Making sense of being a working mother

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This master thesis is dedicated to
my parents, my sister, Naoise and my friends,
for loyal support, care and understanding in the dark hours

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Abstract

Feminist scholarship has for many years drawn attention to the unrealistic assumptions embedded in gendered discourses that patterns women’s lives. This focus has led to calls for feminists to pay attention to what is being said about women in general, and mothers in particular in the discourses that models their lives. Yet while the importance and need for the continuation of such endeavors is acknowledged, this thesis switches the focus to examine what women themselves are saying.

This thesis examines how Danish educated women make sense of the work/life choices they have articulated during and after they returned from maternity leave to paid work. In the thesis I have analyzed how educated women who may be among the talent recruited for future manager posts, tries to construct a work/life balance in their everyday life.

Through examination of the data, the author derived three sensemaking strategies consisting of the results of the work/life choices that the women had made or negotiated before and during the maternity leave and after they had resumed paid work. The strategies are 1) Securing a safe environment; in which the women frame how they can continuously make sure that her child is brought up in a safe environment, 2) The ‘good’ mother; in which the women make sense of how they perform as mothers and have to split their identity into three to optimize their identity as mothers, and 3) The working mother; in which the women makes sense of how they can fulfill their roles both as employees and as mothers. All strategies are ongoing, as the women will continue making sense of their strategies after this thesis had been written.

The conclusive findings show that employers need to adjust to the idea that it is no longer only women who will be away from work for a longer period of time during the leave, and likewise it has to be accepted that also men are staying home with the child if it turns sick, and leaves work at 4 am. to pick up the child. Hence, retaining pro-male legislations and staff-policies can no longer be excused with that the women averagely are working less compared to male co-workers during their time on the labor-market. The 12 months of earmarked leave to women will have to be changed to a solution similar to the Icelandic, and little changes will have to be made as it is only the way the months are divided among the gender that will change. The present idea that it is only men who are able to work more than the average 37 hours/week will also have to be adjusted, as a sharing of the child-related routines such as leaving the job at 4 am. will be a tendency among both men and
women meaning that women will be able to work late half of the week. It may then be expected that
the notion of that only loyal workers who stay in late are suitable for promotions will modified, and
staff meetings after 4 am would possibly be less common. Along will the thought among women, as
seen in this thesis, that having small children means that they are not able to have a career will no
longer be the truth. All these changes will also mean that the idea that women should earn 18
percent less than men can no longer be excused.
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Chapter 1: Introduction

The Youth revolution and the Students revolution in the 1970s in Denmark sprouted a female movement; ‘Rødstrømpebevægelsen’, which was a radical and leftist type of feminism. The main strategy for the movement was a struggle for fundamental changes in women's position after years of oppression. The movement did not only alter the economic, political and social aspects of 'female discrimination', but also fought against women's oppression in the family and against the psychological and sexual repression.

40 years have passed, and today, the motions initiated in the 1970s have brought Danish women to places the initiators would not have dreamed of. However, a new study on the division of home chores shows that Danish women are still spending far more hours on child care, dishwashing and cleaning in the home, than Danish men, while the men spend time at work. By acknowledging the sense which is perceived and experienced by individualists, I focus in particular on the distinctive understandings that individual women develop in their efforts to understand and clarify aspects of their private life and working lives. The contributions I hope to make is to explore and explain how Danish women make sense and negotiate their identity as the individual woman, as a partner and a mother, and as a working woman in 2010.

Danes usually designate their career path when they are between 27 and 37 years, the same period of time during which people work hard at home in order to provide families. This creates a general career conflict for Danish women statistics shows that it is still the mothers that take most of the maternity leave. This prevents the women from using their education properly after the termination of school, since the years of career making are often the same as the ones, where women have babies. Hence, the women are on maternity leave before they actually get started on their careers. The lack of the male genders participation in the activities in the households prevents women from having the same possibilities as men when it comes to reaching a career at top level. In 2010, only

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1 Named after the contemporary American movement; the New York Redstocking movement
3 Dansk Sygeplejeråd (Danish Nursing Counsel): http://www.dsr.dk/PortalPage.aspx?MenuitemID=236&M540=aXRlbWtleQ%3D%3D%3ANDEwMTg4Mg%3D%3D%26bW9kZQ%3D%3D%3AMzAw
5 Charter for flere kvinder i ledelse (Charter for more women in management): http://www.kvinderiledelse.dk/personalepolitik.asp
6 Ministeriet for Ligestilling (The Ministry for equality): http://www.lige.dk/kil_private_topledere.asp
5.4 percent of Danish top management are women, and on the management level just below, women make up only 6.8 percent\textsuperscript{7}.

Society needs a greater understanding of how Danish women make both the personal and professional choices they initiate after becoming mothers. The professional world does not know why some women choose not to strive for a career after they have given birth and the companies are unsure of how they should motivate working mothers to pursue a career in the company\textsuperscript{8}. A fundamental understanding to how women make sense of being working mothers will provide the professional society with certain tools and a deeper knowledge of how to recruit and maintain working mothers, enabling them to achieve management positions.

Therefore it is important to have a greater focus on female candidates in order to acquire an understanding of which grounds and reasons they base the work/life choices they make as working mothers and how they perceive the work/life decisions they have made and negotiated. This being the outcome of choices they make when prioritizing between either ‘work’ (career and ambition) on the one hand and ‘life’ (pleasure, leisure, family and spiritual development) on the other. It is such choices that either facilitates a possibility of being a working mother with a career or not.

1.1 Research question
The research question in this master thesis is:

How do Danish women make sense of, and perceive the result of the work/life choices that they experienced and negotiated as they returned from maternity leave to paid work.

1.2 Structure of the thesis
The thesis is structured into six major sections. Chapter 1 in the thesis is an introduction, in which I account for the starting-point of the thesis, including informing the reader about the problem area of the master thesis, and the specific research question that I aim to solve. Following, in chapter 2 is a literature review, in which I seek to provide the reader with a broad understanding of previous research made on working mothers, their working habits, and work/life balance. The research and implementation of work/life balance is typically happening in Western countries, including USA and Australia, wherefore working habits in Eastern countries is not covered. Chapter 3 describes the methodological approach in the thesis, forming the theoretical foundation of my work with the

\textsuperscript{7} Kvinder i ledelse (Women in management): http://www.kvinderiledelse.dk/statistik.asp

\textsuperscript{8} Kvinder i ledelse (Women in management): http://www.lige.dk/kil_vaerktoejskasse_familie.asp
empirical studies and the analytical approach. Chapter 4 outlines the empirical findings made in the field research of interviewing Danish working mothers, which will be categorized and analyzed. Chapter 5 provides a discussion of the empirical findings in chapter 4. Finally, chapter 6 is first a conclusion of the research question, followed by the author’s reflections of what the concluding findings will mean to employees, employers and the staff-policies on the Danish labor-market, followed by suggestions to what the conclusive findings may contribute to present academic research and lastly, an outlining of what future research the concluded findings may lead to.

Chapter 2: Literature review

2.1 The working mother and the need for Work/life balance

Prior research shows that work/life balance is related to overall human well-being\(^9\). Work/life balance is defined by Voydanoff (2005) as "a global assessment that work resources meet family demands, and family resources meet work demands such that participation is effective in both domains"\(^10\). There are many aspects to consider, when discussing work/life balance, however the degree of gender equality in relation to domestic chores, including childcare, and the conditions on the labor market, are particularly relevant when it comes to being a working mother dealing with work and life issues. In relation to this, gender equality is defined as "the importance of supporting women’s development and achievements, and an international reorganization of the importance of including women in all aspects of life"\(^11\).

2.1.1 The turn of the breadwinner model

Work/life balance is a well-debated topic in the Western world, and gains enormous attention in political agendas, as governments, employers and employees’ organizations are all involved in discussions about important issues of work/life balance, however little research has been made on Danish level\(^12\). The notion is generally related to working time, flexibility, (un)employment, welfare, social security, family, fertility, migration, demographic changes, consumption, leisure


\(^12\)Center for Work Life Balance: http://www.cba.dk/
time and so on\textsuperscript{13}. Helping employees balance their work and family lives is increasingly viewed as a business and social imperative, and a decade ago, the American Department of Labor (1999) suggested that the difficulty of combining work and family is the major challenge for the current generation of employees\textsuperscript{14}. Therefore, I find it particularly important to approach the subject with an in depth investigation to understand why is it that women face such difficulties in balancing domestic chores and childcare with their professional life at work? We need to know how women negotiate with their employers, their partners, etc., and create a rational approach to these matters. According to ‘traditional Western culture’ children require special individual care, which is generally expected to be given by the mother. The traditional ‘breadwinner’ model is derived from the idea that the male partner has a full-time job (hence the breadwinner), while the female works a part-time job, and is mainly responsible for the housework and childcare duties.

Acknowledgement of the declining importance of the traditional male breadwinner model raises a dilemma that can be partly resolved by what at present is called the modified breadwinner model, in which the women are second shifters. On the one hand, women, and especially mothers, increasingly expect to be engaged in employment working 37 hours/week, and on the other, they are (very often) also in charge of the unpaid caring work in the home\textsuperscript{15}. As the modified breadwinner model is not a perfect solution to meet Danish women’s needs and demands, I will investigate Danish women habits at home and at work.

In the second half of the twentieth century, rates of female employment have increased markedly in all advanced countries. Everywhere work and family have become more compatible. Compared with their mothers and grandmothers, women of younger generations have entered the labor market on a massive scale\textsuperscript{16}. When the responsibility for housework and caring activities are often passed on from women, the crucial thing then becomes what or who should take over when women work alongside men. Some point towards the role of the state and public institutions, whereas others believe that the men should take over. According to Esping-Andersen et al. (2002) ‘the content of

\begin{thebibliography}{16}
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women-friendly policies can be summarized as followed 1) affordable day care, 2) paid maternity and parental leave, and 3) provisions for work absence when children are ill\(^\text{17}\). They point out that childcare, parental leave and benefits are crucial for women's labor market participation. Furthermore the engagement of fathers in care-giving activities and domestic work would create a more equal division of family tasks. I want to investigate how Danish families solve the above mentioned problems and which types of parental leave and benefits Danish women perceive as the most appropriate solution to take care of their child. Peter Abrahamson and Cecilie Wehner (2006)\(^\text{18}\) introduce the concept of family-friendliness, being a family-friendly welfare state, which supports and encourages both mothers and fathers to participate equally in work for pay and in care work. This solution is called the ‘defamilialized’ model\(^\text{19}\), meaning that care work is done by the state and/or market sectors, and thus facilitate women’s employment and the creation of an adult employee family model. Employees are increasingly beginning to introduce family-friendly workplaces and many public work/family policies are implemented within the context of organizations. This is not only a question of relieving women of their double burden, it is also a question of offering richer lives to fathers through increased contact with their children, which has positive implications for the children who get to know their fathers better\(^\text{20}\). However, the ideology of the male breadwinner is still more or less evident in many European countries, and examples of strong and weak male breadwinner welfare countries are apparent\(^\text{21}\). As ‘fatherhood’ has increasingly become a notion in Western countries, the economic market has also changed regarding how baby-related products are promoted and targeted. The increasing father interest has changed the wording in the many magazines devoted to the topic of the care of babies and young children. Today they have titles which include some variation of parent rather than of mother (e.g. parent and child rather than mother and baby). This corresponds to evident new directions in social practices have increased in Western countries\(^\text{22}\).


2.1.2 Work/life balance in European countries

According to Rubery et al., (2004), the European targets for work/life balance is to provide ‘childcare for at least 90 per cent of children between three years old and the mandatory school age and at least 33 per cent of children under three years of age by 2010, together with targets on achieving substantial reductions in gender gaps in employment, unemployment and pay, with a view to eliminating the gender pay gap by 2010, which showed the importance attached to increasing female employment rates and childcare at the EU level’23. In the Employment Guidelines 2005–08 (CEC, 2005, numbers 17 to 24 of the new Integrated Guidelines), following is written: ‘incorporated explicit references to the importance of increasing female participation and reducing gender gaps in employment, unemployment and pay; and of promoting better reconciliation of work and private life and the provision of accessible and affordable childcare facilities’24. Changes to the current setting of these are not made only by welfare policy initiatives, and requires a new set of values, attitudes and assumptions towards gender relations in the family and elsewhere25.

All though the European policies are clear, the level of implementing family-friendly policies depends on the individual countries abilities and interest. Only a couple of decades ago the reconciliation of work and family life was thought of as solely a woman's issue, and in general it still remains a ‘feminine dilemma’. Recent data investigations show that although women's labor market participation may differ between countries, patterns of division of household work in the family are almost similar internationally. Men's involvement in unpaid care work has increased slightly in some countries26; however, in all countries women experience double workload; paid work on the labor market and unpaid work in the household27. Frances McGinnity and Emma Calvert (2009) have identified five different work/life models, presenting the different levels of implementation of work/life balance in European countries.

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Spain is classified as belonging to the ‘Mediterranean’ model in which the family is the breadwinner (Gallie and Paugam 2000). The shortfall in welfare provision is assumed to be met by the family, with women in particular taking on the responsibility for caring. Low availability of part-time work makes it especially difficult for women to combine work and family life in the absence of state support. In Spain less working possibilities for women may possibly also mean less work/life conflict for the female, however, this may also cause notions of gender inequality.

France falls into the ‘conservative’ welfare regime, although women’s full-time employment is facilitated and there is more state support for combining paid work and caring; however, childcare costs are high. Nevertheless, a childcare support in France has done much to help women into employment, particularly full-time employment. Lewis (1992) has described France as a ‘modified male breadwinner’ state. Women have benefited indirectly, from the care and support directed at children, as the majority of French women work. Research shows that women are more able in France than in other European member states to combine relatively high birth rates, a high old-age dependency ratio and non-marital family forms with full-time employment. Their working patterns vary little according to whether they have children. The French state is strongly supportive of family life and more especially of working mothers. Benefits and services are provided uniformly and consistently throughout the country. France is a country with relatively ‘liberal’ gender role attitudes, but a rather traditional division of domestic labor. Thus domestic gender traditionalism in France is associated with significantly higher levels of work/life conflict, whether or not gender role attitudes are ‘traditional’ or ‘non-traditional’.

Great Britain is classified as a ‘liberal’ welfare regime, with very little market interference when it comes to work/life programs. Childcare costs are an issue in Great Britain, with very few

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28 Gallie, Ducan, Paugam, Serge (2000). Welfare Regimes and the experience of Unemployment in Europe, Oxford University
29 Gallie, Ducan, Paugam, Serge (2000). Welfare Regimes and the experience of Unemployment in Europe, Oxford University
subsidies. Great Britain is characterized by high wage inequality, and a general class inequality, and women with low-income families are often forced to stay home instead of going back to work after leave. Since 1997 Labour has developed a wide range of policies on childcare services, care leaves and flexible working hours, however, in Great Britain it is still the ‘male breadwinner’ model that remains strong although steps have been taken in other directions, focusing on increased maternal labor market participation.

The So-called Scandinavian or the ‘Social democratic’ model is what classifies Sweden and Denmark. The two countries have a high level of state intervention in both family life and the labor market, and well-developed provision of support for caring. The model is often used as an example, due to the dual-breadwinner regime where both parents have full-time jobs, considered to be 37 hours per week. This model encourages the sharing of both domestic and paid work between men and women, based on the idea of equal parenthood and the dual-breadwinner family. Countries in which the ‘Social-democratic’ model can be applied are characterized by low-income inequality as well as little gender difference in terms of the labor market. The main aim of family-friendly policies in Denmark and Sweden has from start been to promote gender equality, in which context fathers’ involvement in family affairs has been encouraged, with parameters such as paternity leaves. Even though Denmark is portrayed as a country doing its best regarding equality, research made by the Danish National Research Center for Welfare has identified that the difference in salaries on the Danish labor market has not changed much in the last ten years, meaning that women continuously earn 18 percent less than men, which is equal to women working approximately one

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40 Aya’s, Ayse, Idil, 2007 (11). Worklife balance in the EU and leave arrangements across welfare regimes. Industrial relations journal, v.38 (no. 6)
day a week for free\textsuperscript{45}. The explanation for the differences in the level of salaries has been that women most often apply for a shorter education, compared to men, and that women have less job-experience, since women traditionally have been the ones to care for the domestic chores. According to Pinker (2005) men and women differ in what they state as their priorities in life. Men on average are more likely to chase status at the expense of their families; women give a more balanced weighting\textsuperscript{46}. Whether Danish women perceive this statement as the actual situation in their personal lives will be investigated in the study. However, recent research from Denmark has shown that the distance between male and female levels of education is decreasing in which women dominate the numbers attending professional education (57 percent women and 37 percent men)\textsuperscript{47}.

The World Economic Forum concludes that even though Denmark is among the best places for educated women, it is still placed as number 43 out of 134 countries in its ability to secure equal salaries among genders\textsuperscript{48}. Furthermore female economic opportunities, political power, education and health/survival, has placed Denmark as number 7 out of 134 countries in the Global Gender Gap Report\textsuperscript{49}, in which Denmark has been far outrun by the other Scandinavian countries. Subsequently even though Denmark has a great number of well-educated women, an investigation performed by The Norwegian Center for Corporate Diversity among the 500 largest companies in Nordic countries, has shown that the top management positions in Denmark only include 13.9 percent women. Again this has placed Denmark lowest in the rank among the Nordic countries, as every fifth top manager in Norway is a woman, (this is slightly lower in Sweden and Finland)\textsuperscript{50}.

2.1.3 Maternity leave

Norway was the first country to introduce four weeks of paternal leave in 1993, followed by Denmark in 2001 introducing two weeks. The paternity leave is in both countries reserved for fathers, and is not transferable to the mothers. However, in both countries, employers are not expected to provide full pay during the leave period, but they often have to top-up the payments which give them an incentive to hire men instead of women of childbearing age\textsuperscript{51}. How do Danish


\textsuperscript{47} Jyllands-Posten 16.07.2010. Mænd må genopfinde sig selv - med eller uden hjælp fra Lykke


\textsuperscript{50} The Nordic 500, (2009). \textit{Women at the top in the Nordic business sector}, The Nordic Innovation Centre

women experience the companies’ paternity leave program, and do women experience their partners as interested in using paternal leave and thereby taking time off from work to spend with the child? This will be investigated in this thesis.

It has been said that Denmark has one the most progressive gender equality arrangements. However, it is still women who predominantly take up the parental leave\textsuperscript{52}. When looking at Iceland, this country is more advanced when it comes to having educated women compared to Denmark, and one of the main reasons is identified as being a leave model in which three months goes to the mother, three months to share and three months for the father, meaning paternal leave is at least one third of the time\textsuperscript{53}. In Denmark, as an example, men are still only taking 5 percent of the leave; however, more men are taking paternity leave beyond the mandatory 14 days. Studies also show that the younger the men are, the greater the interest in having paternity leave. The United States government introduced the right to take 12 weeks of job-protected family leave in 1993. However, the country is still considered a laggard in dispensing parental leave as the scope of coverage is limited to companies with 50 employed or more, and the leave is unpaid\textsuperscript{54}.

American women who had maternity leaves indicated that their treatment often differed greatly from expectations, and that they were unable to communicate and negotiate with their bosses\textsuperscript{55}. Maternity leave challenges the normal, rational career process through treating gender conflicts as a site of sexuality. As so, biological sex, gender, and sexuality are fundamental aspects of organizing (Burrell & Hearn, 1989), ‘pregnancy and maternity leave highlight taboo issues of sex and the body: ‘Her visible pregnancy, capacity for sexual pleasure, and involvement with intimate emotions and nurturance all become evident in an organizational context where such aspects of life are considered “inappropriate”’\textsuperscript{56}. Sexuality dissolves the veneer of rationality and gender neutrality in organizing, and maternity leave also highlights asymmetrical power relations. Maternity leave is not simply absence from paid work for health reasons, but a process whereby organizational systems


\textsuperscript{53} Politiken 17.07.2010. Kvinder er simpelthen ikke en lige så god arbejdskraft som mænd; by Thiemann, Per


Lisa Belkin detected an “opt-out revolution” in her New York Times Magazine

\textsuperscript{55} Liu, Meina, Patrice M. Buzanell, (2004). Negotiating Maternity Leave Expectations Perceived Tensions between Ethics of Justice and Care, Journal of Purdue University Business Communication, Vol. 41, No. 4, p 323-349

\textsuperscript{56} Liu, Meina, Patrice M. Buzanell, (2004). Negotiating Maternity Leave Expectations Perceived Tensions between Ethics of Justice and Care, Journal of Purdue University Business Communication, Vol. 41, No. 4, p 334
make women’s bodies generally suspicious. Although some childbearing women presumably were treated the same as their co-employees in terms of performing job-related tasks (regardless of their physical conditions), they experienced different treatment when advancement chances emerged, even though they had the same or better qualifications as other candidates for promotion. For childbearing women and their co-employees and bosses, questions arise about how, when, and with what career issues and consequences workplace pregnancy leave should unfold. I will investigate how Danish women made sense of being a pregnant co-employee?

Acker (1990) suggested that organizational cultures tend to reflect male values and not recognize the employee’s need to balance their work and family responsibilities. Because the socially constructed requirements of being a ‘good father’ are congruent with those of being a ‘good employee’ (e.g. being available for work), whereas the requirements of being a ‘good mother’ (e.g. being available for children) are incongruent with those of being a ‘good employee’, mothers will be perceived as less interested in career success. A research made by Renee L. Cowan and Jaime E. Bochantin in 2009 on female police officers found that in order to do a good job as a police officer, the women were pretty much forced to choose between motherhood and doing the job well, as a career filled with crime, danger, and fear is perceived as unfit for motherhood. The possibility of being both a good employee and a good mother is impossible, and stress was often related to the job since the women faced difficulties when doing both. Apart from being underrepresented in law enforcement, female officers often experienced discrimination, sexual harassment and other types of mistreatment at the workplace; being defined and seen as “womanly” in a highly masculinized workplace.

