them attempting to take on responsibility for both their work role and parental role equally, with neither taking on a gender stereotypical role therefore not engaging primarily with the role of caregiver or provider, they regularly experience such internal conflicts along with the consequential feelings of guilt that they are not achieving enough in either domain. This is possibly an internal conflict experienced by many working couples in a modern society where gender stereotypical roles are becoming less prescribed. Godwin and Scanzoni (1989) suggested that traditional gender role norms prevented the need for much decision-making and negotiating but that contemporary families are moving away from these traditional gender role norms to more contemporary gender role norms which emphasise the importance of the inter-changeability and flexibility of spouses in various roles. An alternative can be seen in those couples who did take on more traditional roles which, in some cases, did appear to obviate the need for much negotiating between spouses when work-family conflict occurred. For example, although Hannah works almost full-time hours, her and her partner Nigel appear to follow fairly traditional roles in terms of her taking on the majority of the family responsibilities and his primary focus being on work. Neither of them appeared to have any qualms with this arrangement and in this way demonstrated congruent beliefs regarding their relative work and family roles. In their interview Hannah discussed this arrangement:

> "He just sort of goes to work and comes home and he doesn't really get involved because his hours are longer than mine so it's easier for me to leave work if necessary than him really."

As previously discussed, Nigel reported very few work-family conflicts in his diary and neither of them expressed conflicting feelings regarding their work and family roles or feelings of guilt. Work-family conflicts tended to be resolved by a pre-established agreement, or perhaps expectation of both parties, that Hannah focused on the requirements of the family, while Nigel focused on paid work. It is important to note, however, that their children were aged eight, fourteen and seventeen and the fact that they no longer had young children to care for could, at least partly, explain some of these findings. Sarah and Adam, who did have young children (aged three and six), reported a similar 'traditional' arrangement with Adam explaining that "Sarah does most of it with the kids" and that if there were work-family conflicts "it's usually Sarah who stays at home." Like Nigel, Adam reported fairly few work-family conflicts in his diary but Sarah reported a great deal more than Hannah, and did express some feelings of conflict between her work and family responsibilities. It appeared, from some of her diary entries, that her beliefs regarding how work-family conflicts should be resolved, and the roles that each of them should play in this, were not necessarily congruent with her partner's. For example, on one occasion she wrote:

> "I can get time off work to look after them, if he doesn't go to work he doesn't get paid so that's the reason in his mind but it stresses me to take time off sometimes because I've got work to do too"

Her statement that "that's the reason in his mind" clearly suggests that this reasoning is not entirely congruent with her own and in expressing that "I've got work to do too" there was the implication that she also valued her work role and would prefer an arrangement that was more equal in terms of their involvement in resolving family issues. Ian and Louise also had a somewhat traditional relationship, despite them both making it clear that they placed great importance on their work roles, because financially he provided more for the family therefore it was agreed upon that his career had to come first. A similar idea is expressed in Resource theory (Blood and Wolfe, 1960) which posited that the partner who commanded the greater amount of material resources would achieve greater power in spousal decision-making. In the current study, rather than influencing decision-making power as such, if one partner provided more for the family financially, this appeared to act as a constraint upon

options for conflict resolution due to their striving to avoid negatively affecting the job, or career, that the family relied upon most. This often led to congruent beliefs about how conflicts should be managed. This was a belief that both Ian and Louise expressed. For example, in one of his diary entries, Ian discussed his view that decision-making in instances of work-family conflicts "boils down to my job being the main breadwinner" and Louise echoed this view in her interview:

> "....at the end of the day, you're (husband) the main breadwinner and you'll always be the main breadwinner and I think.... that's always a factor."

This congruence in beliefs meant that this was a generally accepted, and agreed upon, rule regarding how they both believed that they should deal with daily conflicts. Despite this expressed congruence, their similarities in the value they both placed on work did, at times, appear to cause frustrations on both sides. For instance, when Louise asked Ian to call to make their son's doctor's appointment so that she could get to a meeting Ian wrote that he felt "Hassled at having to do home jobs at work but sorted out after two calls to surgery. Also irritated by their daft booking system" and on another occasion when Louise had to leave work early due to their sons breaking up early for Christmas, she wrote about "Feeling resentful but not at anyone in particular" because she had not managed to do enough work on that particular day.

This suggests that, although she accepted and acknowledged a greater responsibility for childcare due to her partner's higher paid job, the value that she placed on her work role conflicted with this agreement and, because they both placed high value on their roles at work, their similarities in these values could sometimes cause frustrations and tensions when resolving daily conflicts. Such tensions were also seen in other couples where both members placed a great deal of importance on their careers such as Kyle and Carly, who were both trying to further their careers at the time of keeping their diaries. He reported that they "disagreed and argued" about who should stop work to pick their son up from nursery. As opposed to those couples who, at the time of keeping their diaries, placed more value on their parental roles, when both members of a couple were highly focused on their careers this often led to more difficulties in agreement upon how daily conflicts should be resolved and therefore lead to increased tension. It is important to note here that the current

findings rarely demonstrated individuals who could be classed as either work-focused or family-focused, as the majority of individuals tended to place a great deal of importance on their roles in both domains. However, at certain times it might have been said that some individuals *temporarily* placed more value on one role than the others. For example, this could be seen in Carly's focus during a particularly busy period at work, but who generally expressed that she "Love[s] Lewis more than I care about work". Therefore these findings suggest that, at times when both members of a couple were prioritising work and placing a high value upon this domain, decision-making in instances of work-family conflict become more constrained as options for resolution were less readily available.

The diaries kept by Louise and Ian also highlighted the importance of the impact that preferences of one partner had on the other partner's decision-making. Louise demonstrated how there was little choice in taking her partner's values and preferences into account when making decisions when she discussed leaving her work to pick her son up from a concert because she "knew Ian would not go to the carol concert" due to his preference not to attend such events. He supported this contention by writing in his diary that he was "Not prepared to go to cathedral". On another occasion Louise wrote about having to pick the children up from school at the last minute to take them to a concert because Ian had not turned up to take them, again due to his preferences regarding attending this type of event. These examples highlight the impact that the strong preferences of one partner can have on the actions of the other. In this case Louise was left with little choice but to leave her work in order to take care of her family responsibilities. Amy also talked about how her partner's preferences regarding football, and the value he placed on this, impacted upon her experience of work-family conflicts. For example, in one incident she made the decision to play with her son at a time that she should be working because:

> "Keith was watching the football so I knew that although he was keeping an eye on Logan he wasn't really playing with him which meant that he was getting bored.... then I could hear him moaning and crawling around outside the door and knew he needed to play.... I felt bad that he wasn't getting any stimulation and would feel guilty if I left him"

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The value that he placed on football, in conjunction with her beliefs regarding what it meant to be a good parent, and the importance that she placed on these beliefs, consequently led to her experience of work-family conflict, and her decision to take time out of her work to resolve this conflict. Such divergence in beliefs and values could consequently lead to conflict and tension within the couple. Amy expressed that she "felt a tiny bit niggled with my partner at the time." This could be partly due to considerations of fairness within the relationship and the importance of the congruence of their beliefs regarding fairness and turn-taking. As previously discussed in the chapter on fairness judgements, the importance placed on maintaining fairness and equity within a couple often had an impact on decision-making. It would follow that, if one individual within a couple placed more importance on fairness and equality in their relationship than the other this could lead to conflict due to one parties feelings of being under-rewarded. Other examples from Amy's diary further highlighted this, for instance on an occasion where she had provided extra childcare for their son, at a time when she should have been working, so that her partner could rest, she wrote:

> "I felt annoyed when Keith didn't seem at all appreciative for me letting him have the extra sleep and still seemed grumpy and unwilling to take Logan [their son] off me"

There is a clear sense of injustice and that the support provided here was not being acknowledged or reciprocated which further demonstrated the importance of this within a couple and, in particular, highlighted the problems that can arise if there is a lack of congruence regarding beliefs about what is fair and the importance placed on sharing.

When investigating decision-making within dual earner couples it is vital to incorporate the intertwined enabling and constraining factors, and the beliefs, values and preferences, of both individuals. The current findings highlighted that it is not only the individual's work constraints, or lack of such, and their own personal beliefs and values that have an impact on their decision-making, but also, just as importantly, those of their partner. Congruent beliefs and values, regarding how work and family should be managed, generally enabled decision-making and tended to lead to more positive outcomes, as experienced by both partners. It is important to

explore how the decisions made affected both partners, practically and emotionally, if we are to truly understand the decision-making processes involved in negotiating work-family conflicts within couples. These outcomes will not only have an impact upon health, mood, and their relationship, but also on subsequent decision-making.

5.1.3 Gender: Different Experiences?

As well as discussing the experiences of negotiating work-family conflict as part of a couple it is also important to acknowledge the different experiences of decision-making in work-family conflict that can occur for each member of the couples based on their gender. Opportunities for women to work part-time have been available, across a variety of occupations, for over two decades but this solution has not been without problems. For instance part-time and flexible work have been linked to discrimination, low pay and reduced opportunities for promotion (Gatrell 2005, 2007a, Gatrell and Cooper, 2008). In the current research, in all cases bar one, within the couples where one partner worked part-time, it was the woman who reduced her working hours after having children, highlighting how it was still predominantly the woman who took a step back from her career in order to support her family. This concurs with previous research demonstrating that women, more often than men, interrupt their careers when they have children (e.g. Tharenou, Latimer and Conroy, 1994; Abele and Spurk, 2011) with partners returning to more traditional gender roles and that, even in dual-career couples, women more often than men make compromises in favour of their partner's career (Ackers, 2004). Despite this, in the current sample, there were more males with job flexibility than females. However, this could actually be a consequence of women's tendency to interrupt their career progression, and to generally invest less hours in work, in order to raise their family. Such interruptions could limit, or slow down, their career progression. Access to flexible working hours is often more readily available to employees in managerial and professional positions who work long hours (Golden, 2008). Rosenberg (2009) reported that the likelihood of the availability of flexible working hours increases dramatically as workers work more than 40 hours per week and that overall women are somewhat less likely than men to have access to flexible schedules. This indicates that the greater presence of flexible scheduling reported by the males in this study could be explained by their occupation, position and number of working hours.

The men in the current study also tended to express more positive views of flexible working than did the females, with whom such work arrangements were often accompanied by feelings of guilt and stress. As previously discussed, the females who worked flexibly tended to take on the majority of the family responsibilities which "heaped pressure" on them. This was clearly demonstrated by Janet who appeared frequently stressed due to the flexible nature of her job and the constant feeling that she should be attending to responsibilities in both domains. For example, in her diary she discussed an incident when their son was off school ill:

> "If I take annual leave I will be short for the rest of the leave period....But if I work from home I will be stressed as not able to concentrate on either task....Decided that son not too ill so should be able to manage"

Her partner Tim was not discussed in terms of any possible conflict resolution strategies and he did not mention this incident in his diary, highlighting how Janet strived to deal with such conflicts on her own. When it was the woman who had the more flexible job this tended to relinquish their male partners from the majority of the family responsibilities but when it was the male who had greater work flexibility their female partners did not relinquish such responsibility but continued to be actively involved in the home domain on a daily basis. Beyond this, women also tended to take on the role as family organisers meaning that, even when their male partners were participating in family tasks, it was often viewed as the woman's responsibility to organise this involvement. As previously stated, there were very few conflicts recorded in a male participant's diary that were not at least addressed in their female partner's diary; however the instances where women reported a conflict not mentioned by their male partner in his diary were much more frequent. These findings concur somewhat with previous research demonstrating that men tend to receive more support from their spouse than vice versa (e.g. Van Daalen et al, 2005). This was highlighted by comments made by male participants in their interviews such as Tom stating that "Generally when making decisions I just go with what Julie says!", Kyle explaining that "All decisions are Carly basically!", or when Alex was asked about his role as parent, he said "Well, erm, I suppose I just do what I can really." His partner Samantha acknowledged taking on this responsibility stating that "it is me who sorts out the childcare". In his follow-up interview Ben reported that

he had" struggled a little bit" to find many conflicts to report because "Sylvia [his partner] is a born organiser anyway and I just go along with it and go with the flow. Sylvia organises everything."

Despite the numerous reports demonstrating that many of the male participants were actively involved in family tasks, and enabling conflict resolution, by providing their support in the home domain, they tended not to take the initiative when it came to the general organisation that was often involved in the resolution of such conflicts. It was frequently the women who took on the role of organiser in this domain in terms of arranging child care, or exploring how they should manage their children's various activities, and this was the case whether it was a change in their own plans, or the plans of their partner, that triggered the occurrence of the work-family conflict in the first place. In this way the experience of work-family conflict could be very different for females in terms of the amount of pressure and feelings of stress related to dealing with these conflicts. Previous research has implied related differences in the experience of dealing with work-family conflicts for women as compared to men, such as the finding that job stress was related to role conflict more often for women than for men (Greenglass, Pantony and Burke, 1988), and that there was greater difficulty for women than men in achieving control over competing demands generated from the various roles (Duxbury and Higgins, 1991). More recently it has been reported that the relationship between family-work conflict and emotional exhaustion was stronger among female employees as compared to male employees (Posig and Kickul, 2004), and that gender moderates the relationship between family-work conflict and job performance with the relationship being stronger among female employees (Yavas, Babakus, and Karatepe, 2008). The findings of the current study regarding the relative amount of responsibility taken on by women in the home domain, particularly when it is the female who works flexibly, could provide some explanation for such findings and suggests an interesting avenue for future research.