With the increasing number of women entering the workforce over the last 50 years, the necessity of discussing the topic of pregnancy and questions relating to pregnancy has increased. Again, this

60 King, Eden B., The effect of bias on the advancement of working mothers: Disentangling legitimate concerns from inaccurate stereotypes as predictors of advancement in academe, Human Relations, Dec2008, Vol. 61 Issue 12, p1677-1711, 35p, 8
research of female police officers agreed with previous investigations on pregnancy; pregnant bodies in a highly masculinized workplace create gender and work conflicts. Because new mothers are likely to take time off after the pregnancy to care for their new infant, many new mothers can no longer adhere to the masculine norm of the ideal employee. Because of this, pregnant employees and new mothers are marked with negative stereotypes including the idea that they are less competent, less dependable, more irritable and less committed to their work\(^{62}\).

**2.1.4 Off ramping/on ramping and opting out**

It has been found that mothers, when it comes to the idea of work/life balance, find it difficult to balance work demands and child-care responsibilities and are more likely than their childless counterparts to leave the workforce involuntarily\(^{63}\). As work and career composes a managerial and professional role, motherhood is the essence of feminine role fulfillment, perhaps even more so than being a wife or partner. When confronted by work and family conflicts, women may choose between either placing household chores second, engaging in micro-managing, opting out of the workforce, slowing down career progress, trying to integrate or compartmentalize work and family time and emotions, or resorting to "mommy madness," in attempts to be the perfect mother\(^{64}\).

Bradley and Van Hoof (2005: 250) argue that 'young women tended to favor the “traditional” options of stopping employment or working part-time when children came along, rather than seeking to maintain their careers and share both wage and domestic labor equally’\(^{65}\). Quitting the labor market for British women is often a choice constrained by a scarcity of maternity-parental leave and childcare support. However, it is a relatively safe choice because the United Kingdom has a flexible labor market, which allows easier re-entry. Neil Gilbert (2005) has carried out extensive research on American women opting out of high-powered careers to stay home with their children\(^{66}\). Many professional women step off the career fast track at least once to raise children, or manage

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other family demands. The women experience the workplace “pushes” and the family “pulls” which leave the women between a rock and a hard place, and makes it easier to quit the job. However, when or if they are ready to step back into the labor market, women often hit a wall, because the financial penalties for ‘time out’ are punishing. The result is that many women decide not to reenter, which prevents companies from taking the chance to benefit from this talent pool. As a result the labor market suffers from a literate talented brain drain at the same time. The ambivalence that these mothers feel about high-powered careers versus modern motherhood, is difficult, if not impossible, to quantify. In these jobs, work and family still exist as separate spheres\textsuperscript{67}. The partners are described as ‘virtually absent from the home, or as being ‘supportive’. Subsequently, it is mentioned that the partners often left the decision to “opt out” solely in the women’s hands, having little dialogue about how the partners might ease the competing demands of home and work\textsuperscript{68}. The British labor market has always been fairly unregulated, which in particular has enabled part-time work to develop much earlier than in the rest of Europe. However, family policies fail to provide adequate support for the combination of work and family, which has negative effects on the ability to create a work/life balance. It will be investigated whether Danish women consider the opportunity to opt out from work, and stay at home, or use other possibilities such as flexibility and similar work programs to manage the work/life balance?

2.1.5 Companies adapting to pregnant woman

Organizations have responded to changes in the workforce, as an aspect of their environment, with a wide array of work-related programs. Due to increasing numbers of dual-earner couples and single parents, women’s desire for more family involvement, and changed employee expectations with regard to the quality of life outside of work\textsuperscript{69} have been met with flextime, flexplace, part-time work or job sharing, on-site childcare or childcare referral services, elder care referrals, personal and parental leave programs, and domestic partner benefits\textsuperscript{70}. However, factors such as lack of managerial support, employee fears that using work/life benefits will be penalized by co-workers backlash or negative managerial performance evaluation\textsuperscript{71}, and the failure of programs to address the root sources of work/life conflict (e.g. flextime’s failure to reduce total number of hours

\textsuperscript{71} Kirby, E., L., Krone, K., J., (2002). \textit{The policy exists but you can’t really use it. Communication and the structuration of work-family policies}. Journal of Applied Communication Research 30, p 50 - 77
worked) prevent these programs from eliminating work/life conflict. Managers are often given little guidance as to how they should evaluate requests for flexible work arrangements. Some supervisors may take a ‘let’s give it a try’ approach; others dole out flexible work arrangements as rewards to highly valued employees only.

An increasingly popular strategy that companies use in order to distinguish themselves from the competition on the labor market is to portray themselves as work/life balance supportive employers, as workplace flexibility has been linked to positive outcomes for the employees and the organization. In a nationally representative study of employees from mid- to large-size companies, perceived flexibility and ability to manage the demands of work and personal life were strongly related to higher levels of employee’s engagement and expected retention. Internal organizational studies have also established that employee’s with even a small measure of flexibility have significantly greater job satisfaction, higher levels of engagement with the company, and lower levels of stress.

2.1.6 The question of motherhood

The good mother has been perceived as ‘one who nurtures her family and considers care giving to be more fulfilling than work’. A Danish woman stated as follows in the Danish newspaper Information in 2009, ‘the title ‘mother’ seemed like it would be quite hard to live up to if I were to do it the proper, ecological, Parabens-free, detox-like way, which I quickly found out was the norm. If I were to be “properly” pregnant, I would have to cultivate it as a lifestyle and concentrate on my upcoming motherhood’. As the upcoming mother explained, she did not need to talk about her

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77 Remke, Robyn, Patrice, M., Buzzanell, Meisenbach, Rebecca, Liu, Meina, Et al. (2005). Good Working Mother: Managerial Women's Sensemaking and Feelings About Work-Family Issues, The, Communication Studies,
78 Titlen ‘mor’ virkede som om, den ville blive ret svær at leve op til, hvis jeg skulle gøre det på den ordenlige, økologiske, parabene-fri, detox-agtige måde, som jeg hurtigt fandt ud af, var normen. Hvis jeg skulle være ’rigtig’ gravid, så skulle jeg dyrke det som en livsstil og koncentrere mig meget om mit forestående moderskab.
79 Information 06.03.2009. 1. section pp 16 / 17, Debat: Kronik: Øpør mod den perfekte mor; Mølbak, Mette
stomach all the time, as she felt that she was still much more than just a pregnant woman. However, officially she did not dare to express this out loud, as she feared being labeled as 'anti-mother' even before she became a mother. She increasingly felt how women around her changed from being ‘fellow-sisters’ into ‘guardians of the holy motherhood’ by which she would be punished if she even thought about things such as red wine, coffee, stress, beer etc.

It is not only in Denmark that an ideology of ‘intensive mothering’ has evolved. An Australian investigation on flex-jobs shows that instead of having more time to themselves the women working flex-time felt that their work schedules were closely tied to the rhythms of children’s school and leisure activities, which resulted in little opportunity for personal leisure for the women. Time ‘saved’ from not having to commute to an office was reallocated to caregiving, housework or paid employment (Musson and Tietze, 2004). A change in culturally defined ideologies of ‘good’ motherhood implies that even larger amounts of time and energy should be directed toward the care of children and their leisure activities. In present time motherhood is staged, exhibited and articulated like never before. According to Danish Statistics, Danish women spend twice as much on baby equipment compared to the year 2000, as the baby equipment has to be unused. How do Danish women make sense of good motherhood, and do they experience the rules and regulations following the concept of being a ‘good’ mother?

The health system is also permeated with the idea that motherhood should be first priority for the woman. Breastfeeding is seen as a unique form of contact between mother and child, and as the best thing a mother can do for her child. Nobody seems to talk about bleeding nipples, inflammation and pain as the price of this natural contact. Consequently, infant formula is no longer given for free to new parents in France, and it has been prohibited to promote infant formula since the World Health Organization and the European Union made new regulations on what is healthy and not healthy for

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80 Information 06.03.2009. 1. section pp 16 / 17, Debat: Kronik: Oprør mod den perfekte mor; Mølbak, Mette
84 Information 06.03.2009. 1. section pp 16 / 17, Debat: Kronik: Oprør mod den perfekte mor; Mølbak, Mette
85 Information 06.03.2009. 1. section pp 16 / 17, Debat: Kronik: Oprør mod den perfekte mor; Mølbak, Mette
infants. Again, focus is placed on ecology and ‘natural nurturing’ even though this may not be the best for either mother or child. The question is who is the one advocating organic pregnancy? According to the French philosopher Elisabeth Badinter, for the most part it is the midwives, being strongly influenced by the World Health Organization and movements for ecology and breastfeeding saying that nothing is better for the child than what comes from nature, namely breast milk. As Elisabeth Badinter puts it: ‘it is as if there is a desire or an obligation to return to the authentic. And with the word authentic, is meant something that is true or good. It is very worrying’.

When it comes to mothergroups in Denmark, things have also changed. Previously these groups were used as a place where one could get good advice and where mothers had a place to discuss motherhood. At present, these mothergroups are seen not only as a showcase for the perfect mother, but also as the place where a mother may fear being labeled as a bad mother. Motherhood is idolized in a religious way, in which the perfect mother is the ideal. However, it seems impossible to reach the status of being the ‘perfect mother’. It may look great when the baby is wearing designer clothes, living in a completely clean house in which the smell of new baked buns is an everyday thing. Unfortunately this idea may actually keep some women from wanting to become mothers.

Neil Gilbert performed an extensive across-borders investigation in America, Great Britain and Australia on women who are increasingly deciding to have fewer children, or who are choosing not to have any children at all. The common ideal of mothering in the three countries is as in Denmark: women are seen as best suited to looking after young children and are required to be unconditionally available. In a study by Tietjens-Meyer (2001) on fertility decisions in America, she identifies two main groups among women who are voluntarily childless: the ‘early articulators’ and the ‘postponers’. The ‘early articulators’, were women who knew at an early age that they wanted to have fewer or no children. The ‘postponer’ group, on the other hand, was made up of women who delayed having children due to career or personal reasons.
would never want to have children. The ‘postponers’ on the other hand knew that they would have children but they had postponed so far because they had not felt that they were in stable long-lasting relationships. Because motherhood is constructed as natural and highly desirable, women who make an early decision not to have children, or who have difficulties in deciding whether to have children or not, have often been portrayed as being abnormal or having emotional problems.

Elisabeth Badinter believes that the ever more severe demands of today's mothers might mean that women choose to drop 'Project Children' and realize themselves in other ways. Thereby they redefine what it means to be a woman, which up until the present time has been to be a mother. In Germany 38 percent of educated women do not want children.

**Chapter 3: Method**

**3.1 Grounded theory and sensemaking**

**3.1.1 The use of grounded theory**

In order to answer the research question, I have created a methodology which is a hybrid between the ‘grounded theory’ by Glaser and Strauss, and the ‘seven characteristics of sensemaking’ of Karl E. Weick.

Grounded theory is a favored approach among sociologists and other researchers for conducting qualitative studies. The original version of grounded theory was outlined by Glaser and Strauss in 1967. However, over the years, grounded theory methodology has proliferated into many books on the theory, in which authors take different approaches to grounded theory or elements in this

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*To be or not to be a mother? Women negotiating cultural representations of mothering*, Centre for Women’s Studies & Gender Research, Monash University, Institute for Social Research, Swinburne University of Technology, Journal of Sociology, Vol. 43, No. 1, p 5-21

*To be or not to be a mother? Women negotiating cultural representations of mothering*, Centre for Women’s Studies & Gender Research, Monash University, Institute for Social Research, Swinburne University of Technology, Journal of Sociology, Vol. 43, No. 1, p 5-21

94 Information 06.03.2009. 1. section p 16 - 17. *Debat: Kronik: Oprør mod den perfekte mor*, Mølbak, Mette

*The discovery of grounded theory: strategies for qualitative research*. Chicago

methodology\textsuperscript{97}. Therefore the author argues the right to further develop the grounded theory, by combining it with the theory of sensemaking.

Rather than testing hypotheses within a given theoretical framework, grounded theory is an emergent approach that assumes that theory is contained (grounded), within the data collected for the study\textsuperscript{98}. In grounded theory, ‘theory comes from the data...[and] at no time does the investigator attempt to impose a theory from another study onto the data’\textsuperscript{99}. This means that data from participants determine: (a) what is explored in the research; (b) the literature searched; (c) the research question developed; and (d) the number of participants in the study\textsuperscript{100}. Grounded theory takes its starting point in a research situation, in which the researchers’ task is to understand what is happening in the data and field notes generated through the interviews with the respondents. The process of grounded theory is as follows\textsuperscript{101}:

First a substantive area of interest to research is found, and a single question that will serve as a starting point for data collection through interviews is selected. Asking the respondent certain questions, will lead them to open up more, talking in greater depth. It is important for the researcher to ask open-ended questions, rather than simple "yes or no" queries. Second, data is found through coding and categorization of the data. In this research, the seven strategies of sensemaking being: ‘grounded in identity construction’; ‘retrospective’; ‘enactive of sensible environments’; ‘social’; ‘ongoing’; ‘focused on and by extracted cues’; and ‘driven by plausibility rather than accuracy’ are used as focus words in the coding. With qualitative data, coding and categorizing is a form of analysis because the data cannot be quantified. As the researcher reads through the transcripts of the interviews and the field notes, patterns and themes is found through the use of the focus words. Third, the researcher sorts through the completed field notes and transcripts and outlines the findings. In this process the theory grounded in the collected data will begin to emerge. Finally, an analysis and discussion is conducted, in which the articulated emerging theory is prepared thoroughly. It is important to demonstrate how it fits and explains the subject of the research.

\textsuperscript{97} Flick, Uwe, (2009). \textit{An Introduction to Qualitative Research}, 4\textsuperscript{th} ed. p 428 to 429 Sage Publications Ltd.
\textsuperscript{98} How to Conduct Research Using Grounded Theory; http://www.ehow.com/how_5202729_conduct-research-using-grounded-theory.html
\textsuperscript{100} In Qualitative Research Methods (Leininger M.M., ed.), Grune & Stratton Inc., Toronto
\textsuperscript{101} How to Conduct Research Using Grounded Theory; http://www.ehow.com/how_5202729_conduct-research-using-grounded-theory.html#ixzz0xhPEim7o
The value of a grounded theory is how well it fits, that is, how well it explains real-life phenomena.

3.1.2 The use of the sense-making theory

Sensemaking, is the 'making of sense' in retrospective, and is defined by Karl E. Weick as ‘a search for plausibility and coherence that is reasonable and memorable, which embodies past experience and expectations, and maintains the self while resonating with others. It can be constructed retrospectively yet used prospectively, and captures thoughts and emotions'\textsuperscript{102}. Sense-making activities involve the construction and bracketing of cues to be interpreted, linking them to a previous frame of reference that summarizes past experiences, and revises the interpretations that have thus developed as a result of actions, interactions and their consequences\textsuperscript{103}. In this perspective, what people make sense of, and how they do it, depends on where they look, how they look, and how they want to perceive the world. There is no ‘one best way’ on how the world is formed as there is an indefinite number of useful, plausible ways to approach reality\textsuperscript{104}. Sense-making consists of a set of philosophical assumptions, substantive propositions, methodological framings and methods, which when put together, enable the individual to discover their own intentions. Simply put, sensemaking is an individual and ongoing process that relies on past experiences that have shaped our identity, which are used as cues to give plausibility to current events.

Sensemaking is also influenced by our contact with others and the context in which the sense-making takes place. Although each property is interdependent on the other, some are more central in the explanation of certain sense-making events, so their importance fluctuates according to the situation\textsuperscript{105}. In the process of the interviews with the respondents, the respondent’s creation of meaning is an attentional process, in which the respondents are telling about what has already occurred at work, at daycare, with the partner etc. at a specific point of time. Because the experience to be interpreted lies in the past, and is only a memory, anything that affects the remembering will affect the sense that is made of the memories\textsuperscript{106}.

3.1.2.1 Sense-making and grounded theory

(1) *Grounded in an identity construction*: identities are constituted out of the process of interaction, through the choices people make in their life. When the sensemaker shifts among interactions, she also shifts among her definitions of self. The sensemaker is herself an ongoing puzzle undergoing continual redefinitions, coincident with presenting some self to others and trying to decide which self is appropriate. In the sensemaker’s cultural self-presentation theory, she views herself as socially situated, using words such as ‘I’, ‘me’, ‘mine’, and ‘myself’\(^\text{107}\). In the search for ‘identity construction’ in the data-collection, coding will be done through finding previous mentioned words, which enable the author to identify how the respondent uses sensemaking to create her identity as a working mother.

(2) *Done in the retrospective*: the present conceptualization of sensemaking is the focus on the retrospective, as it is stated that ‘people can only know what they are doing only after they have done it’\(^\text{108}\). The ‘past’ may be named in terms of what happened one minute ago, a day, a year etc. Weick describes the use of retrospective as follows: ‘When, by my act of reflection, I turn my attention to my living experience, I am no longer taking up my position within the stream of pure duration; I am no longer simply living with the flow. The experiences are apprehended, distinguished, brought to relief, marked out from another; the experiences which where constituted as phases within the flow of duration now become objects of attention as constituted experiences’\(^\text{109}\). In the search for ‘retrospective’ in the data-collection, coding will be done through finding the clear reflections and awareness of past experiences, and how the respondents have used the knowledge and know-how gained through past experiences, in later contexts. These are either their own experiences or experiences gained by others. This enables the author to identify how the respondents make use of past experiences in the sensemaking of working motherhood.

(3) *Done in an inactive and sensible environment*: through actions, the sensemaker creates her personal environments and these environments then constrain the sensemaker’s actions, as they have to react upon the environment they have created. The respondents are a part of their own environments, and when acting, they do so to create materials that become the constraint and opportunities they face. There is no impersonal ‘they’ who puts these environments in front of


passive people; instead, the ‘they’ are people who act along with the sensemaker\textsuperscript{110}. In the search for ‘enactment’ in the data-collection, coding will be done through finding clear explanations and reflections upon how the respondents have enacted situations and developed routines; how her actions have affected her co-actors, her own behavior and actions, and whether the routines and situations are taken for granted\textsuperscript{111}. This enables the author to identify how the respondent enacts the role of a working mother.

(4) Social: Sensemaking is often perceived as an individual process. However, ‘human thinking and social functioning ... [are] essential aspect of one another’\textsuperscript{112}, as social psychology is an ‘attempt to understand end explain how the thought, feeling and behavior of individuals are influenced by the actual, imagined, or implied presence of others’\textsuperscript{113}. Decisions are made either in the presence of others or with the knowledge that the decisions will have to be performed with or by others, or understood or approved by others. In the search for ‘social behavior’ in the data-collection, coding will be done through the finding of apparent actions either deliberately or inattentively executed with the knowledge of how the action includes or will include co-actors in the process. This enables the author to identify how the respondent acts attentively or inattentively in order to perform the role of a working mother.

(5) Ongoing: as sensemaking is ongoing, as one cannot avoid acting, and one cannot step back and reflect on an action, to make sense of it, and thereby understand what has happened if interruptions appear. ‘Interruption’ is an important signal that changes have occurred in the environment\textsuperscript{114}. An interruption to a flow typically provokes an emotional response, which then leads to sensemaking. Mandler and Berscheid argue that ‘a necessary condition for emotion is “arousal” or discharge in the autonomic nervous system. And arousal is triggered by interruptions of ongoing activity. Arousal has physiological significance because it prepares people for fight-or-flight reactions’\textsuperscript{115}. The perception of arousal triggers an incremental act of sensemaking, and provides a warning to which the sensemaker has to initiate appropriate actions. The arousal develops slowly; about two to three seconds after the interruption has occurred, which give the sensemaker the time to act

appropriately. In the search for ‘interruptions’ in the ongoing flow in the data-collection, coding will be done through finding clear awareness of interruptions, how the respondents reacted to this interruption and possible occurrences of certain emotional events. This enables the author to identify how the respondent experiences changes (major or minor) in her life as a working mother.

(6) *Focused on extracted cues:* as sensemaking tends to be swift, researchers are more likely to see the product of the sensemaking, and not the process. To do this, a researcher has to watch how people deal with prolonged puzzles that defy sensemaking; puzzles such as paradoxes (a phrase or opinion that is in conflict with the general views and opinions and therefore seems strange, bizarre and contradictory), dilemmas (a difficult situation where two or more choices are present), and inconceivable events (impossible to comprehend or grasp fully). Cues are simple structures which again are smaller parts of a larger sense of what has occurred. What an extracted cue will become depends on context in two important ways. Firstly, context affects what is extracted as a cue in the first place, in which the concept of frame is used as shorthand for the structure of context. Secondly, context also affects how the extracted cue is then interpreted.

Starbuck and Milliken outline a process of ‘noticing’, in which cues are extracted from sense-making. ‘Noticing’ refers to the activities of filtering, classifying and comparing, whereas sense-making refers to interpretation and the activity of determining what the noticed cues means. ‘Noticing’ determines whether people even consider responding to environmental events. If they are noticed, the sensemaker will make sense of them, and if the cues are filtered, they will not. ‘Filtering’ is used to remove noise from the sensemaker, and make sure that the sensemaker is not affected by disturbances. As people are confronted with a lot of cues at each moment, they will not notice all of them, as that would be confusing. For the same reason, people are constructed with a filter, and what is remembered are the cues which the person is focusing on. In the search for the ‘focus on extracted cues’ in the data-collection, coding will be done by identifying the particular deviations in context, reasons or events that made the respondent notice the cues and make sense of them. This enables the author to identify which occurrences are important (negatively or positively) in the respondents’ sensemaking of working motherhood.

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Driven by plausibility rather than accuracy: the use of ‘sense’ in sensemaking is mischievous, as what seems sensible in a certain situation, may not be sensible if thought over a second time. How the women interpret the sensemaking strategies laid out in their tales may be more plausible than accurate, as the narration is about how the women perceive their experiences of the work/life choices they have made. People have a tendency to frame their beliefs so that they fit the world they live in. Isenberg (1986) describes how sensemaking should be analyzed: ‘Plausible reasoning involves going beyond the directly observable or at least consensual information to form ideas or understandings that provide enough certainty…. There are several ways in which this process departs from a logical-deductive process. First the reasoning is not necessarily correct, but it fits the facts, albeit imperfectly at times. Second, the reasoning is based on incomplete information’. The criterion of accuracy is secondary in any analysis of sensemaking due to two reasons. Firstly, people need to distort and filter, to separate signal from noise given the current situation. If they did not have the filter, sense-making would be impossible, as the sensemaker would be overwhelmed by too much data. Hence, important data might be filtered anyway. Secondly, sensemaking is about embellishment and elaboration of a single point of reference or extracted cue. Because the cues may have multiple meanings and significance, it is more crucial to interpret some of the meaning than to postpone action till later, when time is present for an accurate and in depth interpretation. At that time, it might be too late to react. In the search for the ‘plausibility rather than accuracy’ in the data-collection, coding will be done by identifying situations in which the respondent has acted according to one sensemaking, but later realized that the sensemaking done was perhaps not the proper one, even though it worked. This enables the author to identify how a working mother acts under pressure in the role of being a working mother.

3.2 Research design

Women with at least a bachelor’s degree or similar were interviewed about how they managed to be both a mother and an active part of the paid workforce. In order to create consistency in the empirical data, the respondents had to have resumed work, and to have passed a certain period of time at work after they gave birth (between one and two and a half years), in order to be sure that the respondents knew the routines of a working mother.


Email requests for participant nomination were sent to approximately 250 people known to the author, who were either working mothers with an academic background themselves, or who knew working mothers. These requests yielded eight potential respondents. All of them received a solicitation mail. Everyone of the women were Caucasian. 62.5 percent had a master degree, 25 percent had a bachelor and 12.5 percent had a higher education degree. 87.5 percent lived with the father of the child in a heterosexual relationship and 12.5 percent in a homosexual (lesbian) relationship, and 50 percent of the couples were married. I have focused on both homo- and heterosexual households; because I am interested in whether huge differences may occur between the homo- and the heterosexual couples. As the findings was analyzed, little difference where to be seen. 50 percent of the women lived in small cities north of Copenhagen, 12.5 percent lived in Copenhagen, and 12.5 percent lived in a larger city in the south of Zealand with 41,729 inhabitants. The remaining 25 percent lived in Aarhus and a larger city with 60,227 inhabitants in Jutland. The average age of the women was 29.7 years. 87.5 percent had only child, 12.5 percent had two, and 12.5 percent was pregnant. The average period of time for maternity leave for the women was 11.3 months. 50 percent shared the leave with their partners, and paternity leave was on average 10.25 weeks. The average income before taxes was divided as followed: 25 percent of the couples was placed in the highest income group between 750,000 to 1.5 million Danish crowns, 62.5 percent was placed in the second highest group, between 450,000 to 749,999 Danish crowns and 12.5 percent was placed in the third highest group, 325,000 to 499,999 Danish crowns. All respondents are anonymous. 

The interviews with the participants were exploratory in nature and involved general open-ended questions, with a high degree of flexibility in the answering-procedure, in order to abide by the grounded theory methodology stance of limiting the influence on participants. The data was collected through one interview per respondent, over a month’s time. The interviews were conducted as informal conversations in order to encourage and inspire the women to talk. The questions were created under the following main topics: Preparation for maternity leave; The baby is born; Being a mother/Being a working mother; You and our partner; and What is the best care you can provide your child. The general questions were effective in eliciting rich and dense

122 Appendix 1: Presentation of respondents
descriptions of working motherhood. The questions was made retrospectively, since the time frame for the period explored lasted from the time the woman decided to tell her boss about the pregnancy until two and a half years (as a maximum) after she had given birth. The interviews were taped, and transcribing was done right away by the author, with close attention to the truest representation possible, which is absolutely essential for later analysis. The interviews were made face to face which is beneficial, as it provides the ability to adapt the questioning to the answers of the respondent’s behavior and answers.

Field notes were made throughout the interview in order to gather knowledge of the respondent’s emotional behavior while she answered the questions. The women would use different linguistic expressions in situations where they wanted to emphasize particular statements or stress their opinion on certain situations.

The women did not express major emotional feelings throughout the interview, but stayed at a relaxed and positive level, which is also what the interviews reflect throughout the analysis. Even though the women sometimes felt that they had to act in sensitive environments, and that they from time to time would face difficulties, apparently these were not situations that would make her break down. She use linguistic expressions such as laughter and outbreak, and changed the tone of her voice or the pressure in her pronunciation in order to reflect how she felt about certain situations, whether it was positive or negative.

The eight interviews were of between 35 and 60 minutes duration, conducted by the author in the respondents’ homes. One interview generated on average eight pages of single-spaced writing, resulting in 67 pages of data. Each line in the transcripts was numbered, in order to ease the analysis. Seven copies of each transcript were made; one for each sense-making strategy, and each line in the transcripts was carefully read.

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Chapter 4: Empirical findings

This chapter examines the identity of Danish women and the work/life choices they were faced with and negotiated before they gave birth, during their maternity leave and as they returned to paid work. Throughout the interview the women developed an understanding of how their lives had changed in many ways and how they had adapted to fit the role of a working mother, by using the three following strategies which have been identified in this chapter: 1) Securing a safe environment; whereby the women frame how they can continuously make sure that their child is brought up in a safe environment, 2) The good mother; whereby the women perform whatever actions necessary in order to be the best mother, and 3) The working mother; in which the women make sense of how they can fulfill their roles both as employees and as mothers. All strategies are ongoing, as the women will continue developing their strategies. The analysis is made in singular.

4.1 Strategy 1: Securing a safe environment

When the woman acknowledged that she wanted to bring a baby into the world she slowly began to transform her identity and adjust it towards becoming what she believed to be the identity of a mother-to-be. At a certain point in her life, the woman slowly commenced a life change which was a step by step process in which she gradually moved from having the mentality of the individual woman who only had to look out for her own needs and main concerns, into a woman with a mentality wherein the main priority was the creation of a safe environment for a child. This environment consisted of a suitable partner (one she believed would also be an appropriate father figure), the right domicile, which would make an appropriate frame for a family, and a healthy economy:

Housing, work and finances were in place, so it was not something we contemplated, but there had been some preceding thoughts, and we would obviously not have tried if both of us had not been in permanent jobs. For me it has also been about finding the right partner before I could have a child. If I know myself well, we would probably have waited until the situation was in perfect if it had not been so125. (AST)

Having a healthy economy in place before the child was born, was among the top priorities for the woman. A pre-condition for having a child was, therefore, that the woman had a job to return to

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125 Bolig, arbejde og økonomi var på plads, så det var ikke noget vi overvejede, men det har da været nogle tanker der har og vi ville selvfølgelig ikke have prøvet, hvis ikke vi begge to var i fast job. For mig har det også handlet om at finde den rette partner før jeg kunne få et barn. Hvis jeg kender mig selv ret, så havde vi nok ventet til situationen havde været i orden, hvis den ikke havde været det der. (AST)
after the baby was born, as it enabled her and her partner to maintain the expected level of financial resources they sought as a necessary part of the strategy for securing a safe environment for the child. Therefore proper off-ramping/on-ramping conditions at work were decisive before the women would engage in having a baby, as she needed to assure that she would return to the same working conditions or similar after the maternity leave:

We got married, were at the right age and I had a job in the public sector, so one could say that there was the flexibility that I needed at work and a good off-ramping arrangement too. I also think that, subconsciously, I knew that I wanted a child and that I wanted to start a family when I applied for the job126. (AST)

Given that we had to use artificial insemination as our way to get pregnant, it is possible to quickly start pondering about whether or not to wait for the perfect time, both in residential and economic terms. [...] It was also a factor that I [...] had a permanent job and we both had jobs we could return to after the birth, which was important as we were sure to have an income both before and after the baby would be born. By that time we were living in a two-bedroom apartment and we thought that although it was not the best, there we were, we were happy to stay there and we had a little garden so we thought that it would probably be okay127. (MOP)

Having ensured a good financial situation and the right place to raise the child, the woman could turn towards identifying which factors may conflict with what she felt was best for a child, regarding her work-conditions. If the work-schedule at her present job did not meet the expectations she had for a good work-environment, and she was not able to negotiate proper working hours, she would apply for another. The working-hours are particularly relevant in order to assure that she does not have to hand in the baby too early at the baby nursery, or have to pick it up very late in the evening. High flexibility at the workplace was her main concern and if the woman did not already occupy a job with high flexibility, she would search for a job in which she would gain it. This was important in order to make the ‘world of the mother’ fit with the ‘world of a working mother’:

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126 Vi var blevet gift og vi havde den rette alder og jeg havde arbejde i det offentlige, så man kan også sige, at der ligesom var en fleksibilitet på arbejdet og en god afhopperordning også. Og jeg tror også, at på en eller anden måde i underbevidstheden vidste jeg også, at når jeg søgte arbejdet, at jeg gerne ville have et barn og at jeg godt ville stifte familie. (AST)

127 I og med at vi jo var nødt til at bruge insemination, som vores måde at blive gravide på, så kan man meget hurtigt komme ud i en lang eftertænksonhed hvor man venter på det perfekte tidspunkt boligmæssigt og økonomimæssigt. Det er så gennemtænkt, at når først man tager beslutningen. Det var også sådan noget med, at jeg havde fast arbejde og Karina havde fast arbejde, og vi havde jobs som vi kunne komme tilbage til efter barslen, og det var det, for det ville sige at vi havde en indkomst både før og efter. På det tidspunkt boede vi en en to-værelses og det synes vi ikke var optimalt men det var jo der vi var og vi var glad for at bo der og vi havde en lille have, så vi tænkte, at det skulle nok gå. (MOP)
I knew when I went on maternity leave that I would look for a new job and the plan was to apply for a job after I was done with the maternity leave. I wanted to work a little less and then I needed certain flexibility at work, to make it compatible with having a child\(^{128}\). (SBT)

[...] beyond that, there was also something more practical to it, this was that I did not have flexible working hours. I worked from 8:30 am to 4:00 pm and I was not paid for what I did after 4:00 pm. I have flexible working hours in this job, which means a lot when I coordinate with my husband. [...] this is why I need the flexibility, so that I don’t constantly have to ask my boss every time I need to change my schedule\(^{129}\). (MBK)

Securing a safe environment for the child is an ongoing process, which also included a healthy relationship between the mother and the partner, as not having one would affect the baby negatively. This was ensured by cooperating with the partner and continuously having conversations about how they both believed things should be done in the home and how they generally framed their different ideals of what is a good and safe environment:

I think we talk a lot together, especially if there are disagreements, and we talk constantly about things and about trying to find better ways of doing things. So we talk really often about what we think irritates us about each other and whether we can do things in a better way\(^{130}\). (SBT)

Keeping a clean house was a part of securing the right environment for the child, and the woman made sure that she was not alone in handling the chores, as she and her partner also divided the chores outside the home which were seen as just as important for the secure environment, such as shopping for food and handing in and picking up the child from the nursery:

It’s important in our everyday life that the house is kept properly. Our cooperation is very good. We each have some different projects that we do. Some things we share and some are only done by ourselves. For example, it’s only me who washes clothes and it's just the easiest solution because I have free time on Tuesdays and I can take the pile then. He does the shopping and takes care of the car and the garden and we both clean and do that in turns. It is important that we are clear on who

\(^{128}\) Jeg vidste da jeg gik på barsel at jeg ville have et nyt arbejde og planen var først at søge job igen, efter at jeg var færdig med barsel. Jeg ønskede at arbejde lidt mindre og så havde jeg behov for fleksibilitet så jeg kunne få arbejde til at passe sammen med at jeg fik et barn.

\(^{129}\) men ud over det var der også noget mere praktisk i det og det var, at jeg ikke havde fleksibel arbejdstid. Jeg havde arbejde fra 8:30 til 16:00 og hvad der var ud over det fik jeg ikke noget for. Og i det her arbejde har jeg fleksibel arbejdstid og det betyder rigtigt meget, så jeg kan koordinere med min mand. [...], så derfor har jeg også brug for den der fleksibilitet, så jeg ikke hele tiden skal spørge min chef hver gang jeg har behov for at lave om på min arbejdsgang. (GB)

\(^{130}\) Jeg synes at vi snakker meget sammen, især hvis der er uoverensstemmelser og vi snakker løbende om ting og om at prøve at finde en bedre måde at gøre tingene på. Så vi taler egentlig tit om hvad vi synes irriterer os ved hinanden og om man kan gøre det på en bedre måde.
picks up the child, in order to avoid him being forgotten at the nursery. So that's how it has been naturally implemented into the everyday life. And I think it works really well\textsuperscript{131}. (GB)

Even though the chores are equally divided, the woman still perceived it as necessary to remain the shepherd who reassured that the division was kept, and in order to prevent that the safe environment would not be neglected:

I would definitely take the lead at home if we had not made these divisions between us, and I know that for sure because I'm the kind of woman who would take on the responsibility. So it’s quite clear that if we didn’t have this division, well, I would be the one doing all the chores. So it cannot be any different\textsuperscript{132}. (AST)

We have firm plans for whom does what. Some things are mostly done by me, while other things are mostly done by my husband. Then we frequently talk about how it is going. I often end up cooking or doing the laundry and when I get too tired of that and I think that I’m doing most of the chores, I bring it up in our discussions. I think we should share it all and do 50% each, so if I feel I do too much, I get pent up and angry and need to talk about it\textsuperscript{133}. (MBK)

\textbf{4.2 Strategy 2: A good mother}

The women felt it was natural to include her partner in the process of having a child right from the start. She and her partner would reflect on parenting together and discuss what they saw as good or bad in the ways their friends had solved parenting problems:

It has often been the case that when we visited friends who had children we would then talk about how our friends handled their children and how we ourselves would do it. It was very useful later on, when we had children\textsuperscript{134}. (SB)

\textsuperscript{131} Det er vigtigt i vores hverdag, at huset bliver passet. Vores samarbejde er rigtigt godt. Vi har hver især nogle forskellige oppgaver vi laver. Nogle ting er vi fælles om og nogle er det kun os selv der laver. Men det er kun mig der vasker tøj og det er bare det nemmeste også fordi jeg har fri om tirsdagen og så kan jeg tage børnen. Og han handler ind og ordner bilen og haven, og så gør vi begge to rent og skiftes til det. Og så er det det ret afgørende at vi har aftalt hvem der henter ham fra vuggestue, så han ikke bliver glemt i forbifarten. Så det er sådan kommet meget naturligt ind hverdagen. Og det synes jeg fungerer rigtigt godt. (GB)

\textsuperscript{132} Jeg ville helt klart have hovedrollen i hjemmet hvis vi ikke havde de her fordelinger imellem os og det ved jeg helt sikkert, fordi jeg er den kvinde der ville påtage mig ansvaret. Så det er helt klart, at hvis ikke vi får det udtalt, hvordan rammerne er, jamen så hænger jeg i sakens. Så det kan ikke være anderledes. (AST)

\textsuperscript{133} Vi har faste planer for, hvem der gør hvad. Nogle ting gør jeg nok mest, mens andre ting gør min mand mest. Og så taler vi jævnligt om, hvordan det går. Jeg ender ofte med at lave maden eller tage vasketøjet, og når jeg bliver for træt af, at jeg synes, at jeg gør for stor en del, så bringer jeg det naturligvis op. Jeg mener, at vi bør deles om det hele - alltså gøre 50% hver, så hvis jeg føler at jeg gør for meget, bliver jeg indestængt og sur og bliver nødt til at tale om det. (MBK)

\textsuperscript{134} Det har ofte været sådan, at vi, når vi besøgte venner der havde børn, ville vi bagefter snakke om, hvordan vores venner håndterede deres børn og om deres måde at opdrage på, og hvordan vi selv ville gøre. Det blev meget brugbart senere hen, da vi selv fik børn. (SB)
The woman mainly prepared herself for motherhood through social processes, like having conversations with friends who already had children. She expressed a certain relief that the friends had been honest about how they perceived motherhood, as they not only talked about the positive aspects of motherhood, but also about the negative elements. The woman found this helpful, as she explained that some of her friends had only been told about the positives of motherhood. This may be a tendency among some mothers; a belief that becoming a mother has to be a ‘miracle’ and solely positive:

I had, of course, talked to my girlfriends about it and luckily many of them were really honest and told me not only about the good things but also the more negative stuff. I'm glad, because I've had friends who've only been told about the good parts. (AST)

The woman herself also chose to enact a rosy picture of how it was to become a mother in the interview:

I had my doubts before the birth, but everything came quite naturally. When the baby cries out you just have to act. You talk a lot about how it will be after the birth and we talked with friends [...] so I was not very nervous. It was a natural evolution. You grow in many ways during the nine months of pregnancy. It's probably why there are nine months - your brain and everything else has to fall into place. (SBT)

No. I think we've felt becoming parents as something very natural and we didn't worry too much but just tried to deal with things as they came. (BS)

However, when asked once again about how she had felt the first two weeks after the baby was born, a completely different picture emerged. The woman had to act rationally in an environment filled with uncertainty, as becoming a mother had not been easy:

We stayed at the hospital the first week and that was hard. I gave birth three weeks prematurely and I was not quite ready to be a mother - it was a bit of a surprise. As I recall, it was just nice to come home, as that was a sign that everything was in order. (SB)

135 Selvfølgelig havde jeg talt med mine veninder om det og heldigvis har mange af dem været rigtigt ærlige og har sagt både de gode ting men også de sure ting. Og det er jeg glad for, for jeg har veninder der har fortalt at de kun havde fået de gode ting. (AST)


137 Nej. Jeg synes, at vi har følt det meget naturligt at få et barn og har ikke bekymret os alt for meget og bare prøvet at gribe alt ting an, som de kommer. (AST)

138 Den første uge var vi på hospitalet så det var hårdt, jeg fødte jo tre uger før tid og jeg var ikke helt klar til at skulle være mor – det var lidt af en overraskelse. Og sådan som jeg husker det, var det bare rart at komme hjem, for det var også et tegn på, at nu var alt i orden. (SB)
It was a tough time. It was a long birth, and I spent a lot of time gathering my physical strength afterwards. I think it was really hard at first because I gave birth during the strike and it took quite a while before we got a mothergroup, so I felt very alone and it was obviously hard. I couldn’t really get the breastfeeding to work and the result was that I couldn’t breastfeed for more than four weeks. It was hard to figure out, though I could tell by our daughter’s reaction that she was just fine. But mentally it was hard as a mother [...].

A woman told how she had felt like a bad mother because she had not been able to breastfeed. She had a great need for support from her friends while deciding whether she should stop trying to breastfeed the child or not, as it was evidently not working:

I think it was excellent that I had my baby, but I also think that it was hard because I could not get my breastfeeding to work and I was really upset. In the beginning, when I still hadn’t made the decision that ‘it simply had to stop’, I felt like a really bad mother. All first-time mothers would do the same, until finally you reach a certain point and say ‘well listen here, the important thing is that she is fed and that she is doing well, which was the conclusion I reached in the end'.