In another diary entry, Janet described a work-family conflict that occurred due to a work call over-running. She was "Panicking when it got to 5:10pm as the kids would be home and Gregory needs to be out again at 5:45pm." However, in Tim's diary

entry it became clear that he was already home from work and able to take their son to his self-defence class without any problem:

> "Janet had a panic because she was late home – no sweat really I took Gregory to self defence and had tea later on"

This implies that she takes on this responsibility even when her partner is available to help. She expressed concern about whether or not her partner would be able to organise this in her absence, saying that she "wondered if Tim would get him out on time" Examples such as this highlight the possibility that, in some cases, women may be reluctant or unwilling, to relinquish their control in the home domain. In their interview, Nick talked about how they were "at least trying to balance out who takes time off work" but that his partner Angela actually "takes more time out of work than I do". When asked further questions about the reasons for this he explained that:

> "She's still obviously at an age where you know she's still very young and attached and Angela's not necessarily wanted to leave her when she's really ill so that sometimes comes into it"

This has been referred to as maternal gatekeeping in the literature (e.g.Allen and Hawkins, 1999; Ferree, 1991; Beitel and Parke, 1998). Rosenbaum and Cohen (1999) noted that there are some cases in the literature which suggest that the stress of working mothers is due to the perception of the effects of outside employment on their role as mothers. Therefore, it could be suggested that some women might perceive a threat to their maternal role; a role which is highly important to their self-concept, and be reluctant to be less involved in this role by sharing the responsibility with their partner. It may also be that women are simply accustomed to taking on this role, leaving less room for input from their partners. Olivia and Ray discussed this in their interview:

> Olivia: But you get ratty but like if it's something to do with Marcus I always think it's my responsibility to do it and he gets ratty because he thinks dads get left out. He always wants to do it so we do argue then, not argue, but we

do disagree. If it's only one of us that can go from school he'll say no I'm going and I say no I'm going! You do though don't you? That's the only time we disagree isn't it really?

Ray: Yeah because I think everything is aimed at mums.

Olivia: Oh he has a big thing about this!

Ray: It used to be mother and baby parking spaces and its mother and baby toilets....

Olivia: You have a big thing about it. You know like when they send forms or something for parents to sign I always just get them out of Marcus' bag and fill them in and he's like why can't I sign it? I'm his dad!

Ray: Why can't I do that? I want to do that!

This not only highlights how, in some cases, women may be inclined to automatically take on this role, leaving little opportunity for their partner's to be involved, but also serves as a reminder regarding the impact that society still has on this gender divide. In many social settings the focus remains on women as carers; or the parent expected to be accompanying the child, which therefore puts restrictions on men who do want to take on this role. A common example of this is restrooms. Women's facilities routinely have baby-changing tables; more often than not, men's restrooms do not, giving a clear indication of who is expected to take parental responsibility (Churchill, 2010).

The previous example given by Nick regarding his partner's reluctance to leave their daughter when she was ill, because their daughter was "still very young and attached [to Angela]" due to the previous amount of time that mother and baby have spent together during maternity leave, touches upon some of the difficulties that can arise in relation to equality between both partners regarding family issues after the focus that maternity leave has placed on the maternal role. This issue was discussed by several participants. Hayley expressed this point of gender division quite clearly in her interview when she said:

"Actually that was it I remember at the point where I was able to take maternity leave and Neil obviously wasn't able to take paternity leave....before that everything had always been just assumed that it would be....suddenly there was this thing where there were one set of rules that kind of applied to me and a different set of rules....that came as a bit of a shock! I think at the time I was a bit taken aback....not intellectually but it just felt different.... And it wasn't just the administrative side because there is a whole physical you know side of nurturing a baby, there is a difference but it was the first time when I'd really felt that there was a difference in our experiences."

Brandth and Kvande (2001) explored the success of paternal leave schemes in-place in Norway by investigating new parent's decisions to take up either; a standardised paternal leave allocation, where fathers receive a single block of 4 weeks leave, or a more flexible system of leave where negotiations are made, between the mother, father and employers, to share the entire parental leave period between the mother and father. This more flexible, system of parental leave was introduced in Norway with the aim of "facilitating opportunities for women to combine work and childcare" (Brandth and Kvande, 2001, pg. 251), to encourage equality, and to "strengthen the father-child relationship" (Brandth and Kvande, 2001, pg. 252). However, their findings demonstrated that the majority of fathers made use of the standardised paternal leave allocation and very few engaged in the more flexible shared parental leave. One of the main reasons given for the limited uptake of this scheme was attitudinal, with mothers who returned to work rather than taking the full parental leave being viewed negatively by others for not being at home with their children and fathers facing similar negative judgements for spending time away from the workplace.

"Mothers returning to work before the maximum leave time is over are met with some suspicion: 'What are they doing at work not being home with their babies?' And fathers risk being defined as part-time workers" (Brandth and Kvande, 2001, pg. 263).

Such findings also offer some insight into why females might be reluctant to give up, or even share, the role as primary carer for their child as this might lead to the

negative judgements of others. Following the same logic, men may fear being judged for not being present in the workplace. Burnett et al (2010) discussed this in terms of the cultural climate which remains fraught with traditional and gendered perceptions of family roles and the validity of long hours and strong workplace presenteeism which will inevitably impact upon the uptake of such policies and the subsequent increase in equality intended by their introduction. They concluded that "A conceptual shift of what it means to be a good father has not yet been widely accommodated" (Burnett et al, 2010, pg. 167). Another study, of stay at home dads, found that thirty-six percent of the stay-at-home fathers surveyed got reactions from other adults reflecting "a general prejudice toward men in traditionally female roles"(Rochlen et al, 2010, pg. 283). The ideas of what it means to be a "good mother" and a "good father" have been internalised over previous generations and still work to maintain traditional gender roles by internal standards and societal norms. Although "conceptual shifts" are underway and ideas about these roles are changing this is a slow and gradual process and currently is still in the transitional stages creating a conflict between the traditional and more modern gender roles, as was succinctly expressed in a diary entry by Joe:

> "Should I be helping out more? Then again I am the main breadwinner. The traditional roles are that the man goes to work and the mother does all this type of stuff. But Jas has a full-time job too"

Two of the couples in the current study recognised the males as the primary carers of their children. For Melanie and Steve this came about due to external circumstances as he was made redundant shortly before their daughter was born. Linda and Edward, who both worked full-time but with the majority of his work carried out flexibly and from home, appeared reluctant to discuss the reasons behind their decision to rely on Edward as the primary carer. In their interview, they frequently appeared defensive in their answers surrounding this topic and when discussing this particular decision Linda said:

> "I will be very honest with you; I think Ed takes more of the responsibility for that. That's a choice that we've made that he takes more of the responsibility because he's the main carer. It's a personal choice. If we could just leave it at that."

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This implication is that such a decision, which goes against traditional gender norms, is still not an easy choice to make due to the parental norms and expectations that remain within our society; or as Crompton and Brockman (2006) explained "centuries of ideological renditions of 'the feminine' and gender socialization and normative expectations, render it extremely likely that women will carry out more care work than men" (Crompton and Brockman, 2006, pg. 119). Although it is clear that we have come a long way, and work and family responsibilities are becoming more equally balanced within many dual-earner couples, there still remain significant gender differences, and biases which help to maintain these.

The experience of dual-earner couples dealing with daily work family conflicts was somewhat different for males and females, impacted by the different gendered expectations placed upon them both internally and externally. It is also important to consider that these daily conflicts, and the subsequent decision-making processes, were experienced within the context of a couple, where the preferences of both members were taken into account, as well as the constraining and enabling factors predicated by each members place of work. Beyond this, daily decisions were experienced in the context of previously made anchoring decisions, which had a continuous impact on the experience of daily decision-making.

5.2 Question Two: How do couples negotiate their work and family responsibilities when they encounter a conflict between the two?

5.2.1 The Importance of Preferences versus Constraints

Decisions were made on a daily basis between work and family tasks and events. As it has been demonstrated here such decisions were initially based around the availability and unavailability of particular options for resolving work-family conflicts in terms of factors which constrained or enabled participant's choices. These factors set the decision-making parameters within which other factors came into play. Within these parameters daily decisions were based upon attempts to maintain fairness and equity in the various relationships involved in both their work

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and family domains. Beyond this the individual preferences of the participants themselves were also permitted some expression in the decision-making process.

There is a debate in the current sociology literature regarding the impact of preferences on the work-life choices that people make. According to Crompton and Harris (1998) two key theoretical positions can be identified in this literature. The first stresses the importance of structural constraints on women's employment opportunities, which still persist (e.g. Crompton and Harris, 1999, Morehead, 2005), and the other places greater importance on individual preferences (e.g. Hakim, 1998, 2002, 2003). The considerable debate that has emerged between these two positions was mainly developed in response to Hakim's work on "preference theory" (Hakim, 1998, 2003, 2006). This theory emphasises individual preferences and argues that it is these, rather than structural constraints, that have significantly impacted upon women's work-lifestyle choices. This theory states that women can be broadly fitted into one of three categories; work-orientated; describing those who are mainly committed to work rather than motherhood and family and whom, if they have children, will delegate childcare to others, adaptive; describing those who combine work and family life but will not be totally committed to their career, and home-centred; those who prioritise family life and children, being full-time homemakers. The implication of the differentiation between these three groups is that there are substantial differences between the priorities and values of those within each group. It is important to note that Hakim does not claim that constraints have no impact on decision-making but that "Preferences are *becoming more important* than they were in the past, when economic necessity was usually the driving force, and they are most important among highly educated women in rich modern societies" (Hakim, 1998, p. 140).

The main emphasis in much of the literature is on the predominance of structural constraints, suggesting that women are unable to make their work-lifestyle choices according to their own preferences because they are restricted by existing structures, which have an exclusionary effect and may also lead to work-life balance issues (Gallhofer et al, 2011). For example, family-friendly policies and organisational cultures may reinforce the gender divide by the continued existence of particular work-family discourses. Even where organisational discourses are intended to be

gender neutral there is evidence that gendered conceptions predominate (Smithson and Stokoe, 2005). Crompton et al. (2003) recognise that women tend to take most responsibility for childcare but argue that this does not mean that they have chosen to do so, as this so-called choice has been structured by a lack of alternatives. Tomlinson (2006) highlights that women work full- and part-time at various stages, therefore making it problematic to associate each individual with a particular static work orientation. She argues that women's perceived choices are structured by available support networks, work status and welfare policies as well as preferences. This suggests that the choices made by women cannot be explained simply as a function of their work and career orientation, but are more complex.

Based on the findings of the current study I would argue that both constraints and preferences have an impact on decision-making in relation to work-family conflicts. This view has been highlighted more recently in the literature. For example, Gallhofer et al (2007) conducted qualitative questionnaires and interviews on Scottish female chartered accountants and concluded that it was the interplay between structures and personal preferences that determined women's work-lifestyle choices, rather than the dominance of either, and that neither an emphasis on structural constraints, nor an emphasis on preferences, could provide a holistic picture of the complexities involved in women's work-lifestyle choices. Beyond this, the present findings suggest that, while preferences and values play a rather large and important role in anchoring decisions, although still within the confines of constraints, preferences have only a minor direct impact on daily decision-making. Daily decisions tended to be mainly affected by factors which either constrained or enabled decision-making, yet it is also important to remember that these decisions were made within the context of the previously made anchoring decisions. This suggests that the impact of preferences on daily decision-making was mainly via the impact they had on original anchoring decisions rather than having a prominent direct impact. This will be discussed in greater detail shortly; in a section exploring the differential impact of the various factors on anchoring, and daily, decision-making.

5.2.2 Applying Pre-existing Strategies

Previous research has reported that individuals and couples often cope with daily work and family responsibilities by developing routines in advance regarding how they will respond to work-family conflicts that arise daily (Medved, 2004). In relation to this, many examples of pre-established routines were described by participants in terms of strategies that they relied upon to negotiate and resolve daily work-family conflicts. These included routines in communication within couples, reciprocal arrangements both within, and externally to, the couple, as well as pre-established hierarchies of available resolution options. Each of these will now be addressed in turn.

5.2.2.1 Organisation and planning ahead

The importance of organisation and planning, as well as the communication necessary between the individuals within the partnership in achieving this, in order to minimise and quickly resolve work-family conflicts was discussed by a number of participants. This communication varied between couples, whether it involved regular joint discussions and decision-making, or plans made by the female, taking into account the work responsibilities of both partners, and conveying these plans to her partner (Please refer to the previous section on gender differences in the experience of negotiating work-family conflict). Organisation and advanced planning could be viewed as a strategy in itself, as well as a means of organising other strategies to enable the successful management of work and family responsibilities. Planning and organising their time as a couple was a way in which couples strived to fulfil responsibilities in both domains, for which regular communication between the partners was vital. It was apparent that many of the couples engaged in regular discussions with one another regarding the arrangements for the following day, month, or even the whole year, in order to assess both of their work responsibilities as well as their joint family responsibilities. In this way they could assess any possible areas of conflict and negotiate resolutions. Ian explained how each morning they "quickly note who has fixed responsibilities that day" and Linda talked about them being "quite organised because we have to sit down and work out where Ed is; where his role requires him to be at a set time in a certain place and likewise with me." There is a focus, in such examples, on the discussions within the couples which enabled their strategy to plan ahead. For a number of the

couples a great deal of emphasis was placed upon communication between the two partners in order to achieve this organisation. This came across in numerous diary entries reporting how upcoming work-family conflicts were managed. For example, in one of his diary entries, Nick described how he and his partner Marissa "talked about the possibilities and what was the best solution for the children" when addressing the problem of who would take the children to school when Marissa was away with work. On another occasion he wrote about his son's school festival conflicting with their work time reporting a similar discussion with his partner in order to reach a resolution:

> "We talked about who was going as someone always attends. Marissa couldn't make it so I had to ask work to have time off"

There was a clear emphasis placed on communication within this couple as a means of resolving any possible work-family conflicts. Other couples also followed a similar pattern using regular communication and joint planning as a strategy in dealing with daily conflicts. Paul and Lucy provided a clear example of this focus on communication. Paul explained how they

> "....discuss the plans for the day at breakfast and speak at various times throughout the day to organise who can pick up the children and who needs to stay at work".

This pattern was demonstrated throughout his diary entries which often included references to phrases such as "We talked in the morning and...." Amy described a similar explanation regarding how her and her partner managed their daily work and family responsibilities, but with an emphasis on more advanced planning:

> "We check both our diaries in advance and try to make plans and negotiate it between ourselves. We are lucky because if we are struggling and both need to do something work-related my mum and dad will usually look after Logan. Like days I have to go into the office, and obviously Keith is working, then I can plan that in advance and book it in with my mum to look after her."