She emphasized her feelings of inadequacy, as she believed that a good mother would breastfeed. She had been very concerned about how her circle of acquaintances would react to her choice of using formula instead of breastfeeding, underlining that it had been her mother and mother-in-law who had told her to buy the formula. She stated that she ‘knew’ that had there not been a public strike among the nurses, the health nurse that normally visits after the baby is born would not have recommended that she stop trying. She expressed a relief that she was not the only one in her circle of friends who had a ‘bottle baby’, however, she continued to judge herself negatively by saying that she should probably have tried a little harder with the breastfeeding, but had been forced to stop by the circumstances:

139 Det var barske løjer synes jeg. Det var en lang fødsel, så jeg brugte meget tid på at komme mig fysisk
140 Jeg synes at det var rigtigt rigtigt hårdt i starten, fordi jeg fødte under strejken og der gik rigtigt lang tid inden vi fik en mødregruppe, så jeg følde mig meget alene og det var selvfølgelig hårdt. Jeg kunne ikke rigtigt få amningen til at fungere og det endte med at jeg overhovedet ikke kunne amme mere end fire uger og det var hårdt at finde ud af, selvom jeg kunne se på vores datter, at hun fejlede jo ikke noget. Men psykisk var det hårdt som mor. (BS)
141 Jeg synes at det var fortælligt at så havde jeg mit barn, men jeg synes også at det var hårdt fordi jeg ikke kunne få min amning til at fungere og det var jeg rigtig ked af. Og i starten af hvor jeg stadig ikke havde taget beslutningen om, at nu måtte det simpelthen være slut, jamen der følte jeg mig jo som en dårlig mor og det ville enhver førstegangsødende gøre, indtil man når til et vist punkt og siger, jamen hør nu her, det vigtigste er at barnet får mad og at barnet har det godt. Og den konklusion nåede jeg jo også til. (BS)
I used most of my family and friends to support me, and luckily I had someone in my circle of friends who also had a bottle baby, so she supported me and told me that it wasn’t the end of the world. She had also had the same thoughts as me. Then I also had my mom and my mother-in-law, who both believed that I should just go down to the drugstore and get some formula. So this was probably a bit different than what I would have been told if I had regular visits from a health nurse. So there was good support from my closest circle of friends and family and I didn’t feel that anyone was judging me, but then again, it was not my own choice not to breastfeed. I could possibly have fought a little bit harder, which I probably should have done, but it's a choice that has to be made. (BS)

A woman told how she had been in a very stable environment when she had been extremely insecure and sensitive as a newborn mother, and how she felt a need to have her partner around:

I think that I was a little overtired, and I was not feeling well mentally. My husband went in and took over; we didn’t have that much we had to do the first two weeks, as babies sleep a lot, but he took care of all the practicalities. (AST)

It was really nice when we were together to handle it, I don’t know which of us looked more like something the cat had dragged in, but it was nice that we were both there to relieve each other. I was really worried when […] went back to work: how would I cope on my own and what if she cried one day and I just left her under the duvet, because I couldn’t stand listening to her. Would I be able to handle the constant screaming with the minimum sleep I had? I was very afraid that I would go completely psychotic, and place my child in the furnace, and that I would get one of those postpartum depressions in which everything goes over the top. (MOP)
The woman found that she had a good cooperation with the partner on how to handle a new baby in the family and on the same time cope with the housework:

We had already found a rhythm which we had gotten used to - one did one thing and the other did another which was really good. But we then had to reconsider the routines because at least one of us was bound to a child and it was mainly me with breastfeeding, and things like that. (LP)

It was very natural for us to complement each other and I saw that we didn’t particularly disagree about parenting, as we were reasonably agreed on how it should be done. It's not really something we've talked about that much, but I think we knew where we both stood. We had also discussed routines - I have a great need for a lot of sleep, and my husband doesn’t need quite as much sleep, so he has been really good at getting up early in the morning. This was something we had talked about long before. (GB)

The woman had thought a lot about how having a baby would change her life, but because she had tried to have a baby for a long period of time, she had already changed her habits to fit the ones of mothers:

I think, compared to some of my other girlfriends that having a child have been an easier transition. We've tried for a long time to have children, so maybe we had slowly changed our habits. (SBT)

The woman had also changed her habits slowly as she and her partner were among the last of their friends to have a child. However, having a child had still been a constraint in some situations, as it meant that she could no longer do some of the things she really liked doing:

We were among the last to have children so friends and girlfriends had already changed our way of being together. Usually, for example, we socialize in pairs. My partner and I aren’t good at doing things together, for example going out to dinner, which depends a lot on childcare though it's something that I would like to do a little more often. It's probably me who feels it the most I think. I miss having enough freedom to do different things and I have to accept that that is just not

145 Vi havde allerede fundet nogle rytmer som vi var inde i – den ene gjorde det ene og den anden gjorde det andet og det var rigtigt godt. Og det skulle man så til at tage lidt op til overvejelse fordi minimum en af os var bundet til det der barn og det var primært mig med amning og sådan nogle ting. (LP)

146 Det gik meget naturligvis for os at suppleres hinanden og jeg oplevede heller ikke, at vi var særligt uenige om opdragelse, der var vi sådan rimeligt ens med hvordan og hvorledes det hele skal være. Det er egentlig ikke noget vi har snakket så meget om. Men det er da noget man reflekterer over, når man eksempelvis er sammen med nogen der har børn, så når man går hjem, har vi snakket om hvordan de greb opdragelse an og hvad vi synes om det – hvad der var godt og skidt(latter). Hvad der var en god måde og hvad der ikke var en god måde. Og på den måde tror jeg at vi vidste hvor vi nogenlunde havde hinanden. Vi havde også snakket om rutiner – jeg har eksempelvis brug for meget søvn, og min mand har ikke brug for helt så meget søvn, så der har han været virkelig god til eksempelvis at stå tidligt op om morgenen. Og det var noget som vi havde snakket om lang tid før. (GB)

147 Jeg tror at i forhold til nogle af mine andre veninder, har det været en lidt lettere overgang at få børn. Vi har jo prøvet længe at få børn, så måske har vi lige så stille ændre på vores adfærd. (SBT)
possible, for example the desire to be home alone and do whatever you want to do. But there is always one or other practical things to do. Then there’s such a thing as a holiday, a thing we’ve always had as top priority and something I really enjoy. It's just not the same experience anymore because there are just some things you cannot do, and it affects the child in another way if it’s pulled out of its usual environment. So even when you're on vacation things must fit into a rhythm. One has to for instance, be sure that there is breakfast at certain times and all those things. So it affects us and we are thinking about whether it at all is worth going on holiday. (MBK)

In the early months, the mother’s main purpose was to meet the child’s demands, understanding the cues coming from the baby and stimulate it all the right ways, often according to what was written in magazines and on the Internet. The woman had planned beforehand that she would do as many things as possible with her child in order to stimulate it properly, however, she found it very difficult:

It was like I became stressed over it. In the beginning when she was little she had to spend time lying on her stomach for a certain amount of time, and you had to make time to have eye contact with her and you had to have time to stimulate her with as much as possible and I had no idea how I should make time for it all- she slept for four hours and then she was awake for one hour. So how could I achieve all the things I knew were important? (MBK)

Because it was difficult to stimulate the child, the woman had attended as many baby related activities as possible. Doing so had also brought her a social network, as she experienced that she herself missed social contact and stimulation from other grownups:

I think that it was a long period of time that I stayed at home for. In part I lacked adult stimulation, we went out a lot and went to many things but I think we felt like something just had to happen all the time. And it’s rather difficult when the baby is so small – after one hour has passed you’ve sung the first ten singing games - days are long and my partner came home around 6 pm. and left

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149 Det var sådan at jeg blev stresset af det. I starten da hun var helt lille, skulle hun nå at ligge på maven i så og så lang tid og man skulle nå at have øjenkontakt og man skulle nå at stimulerer hende med alt muligt, og jeg anede ikke hvordan jeg skulle få tid til det – hun sov jo i fire timer og så var hun vågen i en time. Så hvordan skulle jeg nå alle de ting som jeg vidste var vigtige. (MBK)
sometimes at 7 am. So I think that days were incredibly long and we needed the time to pass in a good way and I think it was difficult. (GB)

In order to be a good mother, the woman had split her identity into three different pieces: the identity of the wife, the identity of the mother and the identity of the woman as an individual, and she struggled to please all three identities. In order to have enough energy for her child, she felt that she had to de-prioritize how much attention she gave to her identity as a wife and to her identity as an individual woman:

It is more divided, because I must be mother, partner and the individual. So it’s divided into three identities today where it was only two before. And it takes a lot - it requires that you also remember yourself. Focus is on the role of mother as number one and then there is the focus on the role of partner and lastly there is the individual and it is hard. I get frustrated if I don’t get my time alone and I get frustrated if I don’t get time with my boyfriend and I get frustrated if I don’t get time with my daughter. (LP)

Although I still feel I'm the same as before, my life changed course .... so I can’t always be there for my friends as I used to. I have to have my child babysat if they need me and because of that I don’t do as many things as I used to with my friends, going to cafés etc. (BS)

There are some things that you have done a lot before that you either don’t have time for anymore or you just don’t have the same need for, but personally I don’t feel that I have become another person. My time is just divided differently and now I have something which means more than anything else. It’s important to me that my daughter is doing well and that my family is doing well although friends are of course still important. I would still like to go out with friends and drink coffee, but then I must consider that I’ve been away one day this week, which means that I can’t go out the next couple of nights. So in a way my identity has changed. I can also see that you need to

150 Jeg synes at det var lang tid at gå hjemme. Til dels manglede jeg voksen stimulation, men vi var meget ude og vi gik til mange ting, men jeg tror at vi havde det bar meget såen, at der skulle bare ske noget. Og det er lidt svært når barnet er så lille – så er der gået en time og så har man sunget de første ti sanglege – dagene er lange og min mand kom først hjem der ved 18 tiden og tog afsted nogle gange kl 7 om morgenen. Så det var nok det, at jeg synes at dagene var utroligt lange og man skulle have tiden til at gå på en god måde og det synes jeg var svært. (GB)

151 Den er mere splittet, fordi jeg er både mor, partner og individet i sig selv. Så den er tre-delt i dag hvor den var to-delt før. Og det kræver noget- det kræver at man også husker sig selv. Fokus er på rollen som mor som nr. 1 og derefter er der fokus på rollen om partner og til sidst er der rollen som mig og det er svært. Og det at jeg har taget en ugentlig barselsdag og er blevet og blevet bedre til at sige, og det er vi generelt, til at skemaøge ting og til at strukturere ting og det virker for mig. Og jeg bliver frustreret hvis jeg ikke får min alenetid og jeg bliver frustreret hvis jeg ikke får tid med min kæreste og jeg bliver frustreret hvis jeg ikke får tiden med min datter. (LP)

152 Selvom jeg stadig føler, at jeg er den samme som tidligere har mit liv jo ændret sig....så jeg kan ikke altid være der for mine veninder som tidligere. Jeg skal lige have passet min datter først hvis de har brug for mig og jeg er ikke så tit ude med veninderne på café o.l. som tidligere. Men igen er det jo en prioritet, for min mand vil gerne passe når jeg skal ud (BS).
think more about your husband and yourself. Before we had children you would care more about
the relationship but I can feel now more than ever that it is important to take care of me and my
partner as a couple. But you have to struggle hard, because you also want to be together as a
family. Then when you manage it, it's nice for the two of us to be alone.\footnote{AST}

The woman explained that before she had her baby, there would often be some social events that
she and her partner had not been invited to, as they had been baby related occasions. She had found
that friends with children spent more time with other parents, than with friends without. As she
herself had now become a mother, she felt that her circle of friends likewise had changed a bit, as
people with children gradually substituted friends without children, as time constraints and a
mothers needs were suddenly different than those of the individual woman:

Well I certainly interact with different groups than before and at work I can suddenly talk with
other friends with children. The ones you talk to are mothers and you talk about children that is
also what you talk about at work at lunchtime. I think that there is a club that you weren’t a
member of before you got your child and it’s also like that with friends. There were maybe some
things you weren’t invited to because it was children's stuff and you might feel that you see your
friends a little less. I think that when you have children, you start to meet other people with
children such as in the mothergroup and then you change your circle of friends.\footnote{SB}

The priorities in the household had also become different after she had a child, as a good mother
made sure that dinner would be ready at 5:30 pm. She would feel sick if she knew that the
refrigerator was empty and she would have to go shopping for food after she had picked up the
child from the nursery. She tried to attentively include her partner in the making of meal plans,
planning a week ahead, even though she knew he hated it. She felt that making meal plans would
provide the family with time to have fun instead of spending time in the supermarket:

\footnote{Der er jo nogle af de ting, som man har gjort før hen som man enten ikke har tid til eller også har man ikke den samme lyst til det
tære. Men jeg føler ikke, at jeg som person er blevet en anden. Min tid bliver bare lagt anderledes, ved at jeg har fået noget der
betyder mere end alt andet. Det er vigtigt for mig, at min datter har det godt og at min familie har det godt selvom venner selvfølgelig
stadig er vigtigt. Og jeg vil stadig gerne tage ud med veninderne og drikke kaffe, men så skal det opregnes, og så har jeg været væk
e n dag denne uge, så skal jeg ikke også være væk i de næste par aften. Så på den måde er min identitet blevet lavet om. Og jeg kan
da også se, at man også skal tænke mere på ens mand og sig selv. Før vi fik barn skulle man pleje sit forhold men jeg kan mærke
endnu mere efter at vi har fået barn, at det er vigtigt at pleje hinanden. Men man skal næsten tage sig sammen, før man har også lyst
til at være sammen som familie. Men når man så får det gjort, er det rart også bare at være os to. (AST)

\footnote{Jamen jeg indgår da helt sikkert i nogle andre fællesskaber og på arbejde kan man lige pludselig snakke men dem som har børn.
Dem man taler med er mødre og det man taler er børn. Og det er også det man taler om på arbejdet i frokostpausen. Jeg synes at der
er en klub, som man ikke er medlem af før man får barn og det er også vennemæssigt. Der var måske noget som man ikke blev
inviteret med til fordi det så var et eller andet i børnhætlet og man kunne måske mærke at man så dem lidt mindre. Jeg tror, at i og
med at man får børn, begynder man også at møde mennesker med børn i eksempelvis mødregrupper og så ændres ens
venskabskreds sig ligesom i den retning. (SB)

}
I'm trying to make some... I try to gently push him towards making a meal plan so that we've made our shopping and are ready to cook when we come home from work. Because when you've been in the nursery and then have to start thinking about what we should have for dinner and the time is 5:30 pm, he [the baby] is so hungry that there's no point in not having something ready for him. So I try to force the idea that we must make meal plans and he [the partner] hates it. Then sometimes we get it done but other times we have to shop for something randomly. We decide who goes shopping in the morning before work if the fridge is empty. Meal plans are usually done in the weekends, but it's something we've introduced after we've had our baby. I can actually have a bad feeling in my stomach the entire day if I know I must arrange dinner, and I know the fridge is empty, whereas my partner will just pass a supermarket after work and buy something and he does not feel bad about that. (LP)

The woman paid close attention to what she fed her child, focusing on providing the child with the healthiest food possible, normally being organic or ecologic, as a ‘good’ mother would never feed her child candy and lemonade:

We are very aware of ecology. There was a health nurse that suggested that she [the child] should eat what we eat. We aren't fanatics with sugar and similar, but obviously she won't get cake every day When we eat some for afternoon tea one Sunday, she's also allowed to get a piece of cake, but she doesn't get any candy or soda. (MBK)

I'm not fanatical about ecology. I'm more concerned with whether it is healthy or if she gets enough vegetables. We are fortunate that our nursery has a very good canteen where they receive food from outside and we're actually very fond of it. It's one of the best places in town that the nursery receives food from where things are made from scratch and things are, if possible, organic. Of course, we've had the discussions about whether ecology must come before everything else and most people said that health must come above all. Our daughter tastes anything but candy, soda and lemonade as that is just not something we have. We aren't frightened of sugar but we're well aware

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155 Jeg forsøger at lave sådan nogle... altså jeg forsøger at presse ham lidt til, at vi laver sådan nogle madplaner, så vi får købt ind og så er det klar. For når man har været i vuggestuen og så først skal hen og begynde at overveje hvad vi skal have at spise og at klokken den bliver 5:30 pm, så er han altid sulten og så nytter det ikke noget, at man ikke har et eller andet klart. Så jeg forsøger ligesom at få presset igennem, at vi skal lave madplaner og han hader det. Og så får vi det gjort nogle gange og så andre gange er der en eller anden der handler et eller andet tilfældigt ind. Det aftaler vi så om morgenen når det er sådan det er og så de andre dage er det at vi har fået lavet en madplan. Den laver vi som regel i weekenden. Men det er først noget vi har fået indført efter vi har fået barn. Og vi laver den madplan, fordi jeg hader hvis der ikke er styr på sådan nogle ting. Jeg kan godt nærmest gå og have det dårligt hele dagen hvis jeg ved, at det er mig der skal sørge for et eller andet mad og jeg så ikke ved hvad der er i køleskabet. Sådan noget kan jeg slet ikke have hvormod min kæreste han bare lige kører forbi et supermarked efter arbejde og køber et eller andet og det har han ikke dårlig mave over. (LP)

156 Vi er meget opmærksomme på økologi. Der var en sundhedsplejeske der var inde på, at hun skal spise det som vi spiser. Vi er ikke sådan fanatikere med sukker og sådan nogle ting, men selvfølselig får hun ikke kager hver dag, men når vi andre får noget til eftermiddagskaffen en søndag, så skal hun da også have lov til at få et stykke kage. Men slik og sodavand får hun slet ikke. (MBK)
of what sugar can do to your whole upbringing, towards the teeth and the metabolism and weight. I have actually been focused on that for a very long time and I asked our health nurse for advice because I'm deathly afraid that she might be a child that has problems with her weight\textsuperscript{157}. (BS)

The woman said that she had, to a certain extent, become a bit too focused on what she fed her child as she had included the women in the mothergroup in discussions of what was best for the children regarding eating habits. She found that not all the women in the group had felt the same excitement.

In retrospective she acknowledged that she had been a tad too extreme:

I’ve always been focused on ecology but now I feel even stronger about it and that’s because I want to give him the best of the best; things that are free from pesticides and other things that may be bad for his health. In the mothergroup it was really something we talked a lot about and we exchanged experiences and talked about things we had seen and asked about what other people gave their children on their bread. We did that a lot. Some of us - I don’t know if it was all of us, but there were of few of us who were ... well I would not call us rabid, but we were pretty decided that they shouldn’t have sugar and that they shouldn’t have added salt etc., and that things were as organic as you could get them, that they should have fish and they should have ... Yeah we were some people that were pretty… \textsuperscript{158}. (LP)

The woman was very focused on that the child would look neat when it left the home, as the woman saw it as important that the child was sending the right signals to the nursery teachers, and that these would get the impression that the child came from a good and healthy family. The woman was very focused on extracting the cues coming from the teachers on how they perceived the child’s look:

It’s important to me that this [the clothes] is something I think is neat, whether it’s purchased in Kvickly or Hennes & Mauritz, a place we buy a lot of clothes, or whether it should be some brand, it doesn’t matter. A lot of our clothing is second hand. It just has to be something that I think is

\textsuperscript{157} Jeg er ikke fanatisk om økologi. Jeg går mere op i om det er sundt. Om hun får nok grøntsager. Vi er heldige at vi i vores vuggestue har en rigtig god madordning, hvor de får mad udefra og det er vi faktisk rigtigt glade for. Og det er et af de bedste steder i byen hvor de får mad fra hver tingene er lavet fra grunden og tingene er så vidt muligt økologiske. Men vi har da haft diskussionen om hvorvidt økologi skal komme frem for alt andet. Og de fleste har også sagt, at sundhed skal komme frem for alt. Vores datter smager alt, men slik og sodavand og saftevand er som sådan ikke noget vi har. Vi er ikke helt forskrækkede overfor sukker, men vi er godt klar over hvad sukker kan gøre ved hele ens opvækst og ved både tænderne og stofskiftet og vægt. (BS)

\textsuperscript{158} jeg vil da sige, at jeg altid har gået op i økologi og det har jeg altid gjort, men nu går jeg mere specifikt efter det. Og det gør jeg da, fordi jeg gerne vil give ham det bedste af det bedste og så er man fri for pesticider og andre ting og sager der kan være i. I mødegruppen var det virkelig også noget man gik ekstremt meget op i hvor vi udvekslede erfaringer og fortalte om ting vi havde set og spurgte til hvad andre gav deres børn med på rugnødet. Det gjorde vi meget. Vi var nogle stykker – jeg ved ikke om det var os alle sammen, men vi var nogen der var... ja jeg vil ikke kalde dem for rabiane, men vi var ret fokuserede på, at de ikke skulle have sukker og at de ikke skulle have tilsat salt og alle de der ting, og at tingene nu var så økologiske som man kunne få det. Og de skulle have fisk og de skulle have... Jaa vi var nogle stykker som var sådan ret så... (LP)
neat, and it’s important that I can vouch for my child, because I believe that both children and adults, sends a signal through the clothes. So it must be clean and neat\textsuperscript{159}. (BS)

One’s clothes do not have to be of a certain brand, but it has to look good and there is also no doubt that if we leave the house and [...] wears two different socks or the blouse maybe a little too short in the sleeves, or that those trousers has a spot on it, I think ‘Aaw darn’ Then I think about what the nursery teachers think about our level of energy and us as parents if [...] looks like this, afraid that they think that we don’t have the energy to look after our child properly, and are thinking ‘what is going on in their home, since she leaves with two different pairs of socks?’ although I have no evidence to think like that. I don’t know if it’s that I hope that the teachers will like our child better\textsuperscript{160}. (MOP)

The women believed that a ‘good’ mother was one that attentively took part in the child’s everyday life, paid attention to what it said and did and participated in the child’s games. The child was prioritized above all. Having a perfect home, and an empty laundry basket was less important:

Well, I don’t know whether the perfect mother exists. The mother that I want to be is someone who likes to have fun with her children and have energy left to make that effort. If it takes 45 minutes to walk home from nursery because she has to spin around every single lamp-post on the way home then that is ok. I also want to be a patient mother who listens to and plays with the child, but then I think of course that one also wants to be the mother who has remembered to pack the lunch and remembers to bring it to the nursery, and arrives there on time - I think that that is also important. Also that there are clean clothes Monday morning, but that is second priority\textsuperscript{161}. (AST)

It’s hard to do it all. Whether it’s important depends on what we’re talking about, because if you don’t manage to play or have a good time and laugh, then I think it would make a difference. But,

\textsuperscript{159}Det er vigtigt for mig, at det er noget som jeg selv synes er pent, om det så er købt i Kvickly eller Hennes og Mauritz hvor vi køber utroligt meget tøj, eller at det skal være et eller andet mærkehalløj, det betyder ikke så meget. Det skal bare være noget, som jeg selv synes er pent. Og meget af det der har været fremme, har jeg ikke synes var pent. Det er meget farver, striber, prikker og blomster, så det har jeg ikke købt. Men det er da vigtigt at jeg kan stå inde for det man har på, for jeg tror at både med børn og voksne, så sender ens tøj nogle signaler. Så det skal være rent og pent.(BS)

\textsuperscript{160}Jeg tror det er noget jeg har fået med hjemmefra. Ens tøj behøver ikke at være mærketøj, men det skal se ordentligt ud. Og der er der heller ingen tvivl om, at jeg lige der tænker, at hvis jeg kommer afsted med [...] og hun har to forskellige sokker på, eller jeg kommer afsted og en bluse måske er lidt for kort i armene, eller at de der bukser har da en ordentlig plet på, så bliver jeg sådan lidt “årh øv” og det handler om, at jeg sådan tænker, at pædagogerne tænker, noget om vores niveau af overskud hvis [...] ser sådan ud, bange for at de tænker at vi ikke har overskud til at se ordentligt på vores barn, eller hvad er det lige der foregår hjemme ved os, siden hun kommer sådan afsted med to forskellige par sokker?” Og det har jeg ikke noget belæg for at tænke sådan. Jeg tror ikke at det er for, at pædagogerne kan lide vores barn bedre. (MOP)

\textsuperscript{161}Ja jeg ved ikke om den perfekte mor findes. Den mor som jeg gerne vil være, er sådan en som kan lave sjov med sine børn og som har lidt overskud til at tage den tid det tager og hvis det tager tre kvarter at gå hjem fra vuggestuen fordi hun skal runde om alle lygtepælene. Og en tålmodig mor og en der lytter og leger. Det tror jeg er sådan en mor som jeg gerne vil være. Og så tror jeg selvfølgelig også, at man gerne vil være den mor der har husket at smøre madpakken og husker at tage den med i vuggestuen og ankommer der i tide – det tror jeg også er vigtigt. Og at der er rent tøj mandag morgen når man skal i vuggestue, men det kommer lidt som nr. to. (AST)
if it means that you don’t have an empty laundry basket all the time then it’s maybe not that important. Perhaps it doesn’t matter that much that you don’t get promoted at work the first few years. However, it's important that you are feeling good yourself\textsuperscript{162}. (LP)

There are those days where I end up shouting ‘[…], now stop’, and then she gets quite scared and begins to cry and then I feel that I’m the worst mother in the world, and I think that it must be hard being a little girl who really just wanted a banana and just wanted to say it 100 times before she got it. I think that sometimes there is too much logistics involved with being a parent and sometimes I can lose myself a little in the logistics like ‘now you have to make dinner’ and then ‘we need to shower’, and ‘I must do the laundry’ and all of it preferably before 7 pm. And how much time is then left for […] before 7 pm when she hasn’t seen her mother the entire day and maybe she really just wanted to talk and play around and fool a little\textsuperscript{163}. (MOP)

The woman had discussed how the leave should be divided with the partner, believing that a ‘good’ mother was one who let her partner have part of the maternity leave. The woman explained that it would be positive for the partner to have a part of the maternity leave, as he then would get an opportunity to make stronger social bonds with the baby:

Concerning sharing the maternity leave, we had several friends where the man had taken a share of leave, and it had generally been a positive experience because the father builds a very close relationship with the child. So we decided that it would also be positive that my partner got a part of my maternity leave\textsuperscript{164}. (SBT)

\textsuperscript{162} Det er svært at nå det hele. Om det gør noget kommer an på hvad det drejer sig om, for hvis man ikke går nået at lege og hygget og grinet, så synes jeg at det gør noget. Men hvis man ikke har tom vasketøjskurv hele tiden, så gør det måske ikke så meget. Det gør måske heller ikke så meget at man ikke bliver forfremmet inde på arbejdet de første par år Det er vigtigt at man selv har det godt. (LP)

\textsuperscript{163} Den perfekte mor er sådan en som formår at støtte og se sit barn på barnets egne præmisser og at det barn kan være helt sig selv og slappe helt af og tror på i sin egen verden, og på der er bedst for sig selv i forskellige situationer. Det ligger mig enormt meget på sinde at […]. når hun bliver ældre, skal kunne stole på at når hun får ondt i maven over et eller andet, så er det fordi det er forkert og så skal hun trække sig for så er det ikke godt for hende at være der, eller hvis hun ser noget der er forkert, skal hun stole nok på sig selv til at sige ’nej det må l ikke, det er forkert’, og kæmpe for sin ret til at være. Der er da også de dage hvor jeg ender med at råbe ’så Freja, nu stopper du’ og så bliver hun helt forskrækket og begynder at stå og græde og så står jeg der og synes at jeg er den dårligste mor i hele verden, og at det må være hårdt at være sådan en lille pige, der egentlig bare gerne ville have en banan og bare gerne ville sige det 100 gange inden hun fik den. Jeg synes at der er meget logistik i det der med at være forældre og nogen gange kan jeg godt fortabe mig lidt i den logistik med at nu skal du have noget mad og så skal vi nå i bad, jeg skal have ordnet vasketøj og alt sammen skal helst ske inden 7 pm. Og hvor lang tid er det så egentlig der er til […] inden 7 pm når hun ikke har set sin mor en hel dag og hun måske egentlig bare gerne ville snakke lidt og lege lidt og fjoelle lidt. (MOP)

\textsuperscript{164} I forhold til at dele barslen, der havde vi flere venner hvor manden havde taget noget, og hvor det gennemgående havde været en meget positiv oplevelse, fordi faren får et meget tøft forhold til barnet. Så vi besluttede at det også ville være positivt at min partner fik en del af min barsel. (SBT)
When asked if she would be a better mother if she was a stay-at-home wife, she answered that it was a societal norm. Had the single breadwinner model still been actual, as it was when she was a child, she might have thought about staying at home, because other mothers would then also be at home with their children which would have provided both her and the child with a social network. However, as this was not how society was structured, she saw it as being for the best that the child went into childcare, in order to be stimulated properly:

I have thought about the idea that if society had been different and if there had been several who had wanted to stay home maybe I would consider the idea of being a housewife for a period of time while she was little. My mom has always been home, so I myself have been used to having my mom around me and I think that it was a good value set to pass on. But back then, I could just go out on the street and play with other children, so that way I also learned to be social and received stimuli from others, rather than just my mom. I learned the same rules that the children now learn in the nursery and kindergarten, namely community and the ability to play with other children. I could also see that it was boring for her [the child] to sit and not get any impressions from other children. So the idea of being a homemaker was not something we've talked about - it's just something I've thought about. (SBT)

When asked specifically, the woman believed that a good mother was a mother who did what was best for her which then would make her child happy too, and she found it would be best for her to return to paid work. She also saw it as vital for her own self-esteem that she was occupied in paid work, and not a stay-at-home wife:

I think that you are a good mother if you do what you thrive on doing. I don’t think that you’re a good mother if you work and at the same time have difficulty getting things to fit together. But I don’t think that one is a good mother if you stay home and don’t thrive on it. So it’s about finding a balance. (AST)

165 Og jeg har da også tænkt den tanke, at hvis samfundet havde været anderledes, og hvis der havde været flere der havde ville gå hjemme at jeg så ville været blevet hjemmegående i et lille stykke tid mens hun var lille. Min mor har altid gået hjemme, så jeg har selv været vandt til, at have min mor. Og det synes jeg at det var nogle gode værdier at viderebringe. Men dengang kunne jeg bare gå ud på vejen og lege med andre børn og der var flere forskellige børn man kunne vælge imellem, så på den måde lærte jeg også at blive social og fik stimuli fra andre end min mor. Og der lærte jeg ligesom de regler som man nu lærer i vuggestuen og i børnehaven, nemlig fællesskab og det med at kunne lege med andre børn. Jeg kunne også se på hende, at det var kedeligt for hendes at sidde og ikke få indtryk fra andre børn. Så det var ikke noget vi som sådan har snakket om- det er bare noget som jeg har tænkt. (SBT)

166 Jeg mener at man er en god mor hvis man gør det man trives med. Jeg tror ikke at man er en god mor hvis det er at man arbejder og så man oplever at man har svært ved at få det til at hænge sammen. Men jeg tror heller ikke at man er en god mor hvis det er man går hjemme og heller ikke trives med det. Så det gælder om at finde en balance. (AST)
I don’t think you can say anything about whether one would be a better mother if one stayed at home - it's very individual. I wouldn’t be, for example, and I know that about myself. It would be too tedious and I don’t like that so it would affect my mood. But there may be others who would do fine. If I had to keep the child home, I would think it was a huge challenge because it’s also good for children to play with other children. Discover the social sites and find out how to act with each other. I, at least, know with certainty that I would not be able to stay at home. Conversely, it might be nice to have some shorter days, but I have some prejudices about people who, for example, are on reduced time. I have an attitude which is probably related to gender; why should it be the woman who goes on part time? It is a part of my identity I think. In that relation gender is actually something that I think a lot about. I can get very annoyed if it’s always me who makes dinner, even though my husband works more than I do, or if I always have to wash the clothes. Although he works more than 37 hours, it's his choice; it’s not a discussion we’ve had where we’ve agreed that because he works more, I should do more things in the home. There are some who arrange it like that, but it annoys me. If I could choose, I'd like to work more than 37 hours at certain times, but it would require that I could slow down at other times. Conversely, it might be nice to have some shorter days, but I have some prejudices about people who, for example, are on reduced time. I have an attitude which is probably related to gender; why should it be the woman who goes on part time? It is a part of my identity I think. In that relation gender is actually something that I think a lot about. I can get very annoyed if it’s always me who makes dinner, even though my husband works more than I do, or if I always have to wash the clothes. Although he works more than 37 hours, it's his choice; it’s not a discussion we’ve had where we’ve agreed that because he works more, I should do more things in the home. There are some who arrange it like that, but it annoys me. If I could choose, I'd like to work more than 37 hours at certain times, but it would require that I could slow down at other times. (MBK)

The women had begun the search for proper daycare rather early in the maternity leave. It could be a difficult task to find childcare that met the parent’s criteria, and at the same time be sure to get a place for the baby, as all the nurseries had waiting lists which either ran after the child’s age or after the date when the child had been signed up. Therefore it became important to start out rather early. The woman felt that it was imperative to her to get the best baby nursery possible for the child:

Well we applied rather early. I knew that it would either have to be at a baby nursery or a daycare and we chose the nursery. There are four nurseries in […]. I had asked questions here and there. One criterion was how many children there were for each teacher. It varies. Out here there are three teachers and twelve children. They only get organic food, which is also something that I care about;
what they're eating – a lot. And how they stimulate the children is also important. They have a lot of different activities, for example, on Wednesdays they have rhythm and so forth. There are so many different projects and the teachers are very focused on child development and many other different things that are very nice. They are very active. It was definitely also one of the major criteria. All the things I mentioned, we had a shared desire for, but of course the mother cares a little more. But he [the partner] was also very participative. We are both fairly focused on food and health and ecology. We mostly buy organic at home, if it is affordable. We are also very satisfied with the stimulation of the children and we are content that the children are self-reliant and learn from each other. So we are very pleased with the nursery we have.  

When we went out looking at baby nurseries, it was the waiting list that was the most important factor, but not at any price. We visited a place where I thought ‘this is a place where it isn’t working’. It seemed like the teachers weren’t in control. You could just see it. For example, I called ahead to tell that I was going to make a visit and asked when it suited best, and they seemed surprised that I would visit them at all. There were only two teachers in one room with ten or twelve children and then one of the teachers showed me around, leaving only one teacher there. I felt ‘this isn’t okay’. I could just feel that there was no control.  

If the woman did not get a place at the baby nursery she wanted, she accepted that the baby had to attend another nursery, even if it had been one that did not fully fit the woman’s criteria. She explained that she had to get back to work, so it was more important to get a nursery on time than to wait for the right one:  

At that time, we couldn’t get a nursery because we lived in another town, so we just needed a place, and preferably by the date we wanted. It may well be an equally big problem to get a nursery by the right date. Again, when we moved to[…], we just needed it to work because we needed a nursery in time, and we didn’t have the time to introduce her for several weeks, so we just wanted it to work.
4.3 Strategy 3: The working mother

The woman had chosen to tell her employer rather early that she was pregnant, as she had ‘felt a little bad’ knowing about the pregnancy. This had not been because she had feared that her pregnancy would cause constraints for her manager and her co-workers, but because she had been afraid that waiting could have resulted in the manager seeing it as safer to release her from the tasks she was part of at that time, because she would sooner or later have to take maternity leave:

 […] according to the rules, you do not have to say it until three months before the birth, it was certainly far in the future, considering that, I felt a little bad that I knew it. So I decided that it would be best to say it early and then we would see what the results were. I was obviously a little worried that it would mean that I would be channeled out of the exciting tasks. But there was nothing like that, and my boss even gave me a hug, which isn’t something she normally would do\textsuperscript{171}. (MOP)

They told me that it was important that I said something if any changes occurred, for instance if I would need to reduce my hours or have to change my working routines. But otherwise there were no problems, no difficulties. And I kept the tasks which I thought were interesting, until I had to go on maternity leave. There were no indications of that my job wouldn’t be there when I came back. So all my reservations were proved wrong\textsuperscript{172}. (SB)

The woman had been eager to go back to work. She had negotiated with her partner right from the start that he would take the last part of the leave, as she had known that she would get bored during the maternity leave. She found that it was good to get back to a ‘decent’ life, and that her career created ‘equality’ between her and her partner as working was also a major part of her identity:

Later I actually began to get bored. I have an easy child in the sense that she slept well at night so I haven’t lost too much of my strength. I had more energy during the day, so fairly soon I felt that I wanted to go back to work despite the fact that I had nine months of maternity. I had chosen right

\textsuperscript{171} Og ifølge reglerne behøver man jo ikke at sige det før tre måneder før man har termin. Det var i hvert fald langt henne set i forhold til, at jeg havde det lidt dårligt med at jeg vidste det. Så jeg besluttede mig for, at jeg ville have det bedst med at sige det tidligt, og så måtte vi se hvad det ville medføre Jeg var jo lidt bekymret for, at det så ville betyde, at jeg ville blive sluset ud af de spændende opgaver. Men der var slet ikke noget og min chef gav mig oven i købet et kram og det var ellers ikke noget man plejer at gøre.

\textsuperscript{172} Jeg måtte jo endelig sige til, hvis det var at der blev noget, hvis jeg eksempelvis havde brug for at gå ned i tid eller var nødt til at ændre på mine arbejdsrutiner. Men ellers var der ingenting og jeg mødte ikke engang nogen tvivl. Og jeg beholdte de opgaver som jeg synes var spændende og som jeg gerne ville have indtil jeg skulle gå på barsel. Og der var heller ikke nogen antydninger om at mit job ikke ville være der når jeg kom tilbage. Så alle mine forbehold blev gjort til skamme.
from the start that I wouldn’t have a really long maternity, but also not a short one. So I had actually prepared myself for the fact that my leave ended earlier than I was entitled to\(^{173}\). (LP)

It is just because I would bore myself to death. It’s as simple as that. There need to be things that happen every day that create a rhythm – I like that… I don’t believe that it would be better for him [the child] if I was a housewife, because I think that it’s really good for the child to get out among other children. They learn a lot from each other and there is also the social aspect to it. I think it’s really important for them that they go out as early as possible. I don’t think it would have been better for him. It would have been different but not better\(^{174}\). (AST)

I wouldn’t be able to stay home. A lot of my identity lies in my work - and I believe that many others are the same. I did not even consider staying at home. Everything was about […]. Even if I tried to talk about something else, everybody really wanted to hear about her, even though I may be tired of narrating the details of the birth for the tenth time. So I really missed going to work, as that was a place where it was perfectly legitimate not to talk about my child, but rather about the things that needed to be done\(^{175}\). (MOP)

The woman’s choice to return to work earlier was discussed in the mothergroup, where she had felt negativity from some of the women about not taking the entire maternity leave. However, the woman spoke openly about her happiness in going back to work earlier during the interview, how bored she had felt, and that she desperately had needed stimulation from other grownups:

We talked about how it felt to start work again in the mothergroup. There were two others, besides me, who started work early and they thought it was tough. There were some who thought it was

\(^{173}\) Senere hen begyndte jeg faktisk at kede mig. Jeg havde et let barn forstået på den måde, at hun har ikke taget så meget på min kræfter da hun sov godt om natten. Så derfor havde jeg også flere kræfter om dagen, så jeg havde rimeligt tidligt følt, at jeg gerne ville tilbage på arbejde på trods af, at jeg efter fødslen havde ni måneder. Jeg havde valgt lige fra starten, at jeg ikke ville have en sindssyg lang barsel, men heller ikke en kort en. Så jeg forberedte mig egentlig mere på, at skæringen var tidligere end man egentlig have mulighed for. (LP)

\(^{174}\) Det er fordi at jeg simpelthen ville kede mig ihjel. Ganske enkelt. Det tror jeg. Der skal ske et eller andet til dagligt og at der er en fast rytme – det kan jeg også godt lide. Jeg tror heller ikke at det ville være bedre for ham, hvis jeg var hjemmegående, fordi jeg tror at de har rigtigt godt af at komme ud mellem andre børn. Jeg havde valgt lige fra starten, at jeg ikke ville have haft det bedre. (AST)

\(^{175}\) Jeg ville slet ikke kunne blive hjemme. Rigtigt meget af min identitet ligger i mit arbejde – sådan tror jeg også at mange andre har det. Jeg overvejede overhovedet ikke at blive hjemme. Alting handler om Freja. Og selv om man så ligesom prøver at snakke om noget andet med sine veninder, så er det jo så stor en omvæltning, at de jo ger vil høre om det, selvom man måske selv er rimeligt mættet af at fortælle om alt det der og alle detaljerne fra fødslen for 10ende gang. Så jeg savnede enormt meget at komme på arbejde, hvor det var fuldstændigt legalt ikke at snakke om mit barn men om alle de andre ting som vi skulle have klaret. (MOP)
odd that we started so early. They just wanted to get as much time as possible with their child. But I knew from the start I couldn’t do that. I needed to use my brain and talk with other people.\footnote{Vi snakkede meget om hvordan det føltes at starte på arbejde igen i mødregruppen. Der var to mere end mig, der startede på arbejde tidligt og det synes de andre var hårdt. Der var nogle der syntes at det var lidt mærkeligt at vi startede så tidligt. De ønskede bare at få så meget tid som muligt ud af tiden sammen med deres barn. Men det vidste jeg fra starten, at sådan skulle jeg ikke have det. Det havde jeg simpelthen ikke kunnet. Jeg havde behov for at bruge min hjerne og snakke med andre mennesker. (LP)}\footnote{Jeg ved ikke om vi har noget om, hvilket job der er vigtigst. Vi synes begge to at vores arbejde er vigtigt. Og når vi taler om det, er det ikke sådan at hans job vejer mere end mit. Og når vores datter er syg, ser vi på, "jamen hvad har vi på skemaet" og hvordan passer det bedst, for den af os at blive hjemme. Og det kan lige så godt være ham som det kan være mig. Men hvis det kommer sådan heelt ned til at det tæller, så tror jeg at hans er vigtigst – både i forhold til indkomst, han tjener en del mere end mig, og på den anden side, så også at hans arbejde har mere betydning for ham end mit er for mig. (SB)}

The woman perceived her work to be just as important as her partner’s which also made it very easy when decisions was made regarding who should stay at home if the child was sick etc.:

I don’t think we have considered which job is more important. We both think of our jobs as important. And when we talk about it, it's not a case where his job is more important than mine. If our daughter is sick, we say, ‘well what do we have in the schedule today’ and see how it fits best for each of us to stay home. It could be him as much as it could be me. But if it comes down to the bottom line, I think that his is the most important - both in relation to income, he earns a lot more than me, and also his work also has more meaning for him than mine does for me.\footnote{Puuuh jamen rent økonomisk er det mit, fordi jeg tjener mest. Men rent indholdsmæssigt, da ved jeg det faktisk ikke – det er jo subjektivt. Der vil han jo synes at hans arbejde er vigtigst for ham og han ville ikke kunne udføre mit arbejde og jeg vil ikke kunne udføre hans. (BS)}\footnote{Det er mig der ringes til. Det tror jeg ikke at der er en speciel grund til. Jeg ved ikke om det er fordi at det var mig der kørte ham ind og så hvis der ringes til mig, ringer jeg til enten Kasper eller mine forældre hvis jeg ikke selv kan gå. Så jeg ved egentlig ikke hvorfor det lige er mig de ringer til. Det er ikke noget som vi har aftalt. (BS)}

Purely on economic grounds, it is mine, because I earn the most. But when it comes down to it, I don’t really know - it's subjective. He will indeed think that his work is more important to him, but he couldn’t do my job and I wouldn’t be able to perform his.\footnote{It's me who’s called. I don’t think that there is a special reason. I don’t know if it's because it was me who introduced him and that that’s why they call me. I call either my partner or my parents if I can’t leave. So I don’t really know why it’s only me they are calling. It's not like we agreed on it. (AST)}
We look at each other's plans and where it’s most important that we’re present. Is there something that can be moved to a different time and how important is it that we are present at work? If she’s sick over a long period of time, we look at which one of us is dispensable\(^{180}\). (SBT)

It is usually my husband who picks her up because he is close by. He works from 8 am to 4 pm, but it's not like he is teaching all the time, so it's easier for him to leave than it is for me\(^{181}\). (LP)

Likewise, it was not always the woman who picked up the child on a daily basis, as the parents would switch between who picked up the child and who dropped it in:

My husband left early for work today so I brought her in, but normally it alternates who hands her in and who picks her up\(^{182}\). (AST)

It is either my boyfriend or I who drop our child off at the nursery and I try, as far as possible, to avoid having to hurry out. We both bring her in as we have more or less flexible hours, so we just have to be in work around a certain time. At work we do whatever we have to do and we plan whether it is me or my boyfriend who picks up by looking at who does what during the week\(^{183}\). (SBT)

In situations where the woman had to leave the workplace earlier because the child was sick, she felt very guilty because she could not perform the same workload as everyone else, and her leaving earlier would affect both clients and her co-workers, and thereby create a certain level of stress. The woman had a high level of self-expectation regarding how much she could complete at work, which may be because before she had a baby she would show up at work early, work late and bring home work. But that was no longer possible as the mother identity was prioritized over the individual woman’s needs:

I can feel guilty if the people I have for treatment are being moved to another day. The other therapists can’t take care of them, which therefore makes me feel bad if they are rejected. The number of people in work may also be a stress factor. If my daughter is ill, the appointments I have

\(^{180}\) Vi ser på hinandens planer og hvor det er vigtigst at man er til stede. Er der noget man kan rykke til et andet tidspunkt og hvor vigtigt er det at man er på arbejde? Hvis hun så er syg over længere tid, ser vi på, hvem der bedst kan undværes fra arbejdet. (SBT)

\(^{181}\) Det er oftest min mand der henter hende, fordi han er tættest på. Han arbejder fra 8 am til 4 pm, men det er ikke sådan at han underviser hele tiden, så det er nemmere for ham at gå end det er for mig. (LP)

\(^{182}\) I dag tog min mand tidlig fasted, så jeg afleverede hende, men ellers er det forskelligt hvem der afleverer og hvem der henter. (AST)

\(^{183}\) enten er det min kæreste eller mig der afleverer ude i vuggestuen og jeg forsøger så vidt som overhovedet muligt, og ikke bare drøne ind og drøne ud, for jeg har, og det har vi sådan set begge to, mere eller mindre fleksible arbejdstider, så vi skal bare være på arbejde omkring et vist tidspunkt. Og på arbejde der laver man de ting man nu skal lave og alt efter om det er mig eller min kæreste der skal hente, så planlægger vi det ud fra hvad vi har af opgaver i løbet af ugen. (SBT)
to cancel will have to wait till I come back. I know that my colleagues get blisteringly busy, which makes me stressed. This means that the child's sick days are actually very stressful. So it is best if we can arrange them with the grandparents. Thankfully, now, she doesn’t have that many sick days. But I often think that I don’t have the time to do everything which I believe I should do, and I think it’s a really difficult thing to have to swallow. You can’t manage to do the same amount when you leave at 3 pm compared to if you stayed until 5 pm, which is logical. And the extra work that I wanted to do is just not really possible. At least not as much as when I arrived at 8 am and also worked a little at home during the evenings and generally had some long days. It is something that is talked about at the workplace, perhaps mostly among colleagues who have similar backgrounds, but I also think it’s about my own expectations for myself and what I won’t be able to achieve. But there’s no criticism from the manager, suggesting that I don’t achieve what I was suppose to or because I leave too early, and I think that I get the same things done as the others. So it’s actually mostly my own expectations that I should be able to achieve much more than I actually can. Nor have I experienced any negativity from colleagues who stay in later than me, but we’re also a group at work that has small children so the majority of the staff are in the same boat.