This highlights the importance of such planning ahead in dealing with any conflicts set to arise as it maximises the possibility of available support options. The implication here is that Amy's mum would have been more likely to be available to

resolve any conflicts, which they could not easily resolve between the two of them, if her help had been requested in advance. Sylvia took such advanced planning one step further and organised their responsibilities for the entire year based on her's, and her partner's, work schedules as well as their daughter's school timetable:

> "What we do is at the beginning of the year, I have a calendar and I write down all the holidays at the beginning of the year and what he has to take off and what I take off and then he takes them in work straight away. Only when it's her holidays, you know when its half term etc and we work it out like that and make sure he's got a few days left so that he can take them when he wants so he's not just taking it because he's got to and I'm the same aren't I?...Yeah that's what I do; I get her holiday patterns and plan it. I think you have to be organised."

These examples demonstrate how couples managed work and family responsibilities using organisation and planning in order to balance all of their responsibilities between them, and, where this was not possible, to allow them the time to make alternative arrangements. The following section will explore the balancing of responsibilities between individuals within a couple, and with others, in greater detail.

5.2.2.2 Reciprocal arrangements and turn-taking

Another important strategy that couple's used to resolve daily work-family conflicts involved building, and maintaining, agreements of mutual reciprocation with others. Couples often had such prearranged agreements with others as a way of dealing with daily conflicts. This was most frequently seen within the couples themselves as a turn-taking agreement between the partners but was also seen externally with other parents.

Examples of pre-established routines that were frequently discussed by participants manifested themselves as reciprocal agreements, between partners within the couples, which involved taking turns when conflicts arose. For example, taking turns to take time out of work when their children were sick or during school holidays. Lucy and Paul frequently relied upon a pre-established agreement regarding turn-taking behaviour to resolve, or even avoid, work-family conflicts in their daily lives.

They both reported the conflict between dropping their baby off with her family in the mornings and getting to work at a reasonable time so that they could fulfil their hours, on an almost daily basis. However, this was always quickly resolved by a pre-established agreement that they would take it in turns to drop their youngest child off with family members, therefore also taking it in turns to arrive a little later at work. This turn-taking extended to other conflicts such as when their son broke his ankle and they alternated who would take time out of work to take him to his hospital appointments.

> Lucy: "Paul had taken him to the initial hospital appointment so I wanted to take him this time, and this allowed Paul to get a full day's work in!"

> Paul: "I was ready to take some time off if required. If I had to take time off I would need to build it back up later"

Carly and Kyle reported a very similar pattern of turn-taking with regards to dropping their son Lewis off at nursery on their way to work. When Carly had taken him to nursery on the previous day she asked partner to take Lewis to nursery because "I couldn't be late for work again" and Kyle agreed to do the nursery run that morning because Carly had done it the previous day and was collecting him from nursery that evening:

> "Carly would feel hard done by to do drop off and pick up as well as cooking dinner and full night time routine with Lewis"

As well as helping couples to negotiate daily conflicts with greater ease, the reports of such reciprocal agreements suggested a desire to maintain feelings of fairness and mutual trust within the couples; creating a desire to offer their support to one another to resolve such conflicts in the future and therefore maintaining this reciprocation. For example Tom reported how he and his partner "always cover each other anyway". Godwin and Scanzoni (1989) found that the more often people participate in actual give-and-take dynamics, the more they are likely to concur with whatever behavioural arrangements emerge from that give-and-take and therefore the more stable those arrangements are likely to be. In this way this becomes the norm for couples who rely on this strategy to negotiate their daily work family conflicts. Neil and Hayley also talked about turn-taking with regards to feelings of fairness in their

interview when discussing their pre-arranged agreement to take turns attending conferences:

> Neil: Well I mean there are conferences that we both attend because of shared interest but I think what we decided, if I'm not mistaken, is that one of us would choose....we would agree that only one of us could go and I suppose that then you just say well you know I did it last time so why don't you go this year.
>
> Hayley: I think we take turns.
>
> Neil: Turn-take, well you know not in a strict....
>
> Hayley: Yeah, not like you've had 2....
>
> Neil: Yeah I've kept a record here and I've noticed that you've got 25% more trips away than me so I think for the next year I should get exclusive rights (Laughing). No I think a sense of fairness is not....a sense of fairness doesn't come from a numerical measure strictly, it's one insight.... But it's just a sense of fairness.

This agreement to take turns, and the associated feelings of fairness, have an impact upon daily decision-making by laying down unwritten rules based on equality, as discussed in the previous section on considerations of fairness and equity. Once agreed upon within the couple, either explicitly or otherwise, it was these internalised rules which prescribed and maintained the turn-taking behaviour. And, as long as this was accepted by both members of the couple as the way that daily conflicts should be managed, these rules could enable decision-making. Gouldner (1960) posited that people often live up to their obligations, not simply because of mutual dependency, but also because they both share the higher level of moral norms stating that "You should give benefits to those who give you benefits" Gouldner suggests that the motivation for reciprocity not only comes from sheer personal gratification but also from the internalization of the norm of reciprocity which morally obliges a person to return benefits received. This suggests that moral obligation to return received benefits are at least as motivating as self-interested exchange. This implies that the moral beliefs held by individuals, as well as the

congruence of these beliefs within a couple, are important and have the ability to constrain, enable and otherwise influence their interactions (Etzioni, 1988).

This type of agreement between individuals also extended to mutually reciprocal relationships outside of the family unit. For instance, in her interview, Sylvia talked about an arrangement that she had with another mum at her daughter Fiona's school whereby they would collect each other's daughters from school on occasions where either of them were unable to leave work on time:

> "It got like a pattern at one stage where I'd pick Hannah [friend's daughter] up for her and she'd pick Fiona up for me."

Linda and Edward had a similar arrangement with the mother of their son's friend. They talked about asking her to look after their son on an occasion when they were both out at work one day during the summer holidays. Linda explained that:

> "We often have reciprocal arrangements with other parents, who are also working full-time or part-time, and in the summer in particular we help each other out....We have often looked after their children and we have an "arrangement" whereby we reciprocate with childcare. In July we had their children for a whole day so we did not feel awkward asking them to help out."

It is clear from this example that this agreement, and their previous act of offering support, enabled support seeking in such instances. Just as with the turn-taking agreements within the couples, these relationships were based on, and maintained by, feelings of fairness and equity. In order for the participants to feel comfortable seeking support from friends there must usually be such a mutually beneficial relationship in place where they could restore the balance by offering support themselves. Therefore, such relationships take work to maintain meaning that this strategy of dealing with incidents of work-family conflict is not used by everyone. For example, Emma explains how she would not be comfortable relying on this strategy to resolve conflicts because she is not able to offer much help in return:

> "Difficult to get friends or neighbours to help out and I find if difficult to ask when I am limited in what I can offer in return."

Although Sylvia did have such an arrangement with another parent from her daughter's school she still expressed feelings of discomfort in relying upon this relationship in circumstances which might be viewed as beyond what was expected within the prearranged agreement. For example, on a particular occasion when she was deciding how to resolve the conflict between collecting her daughter from school and attending a work-related course she discussed relying upon this parent to help:

> "The parents have said it's fine but I don't feel I could do that – say it's a three or four day course – I don't feel like I could do that"

However, she subsequently decided to rely on the help offered since the parent expressed her willingness and she was limited in other available options but she still expressed feelings of guilt and concern regarding relying on others:

> "I felt really guilty about it. The parents were alright about it actually, I think that's just me because I never like to rely on people, I'd rather do it myself really but sometimes you just can't can you? But they were very good."

As previously discussed, seeking support from others, particularly non-family members, incurred feelings of indebtedness due to internalised rules regarding equity, equality and fairness. The acceptance of support implies the obligation to provide future support; therefore an individual may be unwilling to accept support if reciprocation is impossible or unwanted (Shumaker and Brownell, 1984). This meant that, while such reciprocal arrangements with other parents could be an effective strategy for some as a means of dealing with daily work-family conflicts, for others it could be unmanageable. Even for those who did find this strategy beneficial it could, at times, entail feelings of guilt and stress due to concerns regarding inequity. The specifics of moral obligations such as how much and how soon you should reciprocate are vague. Individuals must interpret and resolve this ambiguity in a way as to balance their own needs and interests with moral obligations and sometimes to resolve conflicts between moral principles themselves (Etzioni, 1988). From this perspective engaging in such reciprocal relationships is fraught with moral issues and dilemmas that the individual must resolve in the context of the actual social relationship. Consequently reciprocity norms may limit the amount of support sought or accepted.
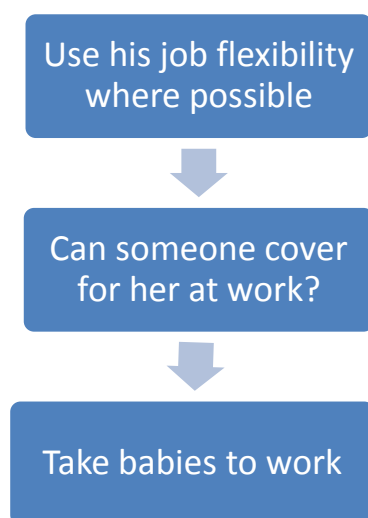
5.2.2.3 Pre-established Hierarchies

All participants reported having some degree of previously established arrangements in place which they could call upon in daily incidents of work-family conflict. These were usually in the form of hierarchies of support options; where those options that were preferred were at the top of the hierarchy, progressing down to those support options that would only be relied upon as a last resort. Such hierarchies were used by couples when resolving many of their work-family conflicts. For example, Marissa explained this in relation to the conflict regarding whether to attend her children's school events during working hours:

> "You have this process where you think I can't go, right Nick can't go, mum can't go, who can go? Then you go through the guilt and then I end up somehow trying to get the time off."

The number of levels in the hierarchies varied between the couples depending upon the different options for conflict resolution they had available to them in terms of both the supportiveness of both individuals place of work as well as the amount of available external support in the home domain. Those couples who did not have support from extended family or friends tended to have smaller hierarchies with fewer levels. However, the number of levels given in each hierarchy did not provide the whole picture; the qualities of each of these levels were of equal importance. For example, as previously discussed, Anna and Adrian did not have any family in the UK and had fairly inflexible jobs which severely limited their available options. Adrian was sometimes able to work from home, or leave work early, as he was in a management position giving him a little more freedom, but this was very much dependent upon the particular circumstances of his work at any given time. Anna was only able to leave work if her boss could provide cover for her, which was not always possible. She explained that "If he [Adrian] can't [work from home] the last resort is to call my boss and say can someone cover for me" This was only the second available option in their hierarchy and was described as being "the last resort". Despite this they both discussed a final option; taking the babies to work

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with them, which was clearly an option that was far from ideal. In this case their decision-making hierarchy would have only three levels, all of which were very tentative and two of which would be described as being last resorts! Their hierarchy is shown in figure 2.
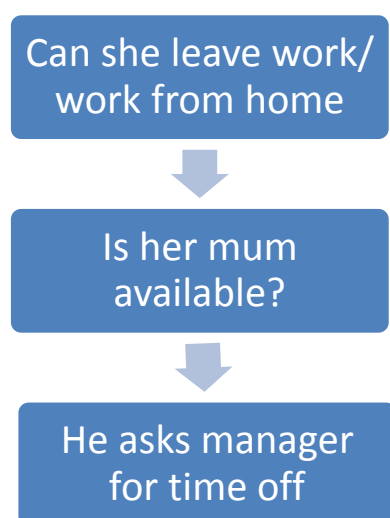

Figure 2. Anna and Adrian's pre-established hierarchy showing three levels of available resolution options

This not only highlights the importance of the number of levels in each couples hierarchy, but also the importance of looking at the nature of each of these levels in terms of their relative certainty as well as how happy the couples would be in relying upon each of these options. In their diaries, each conflict reported was accompanied by reports of feelings of guilt and stress. For example, Anna reported that she was "tired, exhausted, sad, feeling guilty for not being able to give them [her children] what they need" after having to wake her children up before they were ready so that she could get to work on time, or on another occasion reporting that "we feel terribly guilty because we cannot stay at home". Each hierarchy, and the levels within it, could be described as being more or less tentative than others, making the resolution of work-family conflicts more or less problematic and stress-inducing. This was highlighted further when comparing the decision-making of other couples who also described hierarchies with only three levels. For instance, Mary and Nathan discussed how she would usually work from home, or take time off work, in such instances unless there was something particularly important at work in which case they would seek support from her mother. If she was unavailable Nathan would take

time off work. Nathan described how this process would work if their daughter was ill:

> "If nursery say she's ill you need to come and pick her up and you had a really important meeting and you couldn't get away and your mum wasn't available because she was away then I'd just go to the boss and say my daughter's ill I've got to go."

```
┌─────────────────────┐
│  Can she leave work/ │
│   work from home     │
└─────────────────────┘
          ↓
┌─────────────────────┐
│     Is her mum       │
│     available?       │
└─────────────────────┘
          ↓
┌─────────────────────┐
│   He asks manager    │
│    for time off      │
└─────────────────────┘
```

Figure 3. Mary and Nathan's pre-established hierarchy also showing three levels of available resolution options

In the case of Mary and Nathan, although they also only discussed three available options when conflict scenarios arose, each option tended to be much more certain. This was due to her "job being quite flexible and they tend to be quite lenient" as well as her mother's expressed willingness to offer her support, reassuring them that "well I'm around, don't worry" which Mary explained meant that they felt as though they had "got this backup". Even their last resort option; Nathan taking time off work, was somewhat assured because his manager was "quite flexible when it comes to that". On a specific occasion where they did rely on this "last resort" option Nathan reported that:

> "He's alright if you're alright with him so he just said don't clock on and basically he paid me for an hour and a half when I wasn't there which is nice."

The majority of the conflicts reported by this couple were not accompanied by reports of negative feelings or consequences and were a stark contrast to those reported by Anna and Adrian highlighting the importance of looking beyond the number of levels in a person's hierarchy.

It was clear that these hierarchies were established within the boundaries of generally available support options and the availability of each support option in the hierarchy was then taken into account in each specific incident. As can be seen from the previous examples, options in the hierarchy are possibilities which can sometimes be relied upon but are not always available in every specific incident. Anthony described the process which he and his partner went through when resolving work-family conflicts explaining that they look at "who can't do it and then sort of work back to the worst case scenario". This implies a hierarchy of options which is clearly already in place in order for them to be able to work through those options, starting with the most preferred and culminating with those options which would be considered a last resort, to assess which are available in that particular scenario. As well as the simple availability of the support other issues, such as the deemed appropriateness of each support option or fairness considerations, had an impact upon where in the hierarchy that particular option would be situated. The position of the support options situated in the middle of the hierarchy often had some degree of flexibility with regards to each particular work-family conflict incident. For example, Dave discussed his decision-making in relation to whether or not to work on his day off:

> "First I check if Christina is working on the night. If she is we try and find someone to look after the kids. This is normally the mother-in-law or sister-in-law."

This pattern of support seeking suggests a clear hierarchy, and this was seen throughout both his, and his partner, Emily's, diaries. In incidents of work-family conflict where Emily was unavailable due to work commitments they tended to seek support from her sister or her mother. These two support options appeared to be interchangeable, almost in a turn-taking manner, so that support was sought from both her mother and her sister in relatively equal frequency. The following diagram gives a picture of the basic hierarchy used by Dave and Emily in their daily decision-

making. The larger arrows represent how the ordering of the hierarchy frequently
changed during specific conflict incidents.
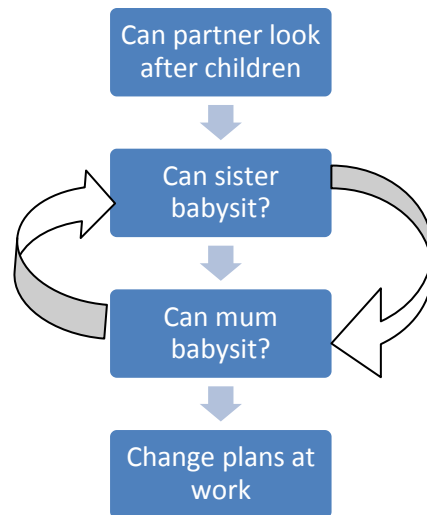
Figure 4. Emily's and Dave's pre-established hierarchy demonstrating the interchangeable nature
of the middle levels depending on specific circumstance.

However, there were particular occasions where this was not the case due to
considerations of fairness. For example, on an occasion when they also had other
children staying at their home, not only did the ordering of their hierarchy shift, but
one level was entirely removed due to them deeming it an unfair and inappropriate
request to seek support from her seventeen year old sister as this would mean that
she was responsible for four young children. In this case her mum was unavailable
therefore Emily decided to go into work late:

> "Had no choice as there are four kids in the house so it's difficult to get my
> sister to come over as it's a big responsibility"

This demonstrates the flexible nature of these predefined hierarchies. They were
predefined in that there were a certain number of options that people generally had
available to them when faced with conflict between work and family, and there was
a general ordering to these options. However, they could be modified based on the
specific circumstances of each particular incident. These modifications were made
based on the factors previously discussed as having an impact on daily decision-
making. Participants expressed how they worked through these hierarchies quickly

and almost automatically when conflict situations arose. For example, Julia explained:

> "I suppose it is just the automatic decision to ask my mum as that's the first point of contact for my children but I do have a couple of friends who have and can help out willingly."
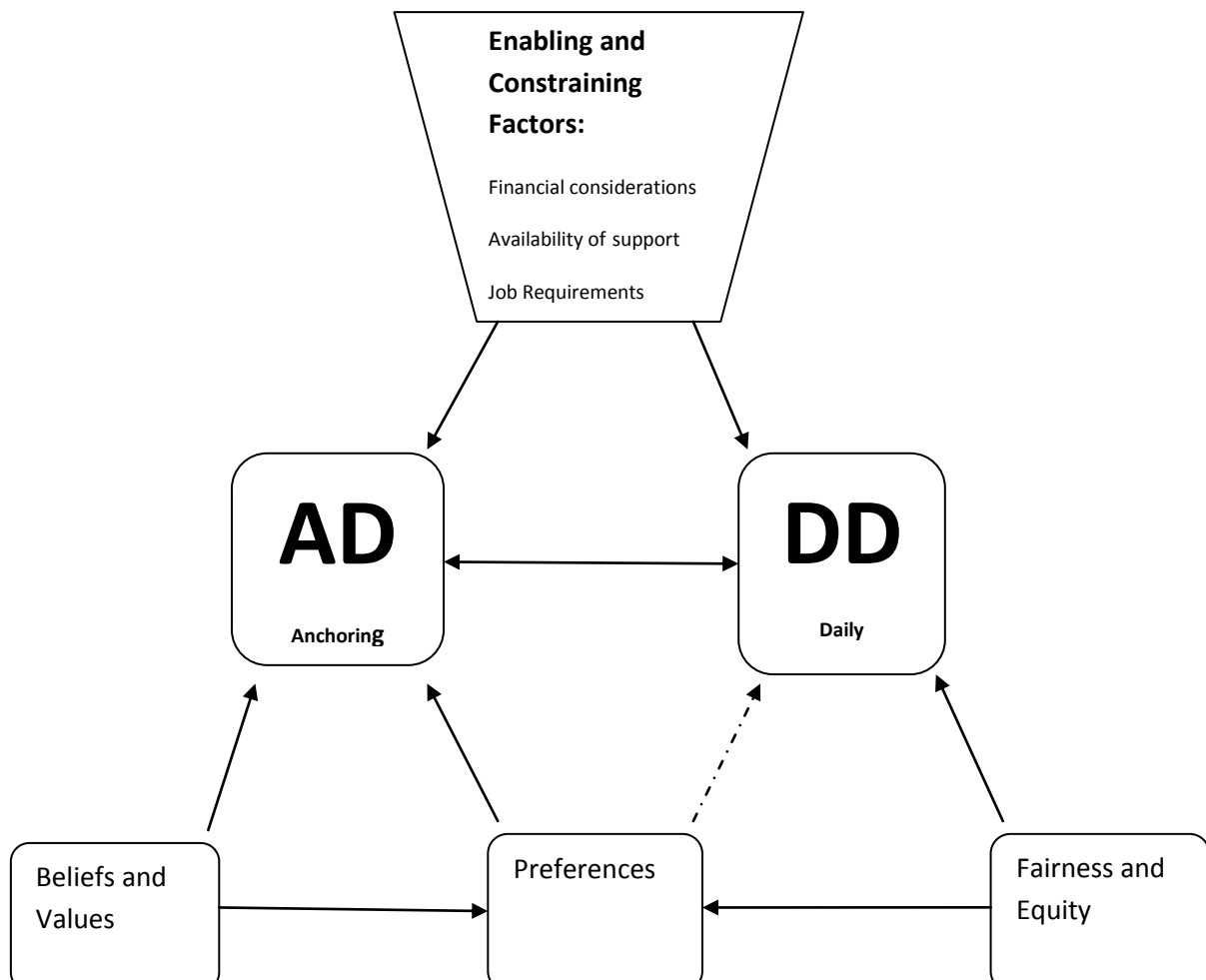
The hierarchies were frequently worked through automatically because they were used in such a regular manner in daily decision-making. It was because these were daily incidents, occurring regularly, that these hierarchical templates already existed, whereas no such pre-established hierarchies were mentioned in relation to anchoring decisions. The following section proposes a general framework for decision-making in incidents of work-family conflict describing the factors involved in moving through these pre-established hierarchies. The framework also incorporates factors which impacted both anchoring and daily decision-making, proposing links between the two types and further exploring the similarities and differences between them.

The strategies discussed here were not in any way mutually exclusive; many of the couples combined all three strategies as a means of dealing with their daily work-family conflicts. Rather, when putting these strategies into practice, they actually worked together to enable decision-making in such incidents by increasing the number of conflict resolution options available to the participants. For instance, forward planning and organisation could mean that the higher layers of pre-established hierarchies were more likely to be available therefore making conflict resolution easier and more satisfactory. Concurrently, having reciprocal agreements in place with others would increase the number of options in a couple's hierarchy, meaning an increase in the support options available to them. In fact, advanced planning and organisation was generally a pre-requisite to establishing such reciprocal agreements in the first place. The emphasis in all three strategies was on being prepared for the occurrence of possible conflicts. Couples were aware of the daily conflicts that were likely to arise and strived to have contingency plans in place for every eventuality resulting in decision-making in each specific incident of work-family conflict being more efficient and readily resolvable and in this way enabling decision-making. The couples often negotiated their work and family responsibilities by relying upon such pre-existing strategies.

The following section describes a decision-making framework which endeavours to explain how couples generally made decisions when faced with each specific incident of work-family conflict. This framework can also provide an explanation for how participants made decisions regarding whether or not to rely on previously established reciprocal agreements or how they arrived at a particular resolution option in their pre-established hierarchy in any given work-family conflict scenario.

5.2.3 A Framework

In answering the question regarding how couples make decisions when faced with incidents of work-family conflict I have created a framework describing the factors which had an impact on the decisions made by participants in the current study and how these factors interacted with one another to reach a conclusion. This framework is informed by cultural and societal assumptions which include gender norms and institutional arrangements around childcare. It is also important to note that based on the findings reported here; it would be implausible to attempt to propose a set model of how this process occurs as it is far too complex and varied to be defined by a linear step by step model.

Enabling and Constraining Factors:

Financial considerations

Availability of support

Job Requirements

AD

Anchoring

DD

Daily

Beliefs and Values

Preferences

Fairness and Equity

In answering the research question, the focus is on daily decision-making however it is important to remember that these decisions were made in the context of previously made anchoring decisions. The Left-Right arrow between the anchoring decisions and the daily decisions represents the link previously discussed in the section 'Linking Anchoring and Daily Decisions'. This bi-directional arrow demonstrates the findings that, not only were daily decisions affected by anchoring decisions which had been made previously, but anchoring decisions could also be affected by daily decisions. While anchoring decisions had both a constraining and an enabling effect on daily decisions, these daily decisions could also accumulate in a way that resulted in anchoring decisions being made in an attempt to improve their daily experiences.

This framework also incorporates how both anchoring and daily decisions were impacted upon by enabling and constraining factors; namely the availability of finances and/or support and job requirements, as well as by personal preferences. However, the arrow linking preferences to daily decisions is shown as a dashed arrow to represent the somewhat weaker direct affect that preferences were seen to have on daily decision-making. The relative importance of both of these factors on decision-making was discussed in the Constraints vs. Preferences section. The current findings led to the conclusion that both constraining factors and preferences played a part in decision-making, which was true for both anchoring and daily decision-making. The personal preferences of the participants were able to have an impact on decision-making only within the context of the constraining factors present at any given time, and were mentioned very infrequently as having an impact on daily decision-making. Preferences were impacted upon by the more enduring beliefs and values of a person which extended beyond preferences; a link which is represented by the rightwards arrow between the two. However, such beliefs and values were expressed as having an impact on decision-making at the level of anchoring decisions, rather than directly impacting daily decisions. For example, beliefs surrounding what it means to be a 'good parent' were discussed in relation to anchoring decisions, rather than daily decisions. This is not to say that such beliefs and values did not have an impact on daily decision-making but rather that this impact appeared to be indirect, via anchoring decisions. In the reports of their daily decision-making processes participants did not mention deep rooted beliefs and

values but tended to focus more on practical issues and necessities such as financial factors, the necessary requirements of their job, and the availability and suitability of support on that particular occasion. Preferences themselves were discussed relatively infrequently as compared to other factors taken into consideration when making daily work-family decisions, and when they were cited as having an impact on such decisions it tended to be in relation to the desire to spend time with their children. Overall, beliefs, values and priorities were discussed to a substantially greater extent in relation to anchoring decisions, as compared to daily decisions, suggesting that such consideration were permitted, or focused upon, to a greater extent when making larger scale decisions which would have an enduring impact on daily life for the foreseeable future. These decisions created the framework within which their family lived their lives and made their day to day decisions. Once this framework was in place, beliefs and values tended not to play a part in the decisions made on a daily basis but were, at the same time, impacted indirectly by those beliefs and values which had helped to form the context created by the anchoring decisions previously made, within which all subsequent daily decision-making occurred.

 Considerations of fairness and equity tended to be reported during daily decision-making. It was clear that these considerations affected preferences, to some extent, in that participants preferred to resolve work-family conflicts with solutions that maintained fairness and equity for all those involved. The leftwards arrow represents how these considerations had an impact on preferences regarding which of the available options to use to resolve a particular conflict. Such considerations were not discussed in relation to anchoring decisions which could be due to a more general focus on actual availability of support, along with a focus on their own beliefs and values on the scenario, when making more general, anchoring decisions. A greater focus on such details may be more amenable to specific work-family conflict incidents as with the decisions that were made on a daily basis, where issues of fairness in each specific scenario would perhaps be more likely to be at the forefront of the minds of those making these decisions.

It is also important to consider that the substantial amount of detail discussed by participants in relation to support seeking in daily decision-making processes, including considerations of fairness and equity, could also be testament to the use of the diary methodology employed here; demonstrating the greater depth that is

uncovered when using a non-retrospective and longitudinal approach. The decision to seek support in an attempt to resolve daily work-family conflicts was revealed as a complex process with many different aspects considered; from the flexibility of others jobs and their willingness to offer support, to the impact of using the available support on their children and the expected repercussions that accepting support would have on the participants themselves. It is possible that such complexity regarding support seeking would have been discussed in relation to anchoring decisions if a longitudinal approach that captured events as they happened could also have captured these decision-making processes. This could be an avenue to be explored by future research.