The woman had considered that having a baby could be a negative interruption to an ongoing career; however that was not something that stopped her from having the child. She knew that she was presently not the next in line for a big career however she felt that that was ok. She still had ambitions which she hoped to fulfill later on, as she presently felt that pursuing a career would be damaging to her family:

No, it wasn’t a reservation that a child could affect my career. Not that I didn’t know it would have an effect, but it wasn’t something I considered actively. It’s something I’ve thought about afterwards, in situations where there are jobs that would be exciting to apply for. However, what

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184 Jeg kan få dårlig samvittighed, hvis de borgere som jeg har til behandling bliver skubbet til en anden dag. For andre terapeuter kan ikke tage sig af dem og så kan jeg godt få det dårligt hvis de bliver afvist. Det kan også godt være en stressfaktor, at vi er det antal personer vi nu er. Hvis man dater så bliver syg og dem jeg så aflyser bliver rykket til når jeg kommer tilbage eller også ved jeg at mine kolleger får drøn travlt. så kan jeg godt blive stresset. Dvs. at barnets sygedage faktisk godt blive stressende. Så hvis vi kan arrangere det med bedsteforældre og så videre, er det bedst. (SBT)

185 Nu har hun heldigvis ikke ret mange sygedage, men jeg synes ofte at jeg ikke får nået det jeg skal og det jeg ville nå og det synes jeg var rigtig svær at skulle sluge. Man når bare ikke det samme når man går kl. 3 pm end hvis man blev til kl. 5 pm og det er jo logik. Og det der ekstra arbejde som man gerne ville give er der bare ikke rigtig plads til. I hvert fald ikke som da jeg mødte ved 8 tiden og måske arbejdede lidt hjemme om aftenen og generelt havde nogle lange dage. Og det er også noget som der bliver snakket om inde på arbejdspladsen, men nok mest blandt kollegerne som har samme baggrund. Men jeg tror også, at det handler om mine egne forventninger til mig selv og om hvad jeg plejer at kunne nå. Men der er ikke nogen kritik af, at jeg ikke når hvad jeg skal eller at jeg går for tidligt. Og jeg mener da også, at jeg når de samme ting som de andre. Så det er egentlig mest mine egne forventninger til mig selv om at jeg burde kunne nå meget mere end hvad jeg reelt kunne nå. Det er heller ikke sådan, at jeg oplever noget negativt fra kolleger der blev i længere tid, men vi er også en gruppe derinde, der har mindre børn så hoveddelen af de ansatte var figesom i samme båd. (MBK)
precisely would that do to our family if I did it? How many more hours would I have to work and what would it mean for our family? There are some couples who organize their lives so they both can have a good career, but it has consequences at home. (MBK)

You know that you have to put everything on hold, and that is something I've thought about, but then I also think that it’s just a year of one's entire life, that you can experience it [the maternity leave], so it is basically a first priority. So I had no doubt. A career versus seeing your child's first year – I would choose the child no matter what. (GB)

YES! I've felt that things could have happened faster, but it’s also a balancing act and it’s hard even though I tell myself repeatedly that I could never do without my daughter and it’s something that we have chosen. There are so many things you could have chosen differently, but it might be a bit of an internal struggle. I occasionally say ‘well look, it might take longer to achieve what you want, but it does not mean that you won’t reach what you want’. And now we have a great child, which is part of what we want in our lives. I have recently thought about starting a second master degree, but I will not mention that to my family right now. I don’t think that I can allow myself to do that to my family and my little child at the present time. (BS)

4.4 Summary
This chapter studied the identity of Danish women and how they make sense of the three main work/life strategies; Securing a safe environment, The good mother and The working mother which they have negotiated before, throughout and after they became mothers, and how they perceive these strategies. The women’s sensemaking is done in retrospect, as sensemaking is learned by looking back over what one has said or done at an earlier time.

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186 Nej, det var ikke et forbehold, at et barn kunne påvirke min karriere. Ikke at jeg ikke godt vidste at det ville påvirke, men det var ikke noget som jeg forholdt mig aktivt til. Men det er noget jeg har tænkt over efterfølgende, set i forhold til jobs der kunne være spændende at søge, man hvad ville det betyde for vores familie hvis jeg gjorde det – hvor mange timer skal jeg eksempelvis arbejde og hvad ville det så betyde derhjemme? Det har en betydning. Men der er jo nogle der tilrettelægger deres liv, så de godt kan køre karriere begge to, men det har jo så nogle konsekvenser i hjemmet. (MBK)

187 Man ved jo, at man skal sætte det hele på pause og det er da noget jeg har tænkt over, men så tænker jeg også, at det er et år af hele ens liv, at man kan opleve det her, så det kommer altså først. Så man er slet ikke i tvivl. Altså karriere kontra at opleve sit barns første år, så vælger jeg barnet uanset hvad. Jeg er ikke det store karriere menneske på den måde. (GB)

188 JA! Jeg har følt at jeg kan mærke at tingene godt kunne have gået hurtigere, men det er også en balancegang og det er svært også selvom jeg sigter til mig selv gang på gang at jeg aldrig ville have undværet min datter og det vi har valgt, men oveni så er der så mange andre ting som man kunne have valgt anderledes, så det kan godt være lidt af en indre kamp en gang imellem at sige "jamen hør nu her, det kan godt være at det tager længere tid at nå det man gerne vil, men det er ikke ensbetydende med, at man ikke når det man gerne vil." Og så har vi fået et fantastisk barn, og det er en del af det vi gerne vil have i vores liv. Jeg har da ikke på noget tidspunkt tenkt mig, at påbegynde en eller anden Master uddannelse, men det vil jeg ikke byde min familie lige nu.. det synes jeg ikke at jeg kan tillade mig overfor min familie og overfor mit lille barn på nuværende tidspunkt. (BS)
Securing a safe environment is the first step a woman takes towards motherhood. She frames the ground stones of a safe environment as consisting of the right partner, and then in cooperation with the partner, she finds the right domicile and building a safe economy. A safe economy means that both the woman and her partner have a secure income after the baby is born, wherefore good off-ramping and on-ramping arrangement is important for the woman. When it comes to a safe environment, this also includes a mother that has time for her child, and she perceives a work-schedule that does not conflict with having the child as a main priority. This is particularly relevant in order to avoid handing in the child very early in the morning and picking it up late in the evening. Securing a safe environment for the child is an ongoing process. As the child grows and becomes aware of its surroundings, it is very important that mother and partner have a good relationship, which the couple secures by continuously communicating with each other on how they frame the world. Along with a healthy environment the woman also interprets a clean house as imperative for a safe environment in which to foster a child. The woman believed that she and her partner have equally negotiated and divided the chores in the home, by which the partner no longer remains the one ‘helping’ in the house – he shares an equal responsibility with the woman to assure that the child comes from a home where things are clean and proper. However, even though the woman also perceived that there is gender equality in her household, the chores are still divided according to gender whereby the woman does the laundry and the man is in charge of the garden and the car. Likewise, it is also still the woman who in the end chooses to mention if things are not done as she feels they should be.

The woman perceives motherhood as an intentional transformation from the individual woman with selfish needs to a woman with three identities; the individual woman; the wife; and the mother; and she seeks to meet the requirements from all three identities. However, a good mother prioritizes the identity of the mother far above the other two at the expense of her old friends, her partner, a possible career and herself as a person. The woman acknowledges the inequality but finds that the circumstances are definite. She is self-conscious about identifying her role as a good mother, as society portrays a certain way of how a mother should be. The woman finds this approach incompatible with how she frames herself as a person. She extracts cues from surrounding mothers and concludes that the best approach to defining the role of a mother, is to do what she herself feels is best. The societal norms of motherhood tend to portray a misleading picture compared to what the woman actually experiences. In one situation she explains that she is positive that her friends
choose to be honest with her when they told her about what motherhood would be like, and not only describe the positive things but also the more negative. However, when she herself is asked how she felt it was like becoming a mother, she first answers that ‘it had been a natural process’. However when probed, she admits that it was very tough and filled with insecurity. The same pattern reappears several times throughout the interviews, as she enacts behavior which she found was negative before she became a mother herself. It seems that the woman believes that there is the truth which society expects, and then there is the actual truth, which is something one does not want to admit to. The good mother adapts the societal truth extracted through cues and let it become her official reality, as she feels bad the true reality, which is perhaps due to the insecurity she feels.

Insecurity makes the woman very focused on how she dresses the child before it leaves for the daycare. She believes that clothing sends out signals, and she is especially keen on sending the right signals to the nursery teachers. It is highly important that the teachers get the impression that the child comes from a family that takes good care of it. The woman is very insecure about why she feels that way, about why it is so important what others think about her family. She has a similar reaction when it comes to planning for dinner. Even though her partner is not dedicated to making dinner plans, the woman actually pressures him to participate in the planning, as she herself feels sick the entire day if she does not know what to make for dinner the same evening. The mother plays a dominant role in the household from time to time, doing what she feels is best for her, which again is what is best for the child and wise versa, as far as she is concerned. At occasions, this may get too extreme on focusing what is best for the child, which is exemplified in the situation with the baby formula, and in the situation where she feels stressful about not having enough time to stimulate the baby properly, according to what is written in books and magazines, because the baby is only awake for one hour at a time. The woman is so wrapped up in making sense of what a good mother is, and seems very confused, and has finally decided that as long as things are done her way, she has done her best. When asked what she believes a good mother is, she however, shows no insecurity. She clearly does not strive to be the perfect mother with a clean home and an empty laundry basket, but rather the mother that focuses 100 percent on her child’s well-being, and about being present and playful in the company of her child. The woman also believes in giving up parts of the maternity leave for her partner, if he is able to do so, believing that it would be good for her partner and child to create a closer bond. She herself perceives that she and her partner have negotiated about how the maternity leave should be divided. However, she gives the impression that
beforehand she had decided the terms of the negotiations before she discussed it with her partner. An incentive to let the partner have a part of the maternity leave was that the mother knew she would be bored if she stayed at home all twelve months. This is a modern, working mother who expresses these sentiments, and not the norms of the society. The woman is very eager to get back to work, and says that she is bored at home. As expressed earlier, the woman does not frame it as comme il faut to say anything else. However, the woman expresses clearly that it feels good to get back to a decent life, where it was legitimate to talk about other things than her baby all the time. In any case, it was because the partner took the last part of the maternity leave that she could get back to work earlier. However, one woman had actually planned that her child would start in the nursery earlier than normal, because she wanted to get back to work. It is peculiar whether the women in the mothergroup who were against going back to work earlier, had a different level of education, since all the women in the interview expressed clearly that they were bored and do not try to excuse themselves while saying it. However, she does say that she would not be a stay-at-home wife since she did not feel in the long run it would be good for the baby to stay at home with the mother, and that it would be best for the child to start with childcare. The mother did not feel able to stimulate the child in the right ways, such as would be the case in a daycare center with other children. At the same time, she also makes it clear that in her opinion, a better mother would not be a stay-at-home mother, as society today is made for the dual breadwinner model and not as it was thirty years ago, where there would be more stay at home mothers and more children playing on the streets. If more mothers choose to stay at home, the woman would have a network of friends, which is important, as she explains that she would get bored of talking baby-talk all the time, and that she needed stimulation from other grownups. And once again she portrays that what makes her happy makes the child happy and vice versa. A part of being a good mother, is finding the right baby nursery, and this can be a very difficult process due to waiting lists. Especially finding the right one. In the selection of the right daycare, the woman goes to a lot of trouble finding the one she sees as fit for her baby, but getting the chosen daycare is close to impossible. But, when it all comes down to it, and it is time to get back to work, the choice of daycare is no longer as important as it seemed to be. She describes that getting a daycare in time was the main priority, and taking a couple of more months off from work was not mentioned as an option.

When the woman chose to become a mother she equally chose that she would not have a career in which she worked more the 37 hours per week, as she perceives that this would affect her family.
Before the maternity leave she would come in early and work late, and even bring work home, being a woman who found her motivation in working a lot. She also chose to tell the workplace early that she was pregnant as she was afraid that her pregnancy would cause the manager to release her from the important task she was part of. Whether it was because she mentioned it early or not, she kept her task up until she gave birth. The woman still express a wish to be a hard working woman and hopes that she can meet the needs of the working woman when the child gets older. It irritates her that her husband is working more than her, but only because she wishes she could do the same. It seems like they haven’t actually negotiated the work conditions, but rather followed the known path of the partner working more than the woman. She says that her job is just as important as his job, which is also evident when it is discussed who should leave work early or stay at home because the child is sick. In such a situation, who does what is decided at the time, which depends on who is most dispensable from work. Likewise, it is also discussed during the week who picks up the child and hands it in, as the parents take turns who does what. When probed, the woman answered that she believed that the job was perhaps more important for him, which also seems to be the explanation as to why she is the one only working 37 hours per week and not her partner. The women feels guilty that she cannot deliver the same workload as she used to before she had a child, but she does not on the other hand put in an extra working hour after the child has been put to bed – she seems comfortable with the prospect that a possible career has to wait.

Chapter 5: Discussion

The theory that has emerged from the interviews with Danish women illustrates a multifaceted impression of how Danish women make sense of being working mothers in 2010. After having resumed work the women's plausible reflections of the strategies they have developed before and during maternity leave provide the viewer with an idea of how a woman rebuilds her life to make it fit with the world of a child. Becoming a mother clearly changes how women frame the world, as their priorities evolve along with the challenges they encounter as new mothers. The following chapter is a discussion of Danish women’s sensemaking of being working mothers and how these women perceive the three work/life strategies that has been derived from the empirical findings in chapter four. It is a reflection on which ways contemporary studies agree or disagree with these findings.
5.1 Securing a safe environment

5.1.1 Getting things right

When the women reflected upon and made sense of how they had strategized a safe environment for their children they explained that the experience of giving birth to a child changed their world perspectives. A feeling of helplessness overwhelmed them as the love for this child was so strong that it produced a continuous insecurity, a fear for the child’s wellbeing, and a wanting to do only the best for their children. These feelings made it difficult for the women to trust their abilities to make the right choices for the ‘safe environment’ strategy for their children. In order to be able to make a good strategy the Danish women experienced a necessity to re-prioritize the order of their lives, as security and a safe environment suddenly had a different meaning than before they had children. According to research performed by Tina Miller (2007) anticipating the responsibilities of mothering is a common feature in the women’s prenatal narratives, as women engage in different and tentative ways with strands of different discourses, speaking about ‘trying to get things right before the baby is born’\(^{189}\). The Danish women prioritized to find the right partner with whom they secured having a good economy, good work arrangements and a settled agreement on who did what inside and outside the household, before they engaged in having a child. Thus, the Danish women majorly perceived ‘security’ and ‘safety’ as tangible factors, in respect of which elements they saw needful of adjustment to the possible needs of a child and they had little focus on intangible terms such as values, when strategizing a secure environment.

As with the Danish women, the life situation of Finnish women in research performed by Eija Sevón (2005) indicates that a mutual relationship, work histories, economic situation, and the implicit idea that children are a part of their adult way of life were the elements which made the Finnish women and their partners feel ready to become parents, and they thus shared the same pre-conditional strategy as the Danish women. These feelings reveal something about the narratives of a good or appropriate female life course in Finland: first comes education and after that (and maybe also after a few years in the labor market) it is the woman’s turn to have children; a common idea which is shared by the Danes; however the expectations of society to have a secure economical and work-related background are not as strongly imbedded in the Danish women’s reasons, as these

\(^{189}\) Miller, Tina (2007). "Is This What Motherhood is All About?: Weaving Experiences and Discourse through Transition to First-Time Motherhood", Gender & Society 21: 337
concerns are more related to the safety of the child. Like the Finnish women, the Danish women perceived the results of their work/life choices as a base or a foundation upon which they continuously could evolve the strategy of securing the child’s environment. Throughout the process of it being created, the women experienced that it was their responsibility to perfect the strategy, as they would surely face challenges which would continuously confront the result of their work/life choices, and thus the strategy had to be adjustable to the child’s evolving needs. This was done through negotiations with their partner, with the workplace and whichever external elements that may have seemed unsuitable to match their strategy.

5.1.2 Flexible arrangements and job-security
In terms of securing the work-conditions till after the baby was born, the women made sure that they had a good opting out arrangement at their workplace, assuring that they had a job to return to after the maternity leave. Danish women are normally protected from being fired during the maternity leave period and even after as the employer has to have a legitimate reason to fire a woman, as the pregnancy itself is not a legitimate reason. However, cases in which women were fired right after maternity increased by 41 percent between 2008 and 2009. When then turning to the United States, the term ‘opting out’ is different from the Danish meaning, however it may become a topic, if the number of women fired right after maternity leave increases in the future. An increasing number of professional American women are opting out of paid work to become a stay-at-home mother, as the women struggle to balance motherhood and paid work. Recent popular culture pieces often focus on women who leave the professional workforce and become home-bound. This is evidenced in the tremendous media focus on those elite, professional women who are ‘opting out’ of the paid workforce, at least temporarily, to concentrate on children and family life.

Apart from good opting out arrangements, the Danish women also focused on having a flexible work-schedule when they returned from maternity leave, in order to ensure that the life of the working woman did not conflict with the life of a mother. When looking at an Australian investigation by Hilbrecht, Margo et al (2008) on flex-jobs, it shows that the Australian women, just

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like the Danish women, chose to work flex-time: not to have more time to themselves, but to ensure that their work schedules were closely tied to the rhythms of children’s school and leisure activities, which again resulted in little opportunity for personal leisure for the women. 

5.1.3 Sharing the chores equally

The Danish women experienced that sharing the chores in and outside the household with their partners on equal terms made it easier for the women to make sure that the home was kept clean and that things such as shopping for food and picking up/handing in the child were done, which was also a major part of securing the environment for the child. Ensuring that, for example, there would be food in the refrigerator for dinner, or that the child would not be forgotten in the nursery were crucial factors in the strategy. A research performed by Haris Symeonidou (2004) on parenthood and time allocation in European countries show that with regard to household chores, it seems that in general men do the gardening, repairs and shopping and the rest is left to women. When comparing seven European countries analyzed in respect of childcare, there appears to be a higher level of participation in childcare by Greek parents. Germany has the highest participation of men in childcare, closely followed by Greece, Italy and Portugal. Nevertheless, while men usually devoted their time to playing with children or reading stories, the other caring activities of feeding, dressing, bathing etc., were carried out almost exclusively by women, which is not what the Danish women experienced, as they also shared bathing, changing diapers etc. with their partners on equal terms.

The women experienced that the partner was an embedded part in the designation of how safety should be strategized; however, the main concern of the women was how they made the basic work/life-choices for the child. This is exemplified in the women’s outlining of how they believed the frame for good parenting should be, in which the partner was one of the life choices the women had to make in the preparation phase for the safe environment for the child (e.g. they were focusing on finding a lifemate with whom they could create a safe world for a child in which mother and father stayed together – a nuclear family). The research carried by Eija Sevón in Finland proves that maternity care, as it is seen in the in the Danish family strategy, displays an ambition for a nuclear family-oriented gathering, with a positive assumptions about fathers’ participation. The nuclear family bears an idealistic view about pair relations as well-functioning and equal, and where

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parenthood is shared. Potential problems, disagreements and gender inequalities in the relationship and parenthood are not recognized, as they reported trust in the companionship and a trust that a child would be a shared responsibility, which is also seen in the investigations on the Danish women’s ideals, as they were open towards including the partner in the decision-making process of the raising of the child in safety\(^{195}\).

5.2 A good mother

5.2.1 What is a good mother?

When reflecting upon the result of the choices the Danish women had made when strategizing for good motherhood, they experienced that being a good mother is very complex and that the decision-making related to mothering is mainly based on how society reflects ‘good’ motherhood. During the pregnancy, the women were highly aware of how a ‘good’ mother should act, as they felt it was central to engage in defining the strategy of a ‘good’ mother in the prenatal phase. They perceived that consumerism presented one vision of ‘good’ motherhood; however, when looking at other women on the streets, in the supermarket etc. they experienced that motherhood was a multifaceted form and that ‘good’ motherhood is highly individual in real life. According to Tina Miller (2007) prior research focuses on expectations and experiences of motherhood, as attention has been drawn to the assumptions made about women’s ‘natural’ and ‘instinctive’ caring capacities. It has been argued that such assumptions have neglected the ‘circumstances, power relations and interests that have made women primarily responsible for mothering’ which has led to beliefs ‘that women’s mothering abilities are somehow natural, essential or inevitable’. These assumptions and beliefs can be hard for first-time-mothers to live up to and thereby create a certain fear, as the women strive to be something that they perhaps are not able to become\(^{196}\).