Chapter 6: Conclusion

6.1 Introduction

The novel methodological approach used here allowed for a more in-depth understanding of the dynamics involved in managing work-family conflict on a daily basis. The majority of past research has focused on antecedents and consequences of work-family conflict which are generally objective characteristics of the individual, their family, or their work (Zedeck, 1992). Less attention has been given to trying to understanding the daily dynamics that occur when dealing with incidents of work–family conflict. The episodic approach in conjunction with a qualitative, longitudinal design enabled an in-depth exploration of specific conflict incidents as they occurred allowing for the beginnings of new discoveries into exactly how these incidents are experienced, negotiated, and resolved on a daily basis, as well as building up a picture of the pattern of such daily events over-time. The use of both couples and individuals as the units of analysis further enabled this understanding; revealing what actually transpires in work-family conflict events, by having two perspectives of the same event. This allowed exploration of the interdependence of the decision-making process, beyond the previously identified existence of cross-over effects between partners in incidences of work-family conflict (e.g. Streich, Casper and Salvaggio, 2008; Matthews et. al., 2006). In these ways the findings reported here provide a more comprehensive understanding of the actual dynamics involved in resolving work-family conflict as reported by the participants themselves. This research moves away from a static levels approach looking at the causes and consequences associated with work-family conflict, and towards a more dynamic investigation of exactly how these conflicts are experienced and resolved.

In doing this, the current research has made three major contributions to the current work-family literature. Firstly, a distinction between two different types of decision-making was revealed. Secondly, the complexity of decision-making in incidents of work-family conflict was made explicit. This includes the uncovering of new factors which had an impact on the process, the greater complexity of previously established factors, and the discovery of internal decision-making strategies used by participants in resolving conflicts, such as the existence of pre-established hierarchies and reciprocal arrangements with others. This led to the development of a decision-

making framework demonstrating the way in which couples deal with conflict. Finally, the current research also makes an important methodological contribution. This concluding section will discuss each of these important new insights in turn and will conclude with a discussion of limitations of the current research, recommendations for future research, and personal reflections on the research process.

6.2 Anchoring Decisions and Daily Decisions: The Distinction

Through the analysis of the data, a clear distinction between two different kinds of decisions, which I have referred to as anchoring decisions and daily decisions, became apparent. Anchoring decisions; the major decisions demonstrating the overall approach to work-life balance taken by the couple, provided a framework within which daily decisions were made. Furthermore, various factors had a differential impact on these different types of decisions. An important two-way link between these two types of decision-making was also found; where recurring problems in daily decision-making led to anchoring decisions being made and anchoring decisions inevitably had an impact upon future daily conflicts and decision-making in that they created an overall strategy for how couple's managed their daily work and family commitments.

6.3 The Complexity of Decision-Making

6.3.1 New Cues and New Insights

A detailed picture of the factors that had an impact on real life decision-making processes was developed enabling new insights into previously reported decision-making factors. The ability of the research methods used here to access the participant's own voices also meant that new cues not previously found in the literature were uncovered. Decisions were made on a daily basis between work and family tasks and events. Such decisions were initially based around the availability and unavailability of particular options for resolving work-family conflicts in terms of factors which constrained or enabled participant's choices. These factors set the decision-making parameters within which other factors came into play. Within these parameters daily decisions were based upon attempts to maintain fairness and equity in the various relationships involved in both their work and family domains. Beyond

this the individual preferences of the participants themselves were also permitted some expression in the decision-making process.

The importance of enabling and constraining factors in both anchoring and daily decision-making was highlighted and a greater focus upon such factors meant that financial cues were raised as having an important impact on decision-making. Previous research in the psychological literature has rarely considered the financial aspects of decision-making in situations of work-family conflict. Financial factors set the limits within which couples were able to make decisions about where to invest their resources as well as being incorporated within an individual's system of beliefs and values, with regards to making anchoring decisions. They also impacted on daily decisions; acting as a constraint on decision-making. The availability of support was also found as a highly important factor which could act by either enabling or constraining decision-making. The findings regarding the availability of support concurs with previous research (Greenhaus and Powell 2003, 2006) but goes beyond this by demonstrating the importance of the wider network of support available in each domain, as well as conveying the impact that this factor can have upon anchoring decisions. A much more detailed and complex picture of factors relating to the decision to seek support were also brought to light, beyond that of its simple availability. The consideration of more specific aspects of the support on offer, usually in relation to fairness judgements regarding others affected by the decision outcome, were also found to be important. Future research should take care to specify not only whether support is available but also whether or not available support is actually used (Tardy, 1985).

The current research findings also uncovered the impact that personal beliefs, values and priorities had on decision-making. This incorporated some aspects of Greenhaus and Powell's (2006) 'internal cues' , which described the impact of role salience, however, by exploring the wider system of beliefs and values it was shown that the internal factors were much more complex than could be described by role salience alone. The majority of the participants appeared to simultaneously have both a strong work, and a strong family, role salience, suggesting that for these individuals work and family roles were both highly important to their self-concepts. It was also demonstrated that a strong family role salience could lead to a desire to invest more time and energy in both the home and work domains meaning that the importance

placed on this role would not necessarily lead to a decision to invest in the home domain in work-family conflict situations. These findings highlight the complexity of beliefs and values, and the impact that they have on decision-making, which have not previously been captured using quantitative techniques. Such factors were shown to have less impact on daily decision-making. While preferences and values played a large and important role in anchoring decisions, although still within the confines of constraints, preferences only had a minor direct impact on daily decision-making. These were occasionally discussed in daily decision-making regarding the desire to spend time with children but were rarely the deciding factor when making daily work -family decisions due to the many other factors that came into play. The findings reported here suggest that preferences might have a greater indirect impact on daily decisions, via anchoring decisions, as preferences were more frequently discussed with regards to the anchoring decisions made by participants. These findings provide a new insight into the impact of preferences versus constraints on decision-making, at least within the area of work-family conflict.

A consideration of fairness and equity has also not previously been addressed in relation to cues impacting decision-making in incidents of work-family conflict. These factors were frequently discussed as important in decision-making. They were particularly relevant when making decisions regarding support seeking but were also considered more generally in terms a concern with maintaining some form of balance in the investment of their resources within each domain. With regards to support seeking, deciding to accept available support was more likely when they believed that doing so would be beneficial and unlikely when they believed that doing so would be ineffective, or would result in negative consequences for themselves or others. These findings helped to make an important link between decision-making in daily work-family conflict incidents and previous literature on distributive and interactional justice. It is suggested here that equity theory offers some explanatory power in looking at how, and under what circumstances, participants engage in support seeking from various sources in order to resolve a work family conflict. Although previous theory and research has demonstrated that equity theory can provide insights toward understanding close, intimate relationships, this has not previously been explored directly in relation to looking at how couples make decisions in incidents of work-family conflict. In exploring this,

the current research also led to the discovery of a support-seeking threshold describing how participants appeared comfortable, at least to some extent, accepting support from others but only up to a particular limit or threshold. This threshold seemed to vary depending on specific relationships and circumstance but was always present at some level.

Fairness and equity considerations were found to extend beyond their relationship with support seeking; raised by participants with regards to the relative amount of resources invested in either domain previously, or to be invested subsequently. They strived for balance in this investment of resources which therefore had an impact on their daily decision-making. Previously made decisions and their outcomes affected subsequent decision-making. This demonstrates how previous decisions about investment of time resources form an important context in which decisions were made. The episodic and longitudinal approach taken here, using a within-person design, allowed for patterns of work-family conflict to be observed therefore enabling the importance of daily conflicts in relation to one another to be highlighted. The impact of past events on subsequent work-family conflicts clearly demonstrated how each conflict cannot be truly understood out of context. Each incident, the way it is resolved, and the consequences of this can have an impact on how decisions are arrived upon when future incidents occur.

6.3.2 Decision-Making Strategies

Beyond the discovery and in-depth exploration of factors which impacted upon decision-making in incidents of work-family conflict, the findings also revealed important daily decision-making strategies; namely pre-established decision-making hierarchies, reciprocal agreements with others, and daily communication within the couple. The use of decision-making hierarchies was found to be a highly important strategy used by all couples when faced with daily work-family conflicts. The findings reported here also explored some of the properties of these hierarchies including the differential stability of each of the pre-established levels within the hierarchies and their interchangeable nature. It was demonstrated how these hierarchies were worked through each time a daily work-family conflict occurred and, based upon the factors already discussed as impacting daily decision-making, one of the resolution options was decided upon. The level of this resolution option

within the hierarchy could suggest the degree of positive or negative outcomes that would result.

In conjunction with this, many couples used pre-established agreements of mutual reciprocation to deal with daily work-family conflict, both within the couple, and with others, such as friends or parents from school. These relationships were based on, and maintained by, feelings of fairness and equity. Participants placed a great deal of importance on their ability to reciprocate when deciding whether or not to become involved in such a strategy. Those who would be unable to maintain such a reciprocal agreement would be unlikely to rely on this type of support to deal with work-family conflicts. While such reciprocal arrangements with others could be an effective strategy for some as a means of dealing with daily work-family conflicts, for others it could be unmanageable.

Finally, work and family responsibilities were also sometimes managed by relying on organisation and planning, with a focus on communication within the couple, in order to balance all of their responsibilities between them, and, where this was not possible, to allow them the time to make alternative arrangements. Many of the couples combined all of these strategies as a means of dealing with their daily work-family conflicts. These strategies worked together to enable decision-making in such incidents by increasing the number of conflict resolution options available to the participants and the ease with which they could negotiate between them.

6.3.3 Decision-Making Framework

All these findings allowed for the development of an initial decision-making framework which endeavours to explain how couples generally make decisions when faced with work-family conflicts. The framework incorporates the factors described above, and their impact on both anchoring and daily decision-making, proposing links between the two types, and further exploring the similarities and differences between them. It can also provide an explanation for how participants made decisions regarding whether or not to rely on previously established reciprocal agreements or how they arrived at a particular resolution option in their pre-established hierarchy in any given work-family conflict scenario. When exploring the framework, with regards to how individuals make decisions in incidents of work-family conflict, it is important to take into account that these factors are proposed,

and considered, by both members of a couple. For instance, beliefs, values and preferences taken into consideration will usually include an amalgamation of those of both individuals within the couple. As previously stated, when compared to previous studies of decision-making, where the focus has been upon less naturalistic settings (e.g. Greenhaus and Powell, 2003, Powell and Greenhaus, 2006), the current findings revealed a less-structured decision-making pattern where decisions did not always progress in a logical sequence. They were the result of ongoing negotiations between partners, using a variety of strategies and influenced by a range of different contextual factors. The framework developed here acts as a guide; highlighting the important factors that were considered when making work-family conflict decisions, and the relationships between them.

6.4 Methodological Contribution

The current research employed an innovative methodological approach as it differed from previous research in this area by being episodic, qualitative and longitudinal in nature, using couples as the unit of analysis, and with a focus on both practical and emotional outcomes. This powerful methodological strategy has been demonstrated to have the ability to provide new and important contributions to the existent literature on work and family.

This approach highlighted the inter-related nature of the decision-making process within a couple. Decisions in incidents of work-family conflict were not made by individuals in isolation, but as part of a dyadic unit and the factors upon which these decisions were based were impacted by both members of the couple and both were subsequently impacted, practically and emotionally, by the decisions made. The lives of the individuals within these couples were intertwined therefore constraining and enabling factors were inextricably linked and the beliefs and values of both partners were considered. The nature, and complexity, of the interaction of the different beliefs and values of individuals within the couples was found to be important in decision-making. Congruent beliefs and values, regarding how work and family should be managed, generally enabled decision-making and tended to lead to more positive outcomes, as experienced by both partners. Attitude congruency has long been recognized as an important correlate of relationship satisfaction (e.g. Coombs, 1966) and more recently other researchers have begun to address similar ideas in

relation to role salience within couples. For example, Wishart and Thompson (2006) suggested that high work role salience may have negative impacts on couple relations, especially when both partners have high work role salience, due to more limited investment in family roles (Wishart and Thompson, 2006). The present results suggest that congruence of beliefs and values within couples may provide a fruitful area for future investigation as a potential explanatory factor in an assessment of the extent of crossover effects within a couple and the significance of those crossover effects for psychological outcomes. These insights point to the critical nature of partner perceptions in understanding an individual's work-family conflict. When investigating decision-making within dual earner couples it is vital to incorporate the intertwined enabling and constraining factors, and the beliefs, values and preferences, of both individuals. The current findings highlighted that it is not only the individual's work constraints, or lack of such, and their own personal beliefs and values that have an impact on their decision-making, but also, just as importantly, those of their partner. A realistic view of individuals as part of a family unit is fundamental to understanding how people develop and implement their plans for managing their daily work and family responsibilities. This implies that research into this area in the future would benefit from gaining data from both members of a couple, and possibly even from others involved in their daily work-family decisions such as grandparents or managers at work. The findings presented here, along with the findings from previous research (e.g. Kossek et al, 2001) have demonstrated how relatives can play an important role in managing work and family responsibilities, while at the same time being a source of stress. Future research would benefit from demonstrating an awareness of the complexities of family life; considering how the family exists as a system of interdependent individuals.

The current research also allowed for a deeper insight into current, more subtle, gender differences in experiences of work-family conflict. Firstly, males and females often appeared to differ in their involvement in the decision-making process which was found to be related to the relative job flexibility of the two individuals within the partnership. They differed with regards to the extent to which they were involved in reaching a resolution to daily conflicts and hence, whether or not they actually experienced the event as a conflict. While women's flexible working arrangements severely limited their partner's experience of daily work-family conflicts, due to

them taking the majority of the family responsibilities on their own shoulders; when men worked flexibly this did not have the same shielding effect for their female partner's who remained actively involved in conflict resolution. It was also found that women tended to take on the role of family organiser. While males were involved in family related tasks, enabling daily conflict resolution, they were less frequently involved in the general organisation often involved in such tasks. The results indicated the possibility that some women might be reluctant to relinquish their control in the home domain, due to their perception of this as a threat to their maternal role, or that they might simply be accustomed to taking on this role, leaving less room for input from their partners. In this way, when considering daily work-family conflict, and its resolution, it is important to take into account that these experiences could be very different for females in terms of the amount of pressure and stress related to dealing with these conflicts due to the different gendered expectations still placed upon them, both internally and externally.