The women found that a major part of the strategizing for good motherhood throughout the pregnancy was predominantly done through conversations with friends and relatives who already had children; the Danish women then made their prenatal choices and ideas for ‘a good mother strategy’ based on these women’s experiences. When making sense of their choice of strategy, the Danish women emphasized the importance of their circle of acquaintances spoke frankly about how motherhood is, as motherhood can also be tough sometimes, and there seem to be a tendency


\(^{196}\) Miller, Tina (2007). “Is This What Motherhood is All About?”: *Weaving Experiences and Discourse through Transition to First-Time Motherhood*, Gender & Society 21: 337
among women to take the view that motherhood will be perfect, which is never the case. Because people had also mentioned the less positive sides of motherhood, the women's pre-planning of their strategy had met the actual experiences they had throughout the first months of motherhood, as these were filled with insecurity and uncertainty as to whether they had made the right choices concerning the child and in stimulating the child the right way. In the research of Tina Miller (2007) women anticipated that mothering would become “key role” but expressed concerns about the ability to “stimulate the child, however assures herself that it no doubt is discursively solved by returning to instincts and nature, and that when the baby come it will be very natural to them. According to Tina Miller, personal experiences of mothering and motherhood are largely framed in relation to two discernible or ‘official’ discourses: the ‘medical discourse and natural childbirth discourse’. Both of these tend to focus on the ‘optimistic stories’ of birth and mothering and underpin stereotypes of the ‘good’ mother’. In addition, a third, unofficial popular discourse comprising old wives’ tales and based on maternal experiences of childbirth has also been noted. These discourses have also been acknowledged in work exploring the experiences of those who apparently do not ‘conform’ to conventional stereotypes of the ‘good’ mother.

5.2.2 Paternity leave of not?

The Danish women experienced it as vital for their strategy that their partner was embedded in the decision-making on how the child should be brought up from the beginning and perceived that a ‘good’ mother should include the partner on equal terms, avoiding being a dominant role in the upbringing of the child, which has been a general tendency seen among Danish women. As such, the women also chose to share the leave period with the partner and found that a fully involved partner increased the bond between the child and the father. However, the negotiation of paternity leave was not only a question of the parents agreeing on the terms, as the partner’s workplace also played a crucial role as to whether the partner was able to take paternity leave or not. Only two weeks of paternity is earmarked for the male partner - only 5 percent of the total leave, which is one of the barriers to gender equality in the labor market. Research performed by Ingólfur V. Gíslason (2007) is interesting. The Icelandic Act on Maternity/Paternity and Parental Leave underwent significant changes in the year 2000, as the leave was extended from six months to nine, and parents who were active in the labor market were paid 80% of their average salaries during the

197 Miller, Tina (2007). "Is This What Motherhood is All About?" ; Weaving Experiences and Discourse through Transition to First-Time Motherhood, Gender & Society 21: 337
198 Information 06.03.2009. 1. section pp 16 / 17, Debat: Kronik: Oprør mod den perfekte mor; Mølbak, Mette
199 Politiken 17.07.2010. Kvinder er simpelthen ikke en lige så god arbejdskraft som mænd, by Thiemann, Per
The leave was furthermore distributed so that fathers were given three months’ leave, mothers three months and the parents were given three months to share as they wished. Figures show that the Act has been well received by society and around 90% of fathers take advantage of their right, using on average 97 days while mothers use an average of 180 days. It is also indicated that the Act has leveled the status of men and women in the labor market in Iceland.200

5.2.3 Meeting the actual demands

Having a child is such a big responsibility that failing is not an option, and as such the partner becomes a close co-actor in the decision-making for further strategizing. However, as the partner resumes work after only two weeks, the women are alone in the process of meeting their children’s demands and on making decisions during the day. As those of the women who were first-time mothers had little or no experience in motherhood, they based their strategy of ‘good’ motherhood on books and the internet, which were stressful choices, since the attempt to be a ‘good’ mother (i.e. the mother as dictated by the literature) was very difficult to meet. According to Tina Miller (2007), her research showed that most women like the Danish women did not experience new mothering as natural, or instinctive, in spite of prenatal hopes and beliefs. While the women had ideas about what mothers did, as demonstrated in their prenatal accounts, any innate mothering knowledge appears to be absent. The women experienced that nature turned out not to have been ‘a force to be trusted’ during birth, and this sets the scene for the early weeks of mothering as the practical skills of nurturing must be learned. The mothers appeared unsure of which strands of discourse to draw on and where and how to locate their experiences as they engaged in early mothering. Their sense of confusion is palpable as their prenatal expectations do not match the reality they find themselves in.201

As the Danish women had in the prenatal phase based the first steps of the strategy on what society dictated, they experienced that these choices held them back from listening to their own feelings and intuitions throughout the first months of motherhood. The fear of not being able to perform as ‘good’ mothers made them feel inadequate. In these situations they experienced the importance of being supported by their circle of friends and relatives in their choice-making, as the women somehow felt incapable of making their own decisions. This in particular is prevailed as a mother

201 Miller, Tina (2007). "Is This What Motherhood is All About?" Weaving Experiences and Discourse through Transition to First-Time Motherhood", Gender & Society 21: 337
explains that she is not able to breastfeed her child, and has to feed it with baby-formula instead. Studies by Ellie J. Lee (2008) in the United Kingdom exemplify how ‘good’ mothering is in particularly measured in how the mother feeds her child. One British woman states that she felt as though she was ‘not doing her job properly’, as she felt she failed her maternal role by baby-formula feeding, since she might be doing the last thing a mother should, i.e. inflicting ‘harm’ upon her child, which is exactly how the Danish mother felt. The women in the British research also needed to be supported in their decisions of not breastfeeding, while searching to find a way to account for, not simply accept, the judgment that a mother who does not breastfeed is ‘doing something wrong.’ Overall, it appears to confirm the suggestion that infant feeding is about more than nutrition, and that how mothers feed their babies is experienced as a ‘measure of motherhood’ and the women’s ‘capacity as mothers’ 202. Apart from breastfeeding, it is generally very important for the Danish women that they, when the child begins to digest real food, feed their child with the right food, which according to the mothers’ views is either ecological or at least healthy food. Similarly, it is also a sign of ‘good’ motherhood that the women pay close attention to dressing the child neatly before it is sent off to the baby nursery. The women believe that their choices of food and clothing communicate to people how they are as mothers. This is particularly evaluated in the mothergroup and in the baby nursery, and this is where the mother feels tested on whether her ‘good’ mother strategy is adequate, fearing that society could judge her as a bad mother.

5.2.4 Accepting new changes

Becoming a ‘good’ mother included accepting that a child changed the women’s daily lives, which the Danish women perceived as a natural transaction, despite sometimes being tough. Similar, the investigation performed by Tina Millern(2007), showed that the women in her investigation rather early in the prenatal phase of their journey into motherhood, reluctantly had to accept that one of the more challenging things about having a child was that they had ‘to change their whole way of life really to carry a child’ and that ‘this is not fair’, whereas the Danish women seemed to accept rather easily that bringing a child into the family would bring natural changes. For the women in the investigation by Tina Miller, the journey into first-time motherhood had involved a steep, lonely and bumpy learning curve for which, in retrospect, they felt ill prepared. As one of the women says, ‘but then I don’t think anybody could actually honestly say this is how I am actually going to cope

with it [becoming a mother] until it actually happens, until the baby’s . . . you know is in your arms . . . because I never knew that being a mother would completely change my life.²⁰³

The Danish women quickly experienced that it was a necessity to split their identity into three; the mother, the wife and the woman as an individual. They saw this as a fitting way to cope with the many choices that had to be made on an everyday basis. When making sense of this action the women perceived that it had made them capable of focusing on being a ‘good’ mother when they were with the child and that they thereby avoided being distracted by elements from their other two identities, since being present and attentive when socializing with their child was the key to ‘good’ motherhood. They experienced that in order to manage being a ‘good’ mother, it had been a necessity to spend less energy on the ‘wife identity’ and the identity as an individual woman, as they perceived the ‘mother identity’ was the most important identity. As women did not let the other two identities conflict with the identity of a ‘good’ mother; they, on the other hand, experienced that motherhood influenced the choices made when acting out their other two identities. For example, it became a natural part of the strategy of being a ‘good’ mother to decrease socializing with friends who did not have children and increase the number of activities with friends with children; socializing was more seen as something the individual woman or the wife identity would be doing. The women also felt that the strategy of being ‘good’ mothers conflicted with their identity as wives, as they spend less energy on socializing with their partners, which otherwise was a very important action, as a good relationship is one of the foundations in the strategy of a ‘safe environment’ for the child.

According to Karl E. Weick (1995), personal identities are shifting and multiple, as identities are constructed through a process of interaction and through the choices people make in their lives, as seen in the findings in this thesis. The women’s self-concepts and personal identities are formed and modified by how they believe others view them as mothers, as wives and as individual persons and how they frame the world in which they interact. As such, the Danish women experienced that they had undergone an identity change, as they suddenly had to interact in a new situation in which they acquired the identity of a ‘mother’; an identity which is defined by how the women perceived themselves a mothers²⁰⁴.

²⁰³ Miller, Tina (2007). "Is This What Motherhood is All About?" : Weaving Experiences and Discourse through Transition to First-Time Motherhood, Gender & Society 21: 337
5.2.5 Ready to resume work

As the women grew more accustomed to being a mother, they increasingly felt an urge to be stimulated by other grown-ups. The women perceived that a ‘good’ mother is not necessarily a woman who is solely dedicated to mummy-madness, as it is also acceptable to focus somewhat on the mother’s personal needs. As such, the women also perceived it as natural part of their strategy of being a ‘good’ mother to resume work earlier let the partner have the rest of the leave, as they perceived work as a major part of their identity as a woman. They experienced a need to return to a life where they were not judged exclusively on their performance as mothers, but on their performance as intelligent women. When making sense of this choice, they realized that being a working woman reflected on how they were as mothers, as being a part of the workforce was a dominant part of how the women reflected on themselves as an entity. Thus, the Danish women perceived that being a stay-at-home mother was not an option, compared to being a working mother, as this choice would neither be healthy for the women as they would have little social network, nor for the child as Danish society is no longer designed for women who stay at home with the child, as it for example is in The United States. Isolating the child from other children, by keeping it home with the mother in the early years, prevents the child from learning the basic social skills which are necessary when socializing with other children, and the women do not feel they are capable of teaching their children these social skills. The Danish women therefore perceived it as an important part of the strategy of being a ‘good’ mother to find a good nursery. However, as it could be very difficult to attain a nursery that met the women’s demands, they understood that they would have to compromise with their demands for the nursery in order to ensure having a nursery found before the date that they resumed work.

The Danish women’s experiences correlate with the research performed by Meina Liu et al (2005) on American women. This research concludes that a ‘good’ mother arranges quality childcare either with family members or with a baby nursery. However, the American women expressed that unless they were satisfied with their initial arrangements, they would go through very different and sometimes multiphase processes of child care arrangements, as they either brought their children to daycare centers or hired nannies to care for the child in the home. One American woman explained how her concern of being away from her child while going to work made her introduce her child to

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daycare in steps because she needed time to adjust to being apart from her child\textsuperscript{206}. The research indicates that American women do not compromise with daycare as do the Danish women. A dominant reason for this could be that most of the American women have only between five to six weeks of paid maternity leave compared with the twelve months of Danish women. Therefore they have to return to work much faster than the Danish women, leaving a very young child in someone else’s care, which can be assumed to be very difficult \textsuperscript{207}. Subsequently, stay-at-home mothers and women opting out of work to dedicate their time to their child is very common phenomenon in the United States where which working mothers to some extend are still perceived as something negative, whereas a stay-at-home mother is a somewhat rare occurrence in Denmark.

5.3 The working mother

5.3.1 Counted as less a worker

In the process of sensemaking the Danish women experienced that their identities as working women was a highly embedded part of how they perceived themselves as women, and experienced a fear that being pregnant would resolve in that management would count them less capable to manage their present level of work. When reflecting upon the choice of telling management early that they were pregnant, they realized that this was not done out of loyalty to co-workers. This could be somewhat expected, since as the women would sooner or later go on maternity leave, it would require structural changes at the workplace. Their choice were due rather to a dread that management would deprive them their status as respected workers, acknowledged for good qualifications, and instead regard them as less important to the company since they were mothers-to-be, and therefore no longer employees with ambitions of having a career. However, the women experienced that this was not the case, and that they could continue with the tasks they were managing. Research performed by Meina Liu and Patrice M. Buzzanell (2007) among American women sustains the fear that the Danish women faced, as the research indicates that maternity leave was not perceived as just a simple absence from paid work for health reasons. It was more seen as a process in which organizational systems make women’s bodies generally suspicious. For childbearing women and their co-workers and bosses, questions arise about how, when, and with what career issues and consequences workplace pregnancy leave will unfold. Because maternity leave does not have obvious and direct organizational benefits, members may experience

\textsuperscript{206} Remke, Robyn, Patrice, M., Buzzanell, Meisenbach, Rebecca, Liu, Meina, Et al. (2005). Good Working Mother: Managerial Women’s Sensemaking and Feelings About Work-Family Issues, The Communication Studies,

\textsuperscript{207} Maternity Leave in the United States (2007). Institute for Women’s Policy Research
ambivalence about leaves and workload reductions for pregnant workers\textsuperscript{208}. Present literature on educated Danish women’s work-environment shows that highly educated women in the private sector loose six percent of income per child as a result of, among other things, the time off during the maternity leave. Subsequently, as the private sector is dynamic, the woman cannot count on getting her old position back when returning to work after the maternity leave. Rather, she is easily pushed back into the hierarchy and must start over again. If she has management responsibility, it is even harder to keep the post open while she is on maternity leave because her absences also have consequences for other employees. In contrast, it is nowhere near as big career consequences for a female teacher or nurse to be away for a year. They can easily pick up where they left off\textsuperscript{209}.

5.3.2 More than just a mother

As mentioned in strategy two, the Danish women perceived it as hard not to be intellectually stimulated by other adults during the maternity leave, and had already chosen to resume work earlier than normal before they went on maternity leave, as they knew twelve months would be too long a period of time to stay at home. The Danish women experienced that some of the women in the mothergroup did not respect their choice, as it was perceived as ‘odd’ that they did not want to take advantage of having twelve months of maternity leave. The Danish women on the other hand experienced it as natural that they would want to return to work, as the women perceived themselves as more than just mothers, feeling an urge to resume the part of the identity as an individual woman, in which they were perceived as more than just a mother. They experienced that re-strengthening the identity as working women was important, not just for their own self esteem, but because it re-established the level of professional equality between the women and their partners.

Finding research in which women express their need for stimulus during maternity leave is very difficult, as well as research on women returning to work earlier because they miss their job. Research performed by Meina Liu and Patrice M. Buzzanell (2007) among American women touches on the subject, where one women expressed an anxiety to return to work faster as she missed public contact with the outside world. Another woman expressed how she felt really bored

\textsuperscript{208} Liu, Meina, Patrice M. Buzzanell, (2007).

\textit{It's 'give and take': Maternity leave as a conflict management process}. \textit{Human Relations} 60: 463

\textsuperscript{209} DJØF: Højtuddannede kvinder diskrimineres (2007).

during the maternity leave. These women were both perceived as ideal workers by management, and still felt valued and respected irrespective of their pregnancies, because they showed that they were engaged in the company’s welfare\textsuperscript{210}. British research performed by Liz Morriz (2008) investigated women’s reasons for returning to work after maternity leave did, and did as the research performed by Meina Liu and Patrice M. Buzzanell, sustain the findings on the Danish women’s interest to return to work earlier. 48 percent expressed that they returned earlier as they had a desire for intellectual stimulus and 35 percent a desire for social contact with other adults\textsuperscript{211}. When reading blogs and articles on Danish women and maternity leave, it provides an impression that it is increasingly articulated that Danish women miss their jobs after approximately eight to nine months. One reason for why it is not easy to find academic literature on this topic could be that only Scandinavian countries have ear-marked maternity leave for mothers of such a long duration as twelve months, hence women in other countries, especially in the United States, may feel that their maternity leave is very short, and do not experience the same need to return to work as the Danish women. A second reason may be that it is somewhat a taboo among women to express that they do not fully enjoy their maternity leave, which is exemplified by how the women in the maternity group reacted to the Danish women returning to paid work earlier. A third reason may be that it is perhaps only a certain group of women which does experience this urge to be stimulated, being women with academic backgrounds with a certain level of ambitions, like the Danish women interviewed for this investigation.

5.3.3 Being present at ‘career time’

The Danish women had right from when they met their partners, negotiated that their work was just as important as their partners’. They experienced that sharing the chores in the household including cooking, who picked up and handed in the child at the baby nursery, and who stayed home with the child if it was sick, provided them with a chance to work more than if the women had been in charge of all chores. Thus the women did not have to sacrifice their job on the same level as if they daily had to consider how they should meet their own expectations at work and also fulfill the role as the one in charge of the household and the child. However, when making sense of how the women managed being both a working woman and a mother on the same time, the women experienced that they overall perceived it as very difficult to meet their own expectations regarding

\textsuperscript{210}Liu, Meina, Patrice M. Buzzanell, (2007). It’s ‘give and take’ : Maternity leave as a conflict management process, Human Relations 60: 463

\textsuperscript{211}Morriz, Liz (2008). The experiences of women returning to work after maternity leave in the UK, Aston Business School.
how much they should be able to complete of the task they had set out to do on daily basis at work, as they were not able to work long hours like their colleagues when they had to pick up the child.

A Danish investigation\(^{212}\) on engineering families’ abilities to share chores in the household shows how important for women’s careers it is that couples equally share the chores. As seen with the Danish women in this thesis, engineers are good at sharing the responsibilities in the home, including who looks after the sick children and who should deliver the child in the morning. However, it seems as though it is still the woman who picks up the children in the afternoon, meaning that she is left behind in the career race. Figures show that whoever stays after work achieves the good work-tasks because he/she networks with the right people and drinks an informal cup of coffee with the boss. The study shows that while only 14 percent of male engineers pick up the children, it is 47 percent of the female engineers every afternoon which does the pick up. 90 percent of all nurseries closes at 5 pm. which is in the middle of what could be called ‘career time’, because meetings are still held as there are still staff left, and these people will acquire points by staying longer. This means that the men score higher points.

5.3.4 The working woman and the mother

Making sense of how they perceived themselves as working women, the Danish women experienced that their choice of being a working mother made them feel guilty if they experienced that they had to leave work earlier because of the child, as in many ways, the women felt it was just as important to do a good job as before they became pregnant. The women experienced that trying to both satisfy her identity as a mother and as an employee could become stressful. However, working in the evenings was generally not a choice, unless it was very urgent. This choice was based on the importance of focusing on the child when they were at home, and they did generally not consider working after the child had been put to bed. When looking at American literature Heather Dillaway’s and Elizabeth Paré’s (2008) research on stay-at-home women versus working mothers, investigations show that a ‘good’ mother is always present, which is also what the Danish women try to be. However the American research indicates that in order to be a ‘good’ mother forgoing any engagement in income-earning activities, either outside of or within the home is crucial. The woman is not only ‘at home’, then, but also is a ‘full-time’ mother because she is not dividing her time or focus between paid work and childcare. According to the American research

\(^{212}\) Ingeniøren 13.01.2006, Ligestilling indtil kl. 16, Ipsen, Annika
child care and care giving in general should be the antithesis of paid work and should be kept physically separate from paid work and the workplace. The research suggest that a working mother is characterized as a ‘supermom’, in which a mythic ‘supermom’ should be able to switch effortlessly from high-powered career woman to attentive mother/homemaker without sacrificing job or children. Thus American literature presents the identity of the working mother as an abnormal form, indicating that combining the two identities the ‘working woman’ and the’ mother’ into working motherhood is mythical, which is to some extent also exemplified be the Danish women as they daily face difficulties. A second research performed by the Engineers’ union on work-environment, shows that engineers with children found more frequently that the immediate management was not good at planning the work hours, and the more children the engineers had, the less they found that management was not good at planning. Engineers with two or more children were more often behind in their work, and found it necessary to work faster. It is therefore not unexpected that engineers with children often have stress symptoms, like the Danish women in this thesis, compared to engineers with no children, and especially engineers with more than two children felt more worn out, emotionally exhausted, stressed and irritable.

5.3.5 Interrupting the career

The Danish women experienced that having a child indirectly had become an interruption to the possibility of having a career at that time, and did feel that they were held back at work. They perceived it as only being temporary since they believed that as the children grew older, they would choose to resume meeting the ambitions they had had before they became pregnant. They perceived it as damaging to the family if they tried to meet these ambitions being mothers with young children. Meina Liu and Patrice M. Buzzanell (2007) investigated career possibilities among American women. It showed that even though employment and career discontinuities are seen as fairly routine, this point does not mean that employment and career disruptions are any less conflicting. From women’s perspectives, work and career breaks can mean worries about job, wage, and advancement potential. From the employers’ standpoints, work discontinuities may raise concerns about project completions, talent loss, and lower commitment.

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215 Liu, Meina, Patrice M. Buzzanell, (2007). It's 'give and take': Maternity leave as a conflict management process, Human Relations 60: 463
Chapter 6: Conclusion

Chapter six first provides the reader with a summary of the thesis, through which the problem statement is answered. Followed are the author’s reflections of what the concluding findings will mean to employees and employers on the Danish labor-market including how it may influence the outlining of future staff-policies. Subsequently, suggestions to what the conclusive findings may contribute to present academic research are given. Finally, an outlining of what future research the concluded findings may lead to and how we make sense of these is made. The conclusion is considered to be new theory.

The research question in this master thesis is:

**How do Danish women make sense of, and perceive the result of the work/life choices that they experienced and negotiated as they returned from maternity leave to paid work.**

6.1 Making sense of being a working mother

Through examination of the data, the author derived three sensemaking strategies consisting of the results of the work/life choices that the women had made or negotiated before and during the maternity leave and after they had resumed paid work. The strategies are 1) Securing a safe environment; in which the women frame how they can continuously make sure that her child is brought up in a safe environment, 2) The ‘good’ mother; whereby the women perform whatever actions necessary in order to be the best mother, and 3) The working mother; in which the women makes sense of how they can fulfill their roles both as employees and as mothers.

6.1.1 How Danish women make sense of securing a safe environment?

According to present research by Tina Miller (2007), anticipating the responsibilities of mothering, feeling insecurity and a need of creating a safe environment for the child is a common feature, occurring already in the prenatal phase. The Danish women’s need to secure having the right partner, a good economy and the right domicile, is a pattern which also is seen among Finnish women, for whom it is seen as a part of the culture in the country first to have an education, and then the securing of the mere tangible things such as a good economy before engaging in having a child. Like the Finnish women, the Danish women perceived the results of their work/life choices as a base or a foundation upon which they continuously could evolve the strategy of securing the child’s environment, continuously adjusting it to the child’s needs.

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When securing good economy it is particularly relevant for the women to make sure that they have a good off ramping/on ramping arrangement with their job and thereby assure that they return to the same work-conditions or similar when they return after the maternity leave. This however is only relevant if the women are agreeing with the present work-schedule at the job. It is important for the women to have flexible working hours as this becomes relevant when the child is born, because the women need to make sure that the working hours will not conflict with the routines related to the baby such as avoiding handing in the baby too early or picking it up too late. If they do not have the work-routine in demand and cannot negotiate proper working-hours, they will look for a new job. When having assured a good foundation for a safe environment for a child, the women feel it is agreeable to become pregnant. The focus on having flexible work-conditions a research by Hilbrecht, Margo et al (2008) also show a tendency among Australian women. The research prevail the same tendency as the women choose to work flex-time, not to have more time to themselves but to ensure that their work schedules were closely tied to the rhythms of children’s school and leisure activities.

The Danish women’s need of securing a good off ramping/on ramping arrangement has become a necessity as Danish women are no longer secure from being fired from the job as they return from the maternity leave. Women may experience that their job has been taken over by other people while they were on leave, wherefore the woman is no longer needed. It is illegal for the employer to fire the woman with the maternity leave as a reason; however the employer’s right to fire the woman cannot be contested if they use other arguments as reasons.

Securing a safe environment is an ongoing process, and continues after the child has been born. The women perceive a good relationship with the partner as decisive, as not having one would affect the child. As so, the couple has focus on cooperation and on communicating about what they both perceive as important aspects for the family regarding preserving the frame for a secure environment. The Danish women’s interest in creating a nuclear family by finding the right partner and continuously assuring a good relationship is also seen among Finnish couples. The nuclear family bears an idealistic view about pair relations as well-functioning and equal, and where parenthood is shared. Potential problems, disagreements and gender inequalities in the relationship
and parenthood are not recognized, as they reported trust in the companionship and a trust that a child would be a shared responsibility.

The Danish women perceive it as a natural thing that they are not alone in the caring for the chores which are important for the safe environment, and make sure that the tasks both inside and outside the house are equally divided between them and their partners. They in particularly focus on keeping a clean home, on making sure that shopping for food is done and that the child is handed in and picked up at proper hours. However, even though the chores are equally divided, the women still perceive it as important that they make sure that the chores remains so, to avoid that the safe environment becomes neglected. Research performed on parenthood and time allocation in European countries show with regard to household chores, a somewhat different general pattern on the division of house chores. It seems that men do the gardening, repairs and shopping and the rest is left to women. While men usually devote their time to playing with children or reading stories, the other caring activities of feeding, dressing, bathing etc. were carried out almost exclusively by women.

**6.1.2 How Danish women make sense of being a ‘good’ mother?**

The Danish women perceive that becoming a ‘good’ mother demands a certain preparation in the prenatal phase. The pregnancy initiated that the women began to ponder over what a ‘good’ mother is like, convinced that when one becomes a mother, one also has to change the personality into a certain mother. However, when looking at other mother’s approach to motherhood, the women perceive that a ‘good’ mother has many shapes and forms which provided the women with the ability to choose which type of mothers they wanted to become.

The Danish women perceive that a ‘good’ mother should include the partner on equal terms, avoiding being a dominant role in the upbringing of the child. The women chose to discuss their feelings and thoughts about parenting with their partner already in the prenatal phase, and create the first stones of a foundation to an ongoing feeling togetherness which especially becomes visible when the baby is born.

The women perceive the best way to prepare for motherhood is to talk to friends who already have children, and especially perceive it as important not only to hear about the positive thing about motherhood, but also the more negative. It is believed that there is a tendency among women enact
motherhood as some sort of miracle, which is appears to be true as the Danish mothers chose to portray their first couple of weeks of motherhood as rosy, even though they, when asked a second time admits that they presently perceive the first couple of weeks as very difficult, filled with insecurity and uncertainty. Prior research prevails that expectations and experiences of motherhood has been drawn to the assumptions made about women’s ‘natural’ and ‘instinctive’ caring capacities, which can be hard for first-time-mothers to live up, as the women strive to be something that they perhaps are not able to become. Personal experiences of mothering and motherhood are largely framed in relation the ‘medical discourse and natural childbirth discourse’, both focusing on the ‘optimistic stories’ of birth and mothering and underpin stereotypes of the ‘good’ mother’. In addition, old wives’ tales based on maternal experiences of childbirth has also been noted as misleading.

As the Danish women had in the prenatal phase based the first steps of the strategy on what society dictated, they experienced that these choices held them back from listening to their own feelings and intuitions throughout the first months of motherhood. In this period of time they perceive it as important to be supported by their circle of friends and relatives in their choice-making, for example regarding breastfeeding or not, as they somehow feel incapable of making their own decisions. The women in a British research also needed to be supported in their decisions of not breastfeeding, while searching to find a way to account for, not simply accept, the judgment that a mother who does not breastfeed is ‘doing something wrong.’ Overall, it appears to confirm the suggestion that infant feeding is about more than nutrition, and that how mothers feed their babies is experienced as a ‘measure of motherhood’ and the women’s ‘capacity as mothers’.

The women had during the prenatal phase reflected upon how being a mother would change their life, and having the child make them realize that they are not longer able to enjoy the same type of freedom as before they had a child. They perceive most of the things as natural, as they already had chosen to change some of their habits before they had the child. This was partly to adjust their habits to the habits of friends with children, and partly because the women had tried for a longer period of time to have children, which had made them adapt their behavior towards the one of parenting. The women had before they became mothers experienced that they were often not invited to baby-related events at friends with children, and perceived this a bit sad, as they then saw less of their friends. However, when the women themselves became mothers they also felt how their circle of friends would change to some extent as they naturally spend more time with friends with babies,
because a mother has different priorities than a woman without children. Investigation shows that the women rather early has to accept these changes, however they often are surprised by how much they actually has to change in order to adapt to the baby’s rhythms.

The women perceive it as necessary to split their identity into three different identities in order to be ‘good’ mothers; the ones of the mother, the ones of the wife and the ones of the woman as an individual. They perceive the identity of the mother as the most important one, and downgrade the two other identities in order to have enough energy for the ‘mother’ identity. They thereby experience difficulties when trying to meet the demands of the two other identities. The Danish women’s choice to solve this problem by splitting their identity is, according to Karl E. Weick, rather natural, as people create new identities as they have to enact in new situations.

The Danish women perceive having a child as a big responsibility in which failing is not an option. First-time mothers have little or no experience in motherhood, and base their strategy of ‘good’ motherhood on books and the internet, which are stressful choices because they are very difficult to live up to. Research shows that most women like the Danish women do not experience new mothering as natural, or instinctive, in spite of prenatal hopes and beliefs. The women have ideas about what mothers should do, however any innate mothering knowledge appears to be absent. Their sense of confusion is palpable as their prenatal expectations do not match the reality they find themselves in.

Subsequently, the women perceive the best way to be a ‘good’ mother is to do what make the women happy, which then naturally would make the children happy too. As so, it would be best if she resumed work. The women had beforehand negotiated with partners who were able to get paternity leave at their job that these would take the last part of the leave, as the women perceive it as a part of being a ‘good’ mother to let the partners have a part of the leave, as it creates a closer bond between the partners and their children. However, paternity leave was not only a question of the parents agreeing on the terms, as the partner’s workplace plays a crucial role as to whether the partner is able to take paternity leave or not. The Icelandic Act on Maternity/Paternity and Parental Leave underwent significant changes in the year 2000, and the leave is now distributed so that fathers have three months’ leave, mothers three months and the parents then have three months to share as they wish. Figures show that around 90 percent of fathers take advantage of their right.
When posed the question whether the women thought a stay-at-home mother is a better mother, the women explained that they did not perceive staying at home with the child as an option, as the society is no longer the same way as it was thirty years ago, where more women would stay home, which provided the women with a social network and the children with friends in the neighborhood, with whom they would learn the basic social skills needed when they later went to school. The Danish women therefore perceive it as important to find a good nursery. However, as it can be very difficult to attain a nursery, they understood that they would have to compromise in order to ensure having a nursery found before the date that they resumed work. These experiences correlate with the research performed on American women, as it concludes that a ‘good’ mother arranges quality child care. However, the American women expressed that they would not compromise with the daycare, as the Danish women would. A reason for this could be that most of the American women only have between five to six weeks of paid maternity leave compared with the twelve months of Danish women, and have to return to work much faster than the Danish women, leaving a very child in someone else’s care, which can be assumed to be very difficult.

6.1.3 How Danish women make sense of being the working mother
The women perceive it as necessary to tell their employers rather early about being pregnant. This is partly because they feel guilty about knowing that they were pregnant, but majorly because they fear that waiting would resolve in that the management would deprive them the task they presently occupied. Research performed among American women shows a similar fear as the one Danish women experience. The research by Meina Liu, and, Patrice M. Buzzanell, (2007) indicates that maternity leave is a process in which organizational systems make women’s bodies generally suspicious. Because maternity leave does not have direct organizational benefits, members may experience ambivalence about leaves and workload reductions for pregnant workers. Literature on educated Danish women show that highly educated women in the private sector loose six percent of income per child as a result of, among other things, the time off during the maternity leave. As the private sector is dynamic, the woman cannot count on getting their old position back when returning to work after the maternity leave. Rather, they are easily pushed back into the hierarchy and must start over again.

As the Danish women perceive it as hard not to be intellectually stimulated during the maternity leave, they chose to resume work earlier than normal as they knew twelve months would be too long a period of time to stay at home. The Danish women experienced that women in the
mothergroup did not respect this choice, as it was perceived as ‘odd’. The Danish women on the other hand experience it as natural that they would want to return to work, as the women perceive themselves as more than just mothers. Working is a contribution to their identity and establishes a level of professional equality between the women and their partners. Finding research in which women express their need for stimulus during maternity leave is very difficult, as well as research on women returning to work earlier because they miss their job. Reading blogs and articles on Danish women and maternity leave provide the impression that it is increasingly articulated that Danish women miss their jobs after approximately eight to nine months. One reason for why it is not easy to find academic literature on this topic could be that only Scandinavian countries have ear-marked maternity leave for mothers of twelve months, whereas for example women in the United States, may feel that their maternity leave is very short, and do therefore not experience the same need to return to work. A second reason may be that it is somewhat a taboo among women to express that they do not fully enjoy their maternity leave. A third reason could be that it is perhaps only a certain group of women that experiences this urge to be stimulated, being women with academic backgrounds with a certain level of ambitions.

The Danish women had right from when they met their partners, negotiated that their work was just as important as their partners’. They experience that sharing the chores in the household including cooking, who picks up and hands in the child at the baby nursery, and who stays home with the child if it is sick, provides them with a chance to work more than if the women had been in charge of all chores. However, the Danish women still perceive it as very difficult to meet their own expectations at work. A Danish investigation on engineering families’ abilities to share chores in the household shows how important for women’s careers it is that couples equally share the chores. As seen with the Danish women, the engineers are good at sharing the responsibilities in the home, including who looks after the sick children and who should deliver the child in the morning. However, it seems as though it is still the woman who picks up the children in the afternoon, meaning that they are left behind in the career race. Figures show that whoever stays after work achieves the good work-tasks because he/she networks with the right people and drinks an informal cup of coffee with the boss.

The women perceive it as very stressful if they have to leave work earlier in case the child becomes sick, and feel very guilty that they are not able to perform the same workload as their co-workers. It
is the same the days they are picking up the child. The women perceive that they have very high expectations to themselves, which is based on that they before they became mothers would show up at work early, work late and bring home work. However, this is no longer possible, as the child is first priority. When looking at American literature by Heather Dillaway and Elizabeth Paré (2008) on stay-at-home women versus working mothers, investigations show that a ‘good’ mother is always present, which is also what the Danish women try to be. However the American research indicates that in order to be a ‘good’ mother forgoing any engagement in income-earning activities, either outside of or within the home is crucial. The working mother is characterized as a ‘supermom’, in which a mythic ‘supermom’ should be able to switch effortlessly from high-powered career woman to attentive mother/homemaker without sacrificing job or children. Thus American literature presents the identity of the working mother as an abnormal form, indicating that combining the two identities the ‘working woman’ and the’ mother’ into working motherhood is mythical, which is to some extent also exemplified be the Danish women as they daily face difficulties.

The Danish women perceive that having a child indirectly has become an interruption to the possibility of having a career at present time feeling that they are held back at work. However they perceive it as only being temporary since they believe that as the children grow older, opportunities for advancing will be a possibility. Investigations on career possibilities among American women show that even though employment and career discontinuities are seen as fairly routine, this point does not mean that employment and career disruptions are any less conflicting. From women’s perspective, work and career breaks can mean worries about job, wage, and advancement potential. From the employers’ standpoints, work discontinuities may raise concerns about project completions, talent loss, and lower commitment.

6.2 Findings influence on employers, employees and staff-policies

Danish media and work-places have great focus on the need to increase the number of female managers and board members in Danish companies. However little interest is paid to how work/life balance among employees has to be improved if gender-equality is to be obtained. 15.000 Danes\textsuperscript{217} are presently home sick with stress-related depression, and the major reason is employee’s difficulty in managing both family and work, which is also what the concluding findings of this thesis, is

\textsuperscript{217} Information 16.11.2010. Aktiveringstilbud for stresssyge droppes
showing. The steps needed towards an increase of female managers are among others an equally divided leave, an equal division in the household and changes in the present work-flow for both male and female employees. This thesis shows a tendency towards that academic families have already adapted to these changes (as far as it is possible) however the needed adjusting in legislations and staff-policies has yet far to go. As families now begin to share the maternity and dividing the chores inside and outside the household, such as sharing picking up and handing in the child, it should be expected that the government and work-places sooner or later understand the need to make the necessary adjustments to fit the workers routines.

As the conclusive findings show, employers need to adjust to the idea that it is no longer only women who will be away from work for a longer period of time during the leave, and likewise it has to be accepted that also men are staying home with the child if it turns sick, and leaves work at 4 am. to pick up the child. Hence, retaining pro-male legislations and staff-policies can no longer be excused with that the women averagely are working less compared to male co-workers during their time on the labor-market.

The 12 months of earmarked leave to women will have to be changed to a solution similar to the Icelandic, and little changes will have to be made as it is only the way the months are divided among the gender that will change. The present idea that it is only men who are able to work more than the average 37 hours/week will also have to be adjusted, as a sharing of the child-related routines such as leaving the job at 4 am. will be a tendency among both men and women meaning that women will be able to work late half of the week. It may then be expected that the notion of that only loyal workers who stay in late are suitable for promotions will modified, and staff meetings after 4. am would possibly be less common. Along will the thought among women, as seen in this thesis, that having small children means that they are not able to have a career no longer be the truth. All these changes will also mean that the idea that women should earn 18 percent less than men can no longer be excused.

As more women will possess the management posts, more pro-family work-routines can be expected to be implemented in the staff-policies. This could be solutions such as making a Children’s Room, and make it a possibility to bring the child to work if it is not too sick or if the kinder-gardens are in strike. Letting two people share management post would also be a possibility,
which would assure that one manager is always present. In general, it should be expected that more family-friendly labor-market policies would be created along with the increase of female managers, as true equality on the labor–market would be a needed solution to a proper work/life balance for Danish families.

6.3 Contributions to present research

The United Nations Development Programme (2001) defined gender equality as ‘the importance of supporting women’s development and achievements, and an international reorganization of the importance of including women in all aspects of life’, which has been the thread through this thesis. It has been said that Denmark has one the most progressive gender equality arrangements. However, it is still women who predominantly take up the parental leave, and little research is made on how to specifically improve the work/life conditions for Danish women.

This thesis contains two major strengths; the first being that it is reflecting a qualitative research made among Danish women, and is not the author’s conclusions and ideas made on the basis of a quantitative investigation. Hence, important thoughts and actual habits of Danish women are illuminated in this thesis. Secondly, the thesis is specifically working with the previous mentioned definitions of gender equality, meaning that it is supporting working mother’s development and achievements in the early years of motherhood and portraying women’s actual behavior in the home and on the labor market, which no other known research has done.

The thesis has subsequently covered areas, which the author found uncovered when writing the literature review. It provides an in depth understanding to how working mothers present work/life routines, and how they combine work and family. It give reasons to why working women face difficulties in balancing domestic chores and childcare with their professional life at work, and to which extent they negotiate with employers. I focus on how the working mothers comply with the modern breadwinner model, and how they negotiate domestic chores with their partners, which provides them which a more dual breadwinner solution. And lastly it has investigated how Danish women made sense of being a pregnant co-employee.

The author finds the use of sensemaking as analytical to very suitable for in-depth investigations when looking at human behavior. Using sensemaking provides the ability to evolve theory based on
actual conclusions on human thoughts and behavior, and is particular relevant because sensemaking is plausible rather than accurate, hence the findings are in particular valid as they are reflecting the working women’s personal thoughts as they see the world, and not a generalization of how the masses manage work/life challenges.

6.4 Future research
As the author believes that the theory developed in this thesis is highly relevant when looking at needed changes on the labor-market, she recommends an extensive research of this thesis’ research question, however reflecting the demographic composition of the female population. It is stated by Benja Stig Fagerland, owner and CEO at Talentuning\textsuperscript{218} in the recent edition of Magasinet Arbejdesmiljø (Working environment magazine)\textsuperscript{219} that \textit{“the requirements for a chief executive is today both archaic and incompatible with a good family life. The result is that the business environment looses most of the female talent on the floor.”}\textsuperscript{220} This recital supports the concluding findings of this thesis, and given that the economical future of Denmark is based on knowledge – economy, an extended research it is not only relevant for the sake of work/life balance in families, but recruiting among 100 percent of the talent mass, being among both men and women for management positions is decisive in order to assure the economical conditions in Denmark. It calls for major changes, both legislative and in the staff-policies as suggested in part 6.2 in order to achieve an increase among female managers, and convince working mothers to choose management post ahead of being the main caregiver in the home.

Research on equally shared care-giving and leave among the genders is subsequently highly relevant for the Danish work-places, and sharing the chores would result in that for example the work-place would avoid having to do without the female employee for an entire year during the maternity leave. Similar, sharing the chores would mean that the women only have to leave work at 4 am. half of the year, and only has to be absent half of the time while the child is sick.

\textsuperscript{218} www.talenttuning.com
\textsuperscript{219} Magasinet Arbejdesmiljø 11/2010. Danmark er et ligestillings-land p. 36-38, Mikkelsen, Annemette
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Appendix 1: Presentation of respondents

GB is 32 years old, and she was 30 years old when she became pregnant. She is not married and lives with the father of the child. She has a Bachelor, and is presently working 37 hours a week as a dentist assistant. Her maternity leave was eleven months and was not shared with the father. She and her partner earns between 450.000 – 749.999 kr. before tax a year.

BFR is 34 years old, and she was 31 years old when she became pregnant. She is not married and lives with the father of the child. She has a master degree, and is presently working 37 hours a week as a SAP Instructor. Her maternity leave was twelve months and was shared the father. She and her partner earns between 500.000 – 749.999 kr. before tax a year.

LP is 30 years old, and she was 27 when she became pregnant. She is not married and live with the father of the child. She has a master degree, and is presently working 37 hours a week as an administrator. Her maternity leave was eight months and was shared the father of the child. She and her partner earns between 500.000 – 749.999 kr. before tax a year.

MOP is 33 years old, and she was 30 when she became pregnant. She is not married. She does not live with the biological father, as she is gay. She is the biological mother, and lives with the second mother. She has a master degree, and is presently working 37 hours a week as an Educational consultant. Her maternity leave was twelve months and was shared with the second mother. She and her partner earns between 500.000 – 749.999 kr. before tax a year.

MBK is 36 years old, and she was 33 when she became pregnant and is presently pregnant for the second time. She is married and lives with the father of the child. She has a master degree, and is presently working 37 hours a week as an HR Coordinator. Her maternity leave was eleven months and was shared with the husband. She and her husband earns between 750.000 – 1.500.000 kr. before tax a year.

SBT is 31 years old, and she was 28 when she became pregnant. She is married, and lives with the father of the child. She has a Bachelor degree, and is presently working 30 hours a week as an Occupational Therapist. Her maternity leave was 12 months and was not shared with the husband. She and her partner earns between 500.000 – 749.999 kr. before tax a year.
SB is 38 years old, and she was 35 when she became pregnant. She is not married, and lives with the father of the child. She has an education as a Theater Technician; a higher educational degree of four years. She is presently working more than 37 hours a week as a Sound Technician. Her maternity leave was 12 months and was not shared with the partner. She and her partner earn between 325,000 – 499,999 kr. before tax a year, as the husband is presently not working.

AST is 31 years old, and she was 28 when she became pregnant. She has two children and one more on its way. She is married and lives with the father of the children. She has a master degree and is presently working 37 hours per week as an administrator. Her maternity leave was 12 ½ months and it was not shared with the husband. She and her partner earn between 750,000 – 1,500,000 kr.
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