Finally, it is pertinent to note the importance of capturing the immediate, and not so immediate, outcomes of work-family decision-making, both short-term and long-term, by employing a longitudinal methodology. Outcomes can be thought of in two senses; the actual behavioural arrangement, or the subjective evaluation of those arrangements (Szinovacz, 1987). An exploration of both the physical, and emotional, outcomes over time led to deeper insights in terms of participant's emotions, regarding decisions made and their physical outcomes, which had an important impact on future decision-making, including an impact on future anchoring decisions. Taking decisions made in isolation would give an incomplete, and often inaccurate, picture of events. For example, past literature has been unclear about the benefits of flexible working with some studies actually reporting that workplace policies designed to provide greater control to employees, such as flexible work arrangements, actually demonstrate positive relationships with FIW (Hammer, Neal, Newsom, Brockwood, and Colton, 2005; Lapierre and Allen, 2006). While the possibility of an increase in work-family conflict incidents for those with flexible working was also found in the current research, what previous studies have not shown is the long-term impact on the employees themselves, and subsequently the organisation. The findings presented here suggest that despite some of the problems with flexible work arrangements a lack of flexibility can be damaging in the long-

term due to the constraints that this puts on daily decision-making. The impact of making decisions under such constraints was shown to have a knock on effect on participants work and personal life over subsequent days. Although a lack of flexibility at work often meant that participants were more likely to take part in the work domain, when faced with a work-family conflict, such constrained decision-making often led to further work-family conflicts. Participants making decisions under such constraints also reported feelings of guilt, frustration and stress as well as other negative consequences in terms of the impact that this had on others in their family domain and the conflicts that this sometimes subsequently led to. Beyond this it was demonstrated how, in the long-term, the necessity to continuously make decisions under such constraints can lead to individuals leaving their organisation. The longitudinal nature of the current research, and the focus on both types of outcome, enabled the observation of the impact that imposing such constraints on decision-making can have over time. The long-term impact of a working environment which creates constraints or pressures can have negative consequences on employees, which in turn can have considerable implications for organisations and the retention of these employees. Further exploration of the impact of using various family-friendly policies at work using an episodic, qualitative and longitudinal approach, with a focus on both practical and emotional outcomes, would be beneficial if we are to obtain a true picture of exactly how these initiatives actually impact people's lives on a daily basis.

In terms of policy, the findings reported here emphasise the importance for organisations to refrain from regarding candidates as single people without social ties if they want to attract the best candidates and retain and develop their staff (Blustein, 2001, Abele and Volmer, 2011). This consideration is also important for organisations in avoiding the costs associated with work-family conflict. A greater understanding of the actual conflicts experienced by employees on a daily basis is vital in the creation of policies or supportive strategies that will be successful. Such strategies must adapt to the variety of modern partnerships that now exist by acknowledging, and responding to, the daily issues involved in being part of a family-unit, including a focus on specific strategies for specific circumstances. Employers should be aware of the major constraining factors in each employee's lives and respond accordingly by providing tailored enabling solutions. Supportive

strategies could include support of the partner's job search, flexible work arrangements, support for childcare and support for domestic duties.

6.5 Limitations and Further Recommendations for Future Research

The in-depth qualitative nature of this study enabled rich insights into the dynamics of decision-making in instances of work-family conflict in a real time setting. However, although the qualitative design of this research presented advantages there were also some limitations that should be addressed.

The nature of the decision-making processes reported here is clearly a function of the individuals who participated in this study. The present research focused upon dual-earner couples; this factor in itself will undoubtedly have had a large impact on the daily decision-making processes experienced and reported. For example, much of the turn-taking behaviour discussed existed within the couples themselves and was therefore predicated on the existence of a partner to engage in such an arrangement with. The nature of work and family decision-making for single mothers would probably reflect a different set of decision-making factors and different experiences of the decision-making process. Future research should explore the decision-making processes for those with alternative family arrangements to explore the factors involved in decision-making, and the experience of this process, in various other family settings.

Participants in the current study were also primarily white, middle class couples with access to full-time employment. Cultural factors can influence the variables involved in work-family conflict for dual-earner couples in a variety of ways. For example, culture can influence the meaning and relative priority of work and family (Lewis, 1999) and may also have an impact on the willingness to accept support and the importance assigned to different work and family activities. Furthermore, cultures differ in beliefs about whether balancing work and family is a collective or individual responsibility (Lewis, 1999). Beyond this, individuals from under-represented groups often experience unique career issues, such as stereotyping, restricted opportunities and other stresses that are likely to have an impact on their experiences of work, as well as their experiences of trying to balance this with having a family (Allen et al, 2000). Therefore, it is important that future research addresses these issues by including studies using a more diverse range of

participants, such as looking at the experiences of same-sex couples and looking at couples in a variety of cultural contexts, especially since awareness of cultural differences is now even more essential due to the increasingly diverse workforce (Greenhaus and Parasuraman, 1999). This diversity has been called for from elsewhere within the work-family conflict literature (e.g. Smith, 1993, Greenhaus, 2008).

A further methodological issue that should be considered is the possible impact that social desirability might have had on participant's responses due to close contact and personal discussions involved in the initial interview. Although I attempted to put participants at ease by carrying out the interviews in their own home environments, conducting the interview in a friendly and open manner and reassuring them of the anonymity of their responses, there is always the possibility that participants might answer questions with a view to being seen in a positive light. In this case it is possible that not all issues that affected them were raised, or all factors impacting their decisions discussed. Whereas some participants might view the research process as a chance to open up and get certain issues off their chest, others might be more inclined to focus on creating a positive impression of their relationship, family, and their ability to manage all of their work and family responsibilities successfully. Conversely, the research process might have caused participants to become aware of, or consciously acknowledge, certain issues or experiences that they might otherwise have overlooked. This could lead them to think, and feel, in a way that they might not have without taking part in this research therefore influencing their responses. While it is important to be aware of such issues when interpreting the qualitative data, the aim of the current research was to investigate participants' interpretations of their decision-making process in incidents of work-family conflict, and their general experiences of this process and the methods used here enabled insight into these interpretations to be achieved, providing a rich insight into these decision-making processes, as experienced by the couples themselves. This is something that previous research on decision-making in incidents of work-family conflict has not explored (e.g. Greenhaus and Powell, 2003, 2006) and therefore an important contribution to the current literature.

Another difficulty experienced with the use of diary methods was due to being unable to be physically present during this process as this meant having somewhat

less control of the whole process. As previously mentioned, keeping diaries requires a great deal of participant commitment and dedication. It was difficult to maintain this level of commitment to the research over time, without being physically present. I therefore found maintaining contact with participants throughout the four week period to be of great importance. I contacted the couples via telephone and/or email at least once a week while they were keeping the diaries to ensure that they were not having any problems, and to provide a further opportunity to ask any questions they might have once they had begun keeping the diary. However, it was sometimes difficult to contact the couples with several becoming unreachable. These couples tended not to complete their diaries on time which not only slowed down data collection and analysis, but also caused concern about the accuracy of the information provided. It was brought to my attention that some of the participants were completing the diaries in retrospect despite encouragement to complete them as soon after the event as possible and therefore avoiding responding to my calls until they had 'caught up'. Asking participants to report all incidents immediately after the event seemed unrealistic in many situations; therefore the instructions given allowed them to postpone responding at inopportune moments until the next possible opportunity to do so. However this could work against the recall accuracy or reliability of the reports and retrospection error could occur, where participants rely on reconstruction or fabrication to complete missed entries, potentially defeating one of the main benefits of the diaries, the ability to obtain accurate, real-time information (Bolger et al, 2003). Although, modern diaries using signalling devices such as pagers are now available, these have limited utility for event-based research. It was discussed with participants when they would complete the diaries during the initial interview, encouraging them to report events as soon after they happened as possible, and many decided that they would complete their diary at the end of each day as this was more feasible, but even then distractions can occur. If it is not possible for immediate recall it might have been useful if I had arranged with the participants a more specific time and place when they could complete their diary on a daily basis to minimize the chances of distraction and retrospection bias. For example, Symon (2004) suggested that a participant completing their diary on the train on the way home from work found this helpful in that it was free from distractions and rarely varied therefore producing reliable diary entries. It might also have been useful to ask participants to record exactly when they completed their

diary entry, or more specifically to note how much time had passed between the event and the recording of the event. This not only gives researchers a clearer picture of the accuracy of the account, but may also encourage participants to make greater efforts to record their experiences as close to the event as possible.

Another issue that arose specifically related to the use of diary studies using couples was the interaction between the pair while completing the diaries. One of the female participants reported beginning to complete her partner's diary for him meaning that his point of view and interpretation of these events were lost. This was despite a lengthy face to face discussion of how the diaries should be completed during the initial meeting with the couple, as well as several opportunities to discuss any issues they might have when I contacted them via e-mail during the time that they were keeping the diaries. When contacted via e-mail she actually did mention that she had been completing her partner's diary which provided the opportunity to explain again why this was not appropriate for this study. This meant that valuable data was gained from both members of the couple for the remainder of their diary entries; data that might otherwise have been lost. This highlights some of the difficulties with maintaining participant's commitment to the research process but also demonstrates the importance of remaining in regular contact with the couples while they are completing the diaries so any questions can be answered and any issues that they might have can be dealt with as they arise. Participants rarely initiated contact to ask questions, but when they were contacted this appeared to encourage them to ask for clarification of uncertainties or discussion of concerns. This contact is also important in encouraging participants to continue to record their decision-making events, since they are constantly busy and investing a significant amount of their already very limited time to participate in this research.

A separate issue comes from the distinction between the two different types of decision making discussed by participants; anchoring and daily decision-making, and the methods used which elicited the description of the decision-making processes regarding each type. Anchoring decisions tended to be discussed during participant's interviews and were almost always described in retrospective accounts. Whereas, daily decisions were discussed in both the interviews and the daily diaries kept by the participants, therefore providing a rich account of daily decision-making including the majority of these accounts being reported in real-time. As has been

previously emphasised in the endorsement of the diary methods used in this research; when using retrospective techniques to acquire data there is always the possibility that participants may not recall incidents or factors that affected their decision-making, accurately (Schwarz, 1999) and certain aspects of the decision-making process might be forgotten. This raises the question of whether or not the factors impacting anchoring decisions would have been different if reported in real-time as the daily decisions were. With regards to daily decision-making, the majority of the factors elicited in the daily diaries had previously been at least mentioned in discussions of daily decision-making during interviews, however there still remains the possibility that, had anchoring decisions been reported in real-time a different decision-making process may have been revealed, possibly with a greater variety of factors or providing more detail about the factors already discussed. Subsequent research could employ diaries to explore anchoring decisions in greater detail. For example, by seeking participants who were at times in their lives where they would be likely to be making anchoring decisions, such as during pregnancy or after the birth of a new baby. Diaries kept over such a period of change could provide extremely interesting data, and a new perspective, on the decision-making processes involved in anchoring decisions.

Following on from this, another interesting avenue for future research could be to explore the possibility that there are different types of daily decision-making dependent upon the amount of notice available regarding the conflict inducing event. Data from the current research implied a possible distinction between the type of decision-making that was engaged in when couples had a certain amount of time to resolve the conflict as compared to those conflicts that occurred instantaneously. There was some indication that in those decisions which were permitted more resolution time participants tended to feel more comfortable seeking support from a variety of sources; whereas they might be more reluctant to seek support from certain sources with very little notice, or even that support would be available in such scenarios. Beyond this it seems quite probable that the decision-making process involved in making spur of the moment decisions would differ somewhat to decision-making that allowed for greater negotiation and planning. Unfortunately there was not enough data available on such instantaneous decision-making to make a real comparison and therefore to draw any conclusions regarding whether or not

the decision-making processes involved, and the factors impacting upon these, would be distinct. This would be an interesting area for future research to explore.

6.6 Brief Reflections

In carrying out this research I embarked on a journey, not only as a researcher but also in my personal life, which I felt it was important to comment on before concluding my thesis. With this research I sought to explore how the participants managed daily work-family conflicts and their experiences of this process. This qualitative research and data analysis, carried out within an interpretivist position, is an iterative process requiring reflection and interpretation by the researcher. Under these assumptions, as the researcher, I did not view myself as a simple objective observer, but rather I was part of the research process (Rowlands, 2005), therefore it is important to address my personal journey during this process and to reflect on this in relation to the findings reported here.

While I was conducting this research I became more fully submerged in the issues of work-family conflict when I gave birth to my own daughter. It became almost immediately clear that this would have a great impact upon my research. The main impact was concerned with my connection with the participants. Having previously conducted my pilot studies, I began the interview process for my research after having my daughter. I was instantly aware of the difference between the interviews I had engaged in previously, as part of my pilot studies, and the interviews I was now engaging in after having my daughter. It was frequently the case that participants would ask whether or not I had children myself and once they were aware that I could relate to their lives and experiences in this way it appeared to create a special type of bond, as parents, which enabled a mutual understanding and, subsequently, a greater trust, allowing them to relax and open up during this process. As Hertz (1995) pointed out, "who reveals what and to whom sets the stage for what the researcher learns and what respondents feel comfortable telling" (Hertz, 1995, pg.5). Hertz (1995) also suggested that it was the intuition of the interviewer regarding which aspects of themselves they should present to particular participants that enables a more collaborative interview. Having revealed myself as a working parent I noticed a substantial difference in participant's responses, with statements frequently being made such as: "I'm sure you can relate" or "As you will know". I

could also acknowledge their responses nodding knowingly or explicitly expressing that I understood. My personal self-disclosure transformed me from a neutral interviewer into a participant myself, giving the participants license to also ask me questions. They would ask questions about my daughter which subsequently led to them talking in greater detail about experiences with their own children. My willingness to expose personal thoughts and feelings created a relaxed and friendly atmosphere where they would do the same. This led to the interview becoming a collaborative process where experiences and information were exchanged in a more informal manner, as a discussion among equals, rather than them viewing me simply as a researcher who would not be able to truly understand their experiences.

I also found that this greater mutual understanding that I had gained enabled me to see things from their point of view and ask more insightful follow-up questions in response to their responses. However, I still made every effort to restrain from divulging any personal ideas or strong opinions that might have an impact upon their responses as I was aware that this could cause them to be less likely to speak freely if their opinions differed from my own. At times we were in such a relaxed and friendly atmosphere that I had to make a conscious effort to remember my role as interviewer and to ensure that my responses remained non-leading and focused upon obtaining a picture of their world from their perspectives in relation to managing their work and family responsibilities. With this at the forefront of my mind, the advantages that my newly gained personal experiences offered had a highly positive effect on my research by allowing me to become an 'insider' within the world of my participants creating an atmosphere of shared understanding therefore enabling me to gain greater insights into their daily experiences of managing work and family.

My own personal experiences of motherhood also had an impact on my interpretation of the data leading to the findings reported here. The empathy that I had gained with participants experiences; the situations, conflicts and emotions they reported heightened my sensitivity to these issues due to my first hand experience. This meant that I picked up on subtleties in the data, that I might not have been as aware of previously, realising their greater importance and impact. For example, by being personally aware of similar experiences, such as the feelings of guilt that can be experienced even in seemingly minor incidents or the complexity of emotions and other factors involved in seeking support and turn-taking ; I was able to pay greater

attention to such issues and more easily pick up on those feelings in participant's reports. Such, subsequently more detailed explorations of issues led to important insights such as the applicability of equity theory with regards to support seeking and turn-taking. I have been involved in a constant struggle with these issues myself throughout the remainder of the research process, therefore I have been persistently engaged in the problems involved in managing work and family, the daily strategies used to do this, and the emotions that were inevitably linked to such decision-making.

6.7 In Conclusion

In conclusion, the research carried out here provided insights into how couples made difficult work-family conflict decisions which they face on a daily basis. In doing so new cues impacting upon decision-making were revealed, and those previously raised were explored and developed. Balancing work and family appears to be a continuous work in progress and, by looking at the issues involved at the level of the couple, the daily dynamics of that work in progress were revealed. These important new findings could not have been uncovered using a levels approach, which would have concealed patterns of work-family conflict over time, or by using a more quantitative methodology which would not have allowed room for the participants own voice. The current research provided a window into one month in the lives of our couples in terms of their daily experiences of managing their work and family responsibilities; therefore enabling us to gain insight into their perspectives on the nature of work-family conflict events, how these events unfold and the impact of these experiences.

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Appendix A – An Overview of the Couples

Couple 1 - Lucy and Paul have been together for ten years and have three children aged eight, five and two. They both work for the local authority. Paul is a civil engineer working flexible eight hour days, two of which he works from home. He made this transition from contract work when the children came along. Lucy works two and a half days a week for the social services as a carer for the elderly. She has worked there for twelve years but went part-time after having the children. She has recently been promoted to a junior management role.

Couple 2 - Sylvia and Ben have been together for fourteen years and have one daughter aged eleven. Sylvia works part-time as a personal assistant for the healthcare sector. She works 9am until 2pm every day so that she can then pick their daughter up from school. She chose to work in this job after having her daughter because of the good family friendly policies. Ben works as a machine operator in a factory. He works nights, which entails twelve hour shifts from 7pm until 7am, three nights on and three nights off.

Couple 3 – Hannah and Nigel have been together for nineteen years and have three children aged seventeen, fourteen and eight. Hannah is a payroll manager at an accounting firm, working from 9:30am until 4:30pm five days a week. Nigel is an engineer for a construction company, working from 7:30am until 6pm five days a week. They have always used nurseries and before and after school clubs and their eldest can now help to look after the younger two during the school holidays.

Couple 4 – Amy and Keith have been together for five years and have a ten month old son called Logan. Amy is a full-time research assistant with very flexible working hours and can often work from home. Keith works as an IT consultant and can also usually work from home. He is contracted to work 37 hours per week but these hours are fairly flexible unless there is a meeting at a particular time that he must attend. Both Keith and Amy say that their managers are understanding regarding family responsibilities and very flexible as long as the work gets done.

Couple 5 – Katrina and John have been together for three years and she has a six year old son from a previous relationship. Katrina works full-time as a social worker, usually working Monday to Friday but she is also required to work one weekend in four and some evenings. She is newly qualified and only been in her current job for a year. John is a manager at an accounting firm, working from around 8am until 7pm five days a week. He is able to work from home sometimes and because he is one of the managers he does have some flexibility. Katrina's mum helps out with childcare and they also have a child minder who takes him to school in the mornings and picks him up after school Monday to Thursday. On a Friday her son's father picks him up and looks after him over night.

Couple 6 – Sarah and Adam have been together for twelve years and have two sons aged three and six. Adam works freelance as a senior hydraulic modeller, generally from 8:30am until 5pm but it is flexible. He only gets paid for the hours he works so he can work at any time but doesn't get any paid holidays. Sarah is a statistician for the British Transport Police. She works part-time, three days a week from 8:15am to 4:15pm. Occasionally she works longer hours and at the beginning of the year was working 4 days a week and finishing at 5:15pm but found that too much. She went part-time after having children. The elder child goes to a before and after school club and the younger child has a child minder.

Couple 7 – Melanie and Steve have been together for sixteen years and have one daughter aged two. She works as a secretary in an accountancy firm from 9am to 5:30pm Monday to Friday. Her job allows her to work extra hours so that she can build up enough to have extra days off. She normally gets to work at 8:30am which means she has half an hour building up every day. Before having her daughter she worked in the hotel industry but this required her to work long hours and nights so she changed to her current job after having their daughter. Steve recently started his own plumbing business, after being made redundant, so he has flexibility because he is his own boss and currently tends to work part-time hours. He tries to fit jobs around picking Annabelle up from nursery and usually does not work on Wednesdays and Fridays so he can look after Annabelle on the days she isn't in nursery. He can always schedule a job in at the weekend if necessary. If he has a job

that is going to take all week and he can't be off on the two days with Annabelle then they ask family to help.

Couple 8 – Anthony and Elizabeth have been together for twenty years and have two children aged sixteen and eleven. They both work for the council. He is a contract manager for adult care facilities and his job is flexible; he has to work 37hours a week but can choose his own hours. He changed jobs a couple of years ago and says that his current job is more family-focused and flexible than his previous job and there is less travelling involved. She works full-time for the Learning and Skills council as partnership manager and also works flexi-time.

Couple 9 – Julia and Tom have been together for twelve years and have two children; a son called Lewis aged eight and a daughter called Olivia aged four. She works as a personal assistant for a crane company working from 9:30am until 4pm Monday to Thursdays and 8:30am until 3pm on Fridays. He is a graphic designer generally working from 9am until 5pm but sometimes he has to work extra hours to meet deadlines. Her mum looks after the children every afternoon as she is retired. Olivia goes to play school in the mornings and her mum picks her up and then picks Lewis up from school.

Couple 10 – Emma and Richard have been together for fourteen years and have three children; an eleven year old son and twin ten year old girls. She works as a secretary from 9am to 5pm, three days a week and these hours are not flexible. He is an engineer usually working from 9am to 5pm, five days a week but his job is flexible with core hours being 10am to 3pm. He sometimes has to work late if he is working on a project where deadlines have to be met. Their family live far away but they have some help from friends and neighbours. Their next door neighbour has a little girl and works very flexible hours, working from home so he is their "1st point of call"

Couple 11 – Linda and Edward have been together for twenty-five years and have two sons aged thirteen and eleven. She works as a company secretary for big blue chip companies but was recently made redundant and is currently working on a short-term contract. She has always worked full-time and currently works from 8am until 7pm, Monday to Friday. Her current company offers time off when needed for employees with children under the age of sixteen but they haven't used this. Edward

is a chartered surveyor with his own company and a lecturer at university. He doesn't have any set working hours, just "as and when is necessary" but he usually works more than thirty-five hours per week. He does more lecturing at the moment due to the financial climate. He is "the main carer" and doesn't work as much over August because university is not as busy as usual over this period and he can look after the children during the school holidays: "We manage our life at home so that he is off more often in August."

Couple 12 – Jane and Carl have been together for two years and she has a seven year old son from a previous relationship. She works part-time in an accountancy and finance office for the council working around twenty-five hours per week on flexi-time; as long as she fulfils her hours she can choose when she works. He is a trainee sales manager at a gym working forty hours per week. He is able to rearrange which two days a week he has off if he gives notice.

Couple 13 – Marissa and Nick have been together for fifteen years and have two children aged twelve and eight. She is a full-time development manager working for the voluntary service charity. Her working hours are flexible but she usually works from 9:30am until 5:30pm to allow her to take the children to school. He is a production worker in a factory working from 7am until 3pm, Monday to Friday. These hours mean he can pick the children up from school. He used to work shifts in his previous job before getting made redundant which was hard. He said "We had to fit family around work. I needed a job so I had to do that job" Both sets of parents live nearby and help with childcare.

Couple 14 – Dave and Emily have been together for seven years and have two children; a son aged five and a daughter aged eighteen months. She works part-time as a healthcare assistant for a pharmacy. She works twenty hours a week in the evenings so that they don't have to pay for childcare. She used to work full-time in the day before having the children, which she wishes she could still do. Dave is a head chef working between thirty-seven and forty-five hours a week. He organises his own rotas which enables him to fit his hours in around his partner's job. He also has a second job working as a chef for a catering company but this is not a regular job. Her mum, sister and grandma live just five minute away and his family don't live far away so they can help with childcare.

Couple 15 – Anna and Adrian have been together for five years and have twin sons aged 21 months. They are from Spain so don't have any family in the UK. She is a veterinary surgeon working for the government, moving life stock animals. Her presence is required for the loading of the animals and for monitoring the animal's welfare and health, and to check the paper work so it is vital that she is there in order for the abattoir to open. She requested part-time hours after having the children so now works thirty hours a week, 7:30am until 3:30pm, Monday to Thursday. He is also a veterinary surgeon but he is the manager of his area. His job involves working long hours, lots of travelling and sometimes working weekends but has a certain amount of flexibility depending what he has on that particular day. The children have been going to nursery full-time since they were 9 months old, when she started back at work.

Couple 16 – Joe and Jasmine have been together for two and a half years and have a 14month old daughter called Ellie and she also has a seven year old son from a previous relationship called Jack. She is a higher level teaching assistant and works from about 8:30am until 3:30pm most days but some days she has staff meetings and has to stay until 5pm. She gets school holidays off but can't take any time off during term time. She is allowed up to ten days a year leave for medical reasons for her children but whether or not she gets paid for that is at the discretion of the head teacher. Joe is an IT service manager for a telecommunications company, working thirty-seven hours a week ("well that's what it's supposed to be but it's always more!") but his hours are flexible. He works from home one day a week, on Friday so that he can do the school run and he works in the Bolton office on Tuesday's so that he can take their daughter to Jasmine's mums' who lives in Bolton and cannot drive since she had a stroke. This means he can't start work until 10am so he has to stay until about 6pm. He takes Jack to school every morning.

Couple 17 – Kyle and Carly have been together for thirteen years and have a sixteen month old son called Lewis. She is a HR manager working three days a week from 8:30am to 5pm but she is about to increase her working hours to four days a week. He has his own small business, employing one other person, managing apartment buildings. Up until recently he was also doing contract work, until his business was making enough money to stop doing this and Carly was back at work. This meant he was working seventy to eighty hours a week but he works about forty to fifty hours a

week on his own business. He can choose his own hours since he is the boss but does have to work around his clients. He can have weeks where he works less hours but will have to do extra work the following week. They have no family close by which is a "big challenge". Lewis goes to nursery three days a week but is increasing to four days a week when Carly increases her working days.

Couple 18 – Janet and Rick have been together for twenty-one years and have two children; Bella aged nine and Gregory aged seven. She works as an IT service manager for a large telecommunications company working on average thirty-six hours a week. Her hours are flexible and she can work from home. He is a business development manager for a small telecommunications company and works fixed hours from 8:30am to 5pm, Monday to Friday with no flexibility. Her mum and dad still work full-time so it is difficult for them to look after the children and requires a great deal of organising. Rick's parents pick the children up from school every Monday and Tuesday and on Wednesday, Thursday and Friday Janet works from home at least part of the day so she can do the school run.

Couple 19 – Nathan and Mary have been together for twenty-one years and have one daughter called Imogen aged three. Mary is a personal assistant to the director at a business school, working from 9:15am to 4:30pm. These working hours were agreed upon in order to enable her to drop her daughter off and pick her up from nursery. She is also able to work from home if needed. Nathan is an industrial paint sprayer for a steel company working forty-eight hours per week, from 7am to 5:30pm Monday to Thursday and 7am to 3:30pm on Fridays. He often does overtime on Saturday mornings or even all day Saturday or Sunday. Mary's mum looks after Imogen on Tuesday's "so she's not in full-time care at nursery"

Couple 20 – Louise and Ian have been together for twenty years and have two children; Stephen aged eleven and Peter aged nine. She is a community matron but has just given up work to do a full-time PhD. He is a hospital consultant working different hours each day. He has some flexibility apart from when he has clinic hours. They do not have any family nearby as they have moved around quite a lot and have only been in Manchester for four years.

Couple 21 – Nick and Angela have one daughter called Suzie who just turned one. Angela works as a personal advisor for a career advisory service for teenagers, three

days a week and Nick works at a University as a research fellow, working on average forty hours per week but these are not set hours or as he says: "I'm just sort of left to get on with it" He can also work from home on the days he isn't teaching. Suzie goes to nursery three days a week and they have a girl from the nursery who they can pay to babysit in the evenings if necessary, as they do not have any family who live nearby.

Couple 22 – Ray and Olivia have one son called Marcus, aged nine. Olivia works full-time as an Inclusion Officer at a school. Her official working hours are from 8:10am to 4pm but in reality she tends to work from 7:45am to 5pm. She has to work fifteen days of the school holidays but can bring Marcus in for these days and they have activities organised for the children. Ray is a Learning Manager and head of year at the same school and has the same working hours as Olivia. She has two sisters who also have children so they all share the school runs between them. Olivia also helps to care for her elderly father.

Couple 23 – Ellen and Alex have been together for twelve years and have two sons; Christopher aged five and Robert aged two. Alex works as a freelance IT consultant and because he works for himself his hours can be flexible but he only gets paid for the time he works and doesn't get any paid holidays. Ellen is a medical secretary working three days a week from 8am to 4pm. She worked full-time before she had the children but her job have always been accommodating so going part-time was not a problem. Her mum lives nearby and will help out with childcare sometimes. His mum is dependent on them for her care and they visit her every day.

Couple 24 – Neil and Hayley have one child called Natalia, aged two and Hayley is pregnant with their second child. They both work full-time as academics at universities. Their hours are flexible when they are not teaching and they are able to work from home. Their daughter is at nursery full-time and they do not have any family living nearby.

Appendix B - Interview Schedule

- **Tell me about you and your family**
  - How many children
  - Their ages
  - Other family nearby?
  - What are your childcare arrangements?
  - Any eldercare responsibilities?
- **Tell me about your work**
  - Organisation
  - Job title and description
  - Working hours and holidays
  - Family friendly policies (including unofficial such as flexi-time)
- **General Decisions**
  - How did you make the decision to both work? What factors played a part in this decision?
  - How do you feel about being a carer /parent and a worker? What does it mean to you? (Role salience) What does work mean to you/ what does being a parent mean to you?
  - How do you generally make decisions in situations of conflicting work and family activities?
- **Can you think of an example of when you have experienced an incident where there was a conflict between work and family?**
  - What was the source of this conflict?
  - What decision did you make?
  - How did you decide what to do?
  - What were the things that affected your decision?
  - How did you feel about the decision? (during, after)

Notes - explaining diaries:

- Emphasize the importance of the small day-to-day decisions
- If they have more than one decision that day they can number them in each section
- In the section for any further information, if they haven't filled in the other sections that day ask them to include any information regarding why they think they haven't had any decisions to make that day
- Discuss how it is best to keep in touch with them while they are keeping the diaries, how it is best to remind them and ask them if it is ok to ring them at the end of each week to see how it is going.
- Talk about collecting diaries and follow-up interviews. These are being done via telephone and individually for confidentiality.
- Let participants know that they can request to read over the transcript data if they like and that they can ask to withdraw any comments at any time.

Appendix C – Example Diary Page (Unstructured)

Day 8   **Date**
_____

Please record any decisions that you had to make today regarding how to deal with competing work and family responsibilities. Please include the decisions you made, how you arrived at these decisions, and how you felt about them afterwards, as well as any other details that you feel may be relevant.

_____

_____

_____

_____

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_____

_____

_____

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_____

Please continue overleaf if necessary….

Appendix D – Example Diary Page (Semi-Structured)

Week 1

Day 1   **Date:** Monday _____

Please record any decisions that you had to make today regarding how to deal with competing work and family responsibilities. Please include the decisions you made, how you arrived at these decisions, and how you felt about them afterwards, as well as any other details that you feel may be relevant.

Please describe any decisions where you made a choice between work and family today

What did you decide to do?

How did you arrive at this decision? Please describe in as much detail as you can the decision process that you went through and ALL the factors that had an impact on the decision you made.

What was the outcome of the decision that you made? Please explain how you felt about the decision and anything that occurred as a result of the decision.

Please use this space to add any other comments that you feel might be relevant

The University of Manchester
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Understanding Work-Life Balance

The purpose of this research is to explore how couples make decisions when faced with conflicting work and family responsibilities.

Previous research has indicated that dual-earner couples often experience such incidents on a daily basis; therefore I am keen to find out your own experiences using this day to day diary. However, some days you may find that you have less to report than on others so please do not feel that you have to write the same amount each day. Please try to fill in the diary as soon as possible after each incident occurs. It is important that the decision-making process is fresh in your mind so you can record this process as accurately as possible.

Please record as many details as possible each time you have to make a decision regarding conflicting work and family responsibilities. Please try to include the following details:

- o The decision that you arrived at regarding the two competing activities
- o The factors that affected how you arrived at this decision
- o The outcome of the decision made and how you felt about it.
- o Any other details that you think might be relevant.

Your experiences are valuable as this is the way in which future research can move forward and make a difference.

Anything that you write in this diary will be strictly confidential. If you have any queries at anytime while completing the diary please feel free to contact me via the contact details below. I will also contact you during this time to see how it is going.

This research is being supervised by Professor Catherine Cassell at Manchester Business School. Email: Catherine.Cassell@mbs.ac.uk

Many thanks for your help with this research

E-mail: **Lauraradcliffe@aol.com**

Mobile: **07921 773 208**

Week 1

Day 1   **Date:** Monday _____

Please record any decisions that you had to make today regarding how to deal with competing work and family responsibilities. Please include the decisions you made, how you arrived at these decisions, and how you felt about them afterwards, as well as any other details that you feel may be relevant.

Please describe any decisions where you made a choice between work and family today

What did you decide to do?

How did you arrive at this decision? Please describe in as much detail as you can the decision process that you went through and ALL the factors that had an impact on the decision you made.

What was the outcome of the decision that you made? Please explain how you felt about the decision and anything that occurred as a result of the decision.

Please use this space to add any other comments that you feel might be relevant

Thank you

<u>Appendix F - Initial Template</u>

Anchoring Decisions

Type of Conflict

- Working or staying at home?
- Working part-time or working full-time?
- Changing jobs

Factors/Cues

- Financial factors
- Flexibility at work
- Support available at home
- Impact on Children
- Future Planning
- Personal Benefits of Work

Outcome

- Happy with Decision
- Guilt
- Stress
- Desire to Change

Daily Decisions

Type of conflict

- Getting to work on time vs. Taking child
- Getting to work on time vs. Helping child
- Leaving work on time vs. Picking up child
- Working out of hours vs. Looking after child/ family time
- Working at home vs. Distractions of family
- Work vs. Child's events
- Child care arrangements fall through
- Work vs. Child's (or partners) appointments
- Extra commitments at work
- Children off school

Decisions

- Ask for support from partner
- Ask for support from a family member
- Take time off work

Factors/ Cues

- Availability/ type of support
  - Availability of partner
  - Availability of others
  - Willingness of partner/others
  - How capable that person is of doing the task
- Family-friendly policies
- Turn Taking
- Amount of time a task would take
- Financial factors
- Impact on others
  - Children
- Amount of responsibility felt
  - Whether you had arranged the task/ made promises
- Importance of work tasks
  - Time/ Deadline/ urgency

Outcome

- Feelings
  - Guilt
  - Frustration
  - Annoyed
  - Happy
- Decide to do things differently next time/ make change
- Positive or negative outcome for others/ partner

Appendix G – Developing Template

Big Decisions

Type of conflict

- Working vs. being a stay at home parent
- Working part-time vs. Full-time
- Change job?
- Studying

Factors/ Cues

- Financial issues
  - Nursery fees
  - Other commitments
  - Luxuries
- Flexibility of job/ family-friendly policies/ terms of job
- Feeling of guilt
- Children's preferences
- Beliefs about what it means to be a good parent?
- Benefits to children (other than financial)
- Time with children (importance of)
- Amount of support available
  - From partner
  - From others
  - Convenient official childcare
- Career ladder – how much achieved so far
- Pressures from job
- Planning for the future
  - Job security
  - Financial security
- Redundancy (external circumstances)
- Personal benefits of work
  - Personal work ethic
  - Prevent boredom
  - Social aspects
  - Achievement/ challenging
  - Identity/ reality
  - Enjoys what they do

Outcome

- Happy with decision
- Guilt
- Frustration/ stress
- Lack of time together/ with children
- Wish things could be different

Daily Decisions

Type of conflict

- Getting to work on time vs. Taking child
- Getting to work on time vs. Helping child
- Leaving work on time vs. Picking up child
- Working out of hours vs. Looking after child/ family time
- Working at home vs. Distractions of family
- Tired from work vs. Family time
- Work vs. Child's events
- Work vs. Family events
- Child care arrangements fall through
- Work vs. Child's (or partners) appointments
- Extra commitments at work
- Children off school
    - Ill
    - holiday

Decisions

- Ask for support from partner
- Ask for support from a family member
- Ask for support from work colleague
- Ask for support from friend
- Work
- Work from home
- Take children to work
- Take time off work
    - Officially (annual leave/ personal day)
    - Unofficially (an understanding with boss/ colleague)
    - Say no to doing extra work

Factors/ Cues

- Availability/ type of support
    - Availability of partner
        - Flexibility of their job
        - Priorities of partner
    - Availability of others
        - Work colleagues
        - Family members

- Friends
- Elder sibling
- Their job/ commitments
- Location
  - Willingness/ supportiveness of partner/others
  - How fair it is to seek their support?
    - capability
    - Impact on them
    - Appropriate?
    - Turn taking with others
  - Official childcare
    - Flexibility
    - Location
- Family-friendly policies
  - Flexi-time?
  - Work at home?
- Unofficial work agreements
  - Understanding boss
  - Other unofficial agreements
- Position in organisation
  - Time at organisation
  - Seniority
  - Relationship with others
- Amount of annual leave left
- Amount of time a task would take
- Whether it is a one off or regular
- Time invested in domain
  - Previously
  - Future expectancy
- Amount of notice
- Financial factors
- Children's preferences
- Desire to spend time with children
  - enjoyment
- Guilt/ *worry*
- Responsibility
  - Whether you had arranged the task/ made promises
  - Impact on others/ relying on you (what they think will be)
    - Children
    - Person offering support
    - Work colleagues
    - Work clients/ patients
    - Amount of people effected

- - Organisation
- Importance of tasks/ events (work or family)
  - Deadline/ urgency
  - Amount of time and effort already invested in task
  - Severity of situation
  - Possible to rearrange?

Outcome

- Feelings
  - Guilt
  - Stress
  - Frustration
  - Annoyed
  - Happy
  - Discomfort
  - Pressure/ panic
- Conflict with others
  - Partner
  - At work
- Decide to do things differently next time/ make change
- Positive or negative outcome for others/ partner
- Going into work sick

Appendix H – Final Template

Template for Anchoring Decisions

Type of conflict (A-TC)

1. Working vs. being a stay at home parent
2. Working part-time vs. Full-time
3. Change job?
4. Studying

Decisions made (A-DM)

1. Work Full-Time
2. Work part-time
3. Seek Support
     a. Official Childcare
     b. Family members
     c. From each other/ balance it between them
4. Change job
     a. Different Job/ Company
     b. Increase hours
5. Extra study

Factors (A-F)

1. Enabling and Constraining Factors
     a. Financial Considerations
     b. Availability of Support
2. Beliefs, Values and Preferences
     a. What it means to be a good parent
     b. Personal Benefits/ Preferences

Outcome (A-O)

1. Happy with decision
2. Negative feelings
     a. Guilt
     b. Frustration/ stress
3. Desire for change

Type of conflict (D-TC)

1. Getting to work on time or helping family
2. Completing work or getting home on time
3. Work distractions while at home
4. Family distractions while at work
5. Working extra hours
6. Children's events during usual working hours
7. Usual childcare falls through during usual working hours
8. Children unwell during usual working hours

Decision Made (D-DM)

1. Seek Support
   a. From Partner
      I. Balance it between them
   b. From family member
   c. From work
      I. Work colleague
      II. Work client
      III. Boss
   d. From friend
   e. Official childcare
2. Integrate *(Do both at the same time)*
   a. Work from home
   b. Take children to work
3. Take time off work
   a. Officially (annual leave/ personal day/ compassionate leave)
   b. Using Flexible Working
   c. Unofficially (an understanding or without telling anyone)
   d. Say no to extra work commitments
4. Reschedule *(Do both but at different times)*
   N.B. This requires either support or flexibility

Factors (D-F)

1. Enabling and Constraining Factors
   a. Availability of Support
      i. At home
      ii. At work
   b. Job Requirements and Expectations
   c. Financial Constraints
2. Fairness and Equity

        a. Support Seeking
            i. Impact on Supporter
           ii. Impact on Children
         iii. Previous Support
         iv. Impact on Participant
        b. Time Investment
            i. Task Time
           ii. Task Frequency
         iii. Time Previously Invested
         iv. Future Expectancy
    3. Preferences

Outcome (D-O)

1. Negative Feelings about decision
    a. Guilt
    b. Stress *(an overwhelming feeling of responsibility)*
    c. Worry *(a constant concern about something which can lead to stress)*
    d. Frustration *(a reaction to stress)*
    e. Annoyed
    f. Sad
2. Positive feelings about decision
3. Conflict with others
4. Decide to make a change
5. Positive or negative outcome for others
6. Positive or negative perception of others
7. Dangerous Behaviour

Appendix I - Diagrammatical Representations of Decision-Making Scenarios – Examples

N.B The codes used in the following diagrams link back to their position in the final template (See appendix H).

Couple 1 – Lucy:

Complete work vs. pick children up D-TC2	**Drop son at dad's vs. getting to work** **D-TC1**
↓	↓
Asks partner for support D-DM1a	**Asks partner for support** **D-DM1a**
↓	↓
Partner's job is flexible/ he is working from home D-F1ai **She had a deadline to meet** D-F1b	**Partner available - flexible job** **D-F1ai** **She has been late for work and had time off previously** **D-F2biii**
↓	↓
Decided next time she would leave work to collect children because felt guilty D-O1a & F4	**Negative outcome for partner work-wise** D-O5

Couple 1 – Paul:

Take son to her dad's vs. get to work on time
D-TC1

Use Flexi-time - Go into work a little late
D-DM3b

Partner busy at work
D-F1ai/D-F2ai
He could make time up by working late
D-F1aii

Partner can work early but will not get to see her dad
D-O5