

Gender equality as a Swedish norm,
but who's included?
- a critical analysis of the Swedish parental insurance

Abstract

This thesis purpose is to investigate to what extent gender equality norms have developed in Sweden over the last 40 years. In order to do this I will use Carol Bacchi's method, "What's the problem represent to be", and six questions that she has created within this method. These questions are applied on four different governmental propositions, that discuss the parental leave insurance and gender equality, from the year 1973 until 2014. Together with Bacchi's method, this thesis theoretical framework will be influenced by feminist postmodern thoughts. In the analysis, four different key concepts are identified. These concepts; The State, Family: men, women and parenthood, Work and, Flexibility and freedom of choice, are central in all four propositions. Outside the propositions, a few norms have been identified and analyzed. The most central norms are: to have an employment, the twoness norm, and the heteronorm. Even if Sweden has had good preconditions and created equally formal rights for both men and women, there are still obstacles and norms in society about how a mother, father or a parent should be. Even if gender equality norms have changed, the basic assumption, that parents should be able to combine work and family, is still central.

Key words: Bacchi, feminism, feminist postmodern thoughts, gender equality, parental insurance, parental leave.

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1. Introduction

Sweden has one of the most generous parental leave insurances in the world, and one of the foundational beliefs is that parents, both mothers and fathers, should be able to combine family life with work. A more gender-equal use of parental leave has shown to have good effects on wage and career development and health. Some studies also indicates that an equal use of parental leave could help parents to divide the domestic work and responsibility for the family more equal as well. An increased gender equality is also a political goal for the Swedish government (Försäkringskassan 2013:7-8,11).

In 1995 the first father's quota was legislated by the center-right government and the second quota in 2002 by Swedish Social democrats (Ellingsæter, 2014:563-564) which has led to increased use of parental leave for fathers. In 2008 the government instituted a "gender equal bonus" for those parents who shared parental leave equal. Even though there is a new legislation to promote a more equal parental leave, it is still women who use the largest part of it (Försäkringskassan 2013:9-10).

40 years ago, in 1974, the parental insurance was legislated in Sweden, and this reform has been changed and challenged in different ways during the years depending on the economic and social context (Ellingsæter, 2014:559). This is an ongoing debate within the political parties whether or not the parental leave should be individualized or be divided into three parts, add another fathers quota, remain as it is today, or take away father's quota and let the parents decide for themselves. There are disagreements about the parental insurance and how it should be developed both within and between the political parties. This policy is interesting for several reasons but especially because of the differences and similarities within the political spectra (Ellingsæter, 2014:563-564). I believe that family policies, like parental insurance and childcare services, are important to investigate since it is of great importance both for the private sphere, the families, and the public sphere in the overall society.

In this studie I will investigate how norms and structures have developed over time, and how the argumentation concerning gender equality has been debated within the Swedish governments proposition since 1974, when the parental insurance was legislated. In order to succeed with this I will investigate four propositions about the parental leave insurance from 1973 until 2014. Further, this thesis focal point will be to identify different interpretations and definitions of central concepts within the discourses of parental insurance which I will identify by Carol Bacchi's method "What's the problem represented to be".

I am interested to interrogating to what extent the norms and structures have changed over time, and if a new norm is noticeable, how is it manifested in the society and who is included or excluded from this 'new' norm?

There has been and still is a struggle about how the parental insurance should be formed, primary about if the parental leave should be divided equally between the parents by legislation or if it should be the parents "freedom of choice". I believe it is important to investigate policy proposals to get a further understanding of how the problem is represented in the legislation and in what way the representation affects the society. Depending on how the legislation is presented it will have different effects for individuals, groups and the society. Since parental insurance is an important policy that includes a wide range of people, both men and women independently of socioeconomic background, ethnicity, age, and religion it is crucial to investigate and problematize the policy proposals.

Since Sweden has had a parental insurance legislated since 1974 it will be of great importance to also investigate how the parental insurance has developed over time and to compare the different proposals with each other.

One study that was published in 2014 raised the question about how father's using of parental leave is affecting housework and childcare and if it will have other effects on the gender equality. This study is based on surveys and interviews, and the researchers observations are that the parental insurance can give us further understanding about gender equality (Almqvist & Duvander, 2014:19).

Since my main focus is to understand and get more information about gender equality I will have my starting point in the parental insurance.

1.1. Purpose och research question

My main purpose of this thesis is to investigate how gender equality has developed and changed in Sweden, and I will use the parental insurance as my starting point. The parental insurance has been changed several times since the policy was legislated in 1974 and my main focus will be to visualize norms and structures that have been dominating the discourse about gender equality. I want to get a further awareness about the public policies that are discussing gender equality and parenthood, and try to understand why things have come to develop as they have until today. How have these changes been motivated within the policies and on what premisses have these decisions been made? Is it because of the historical development, science, ideology, or something else? Another purpose of this thesis is to highlight for whom these decisions have been taken and if the norms about gender equality, that are presented within the parental insurance, include everyone in the Swedish society. If it is possible to identify whether a new norm is created, or if it still is under reconstruction, in what ways will this affect those parents or social groups in Sweden that do not fit into this new norm? If not every parent can use the parental insurance at equal terms in what way will this affect the gender equality between men and women and the equality between different socioeconomic groups?

My research questions are:

How can we understand and explain the development of gender equality norms over time?

To what extent have the Swedish gender equality norms developed and changed within the parental insurance over the last 40 years?

2. Background

Sweden is an ordinary case compared with other countries, both regarding the extent of gender equality and the parental insurance. In year 1974 Sweden was the first nation to legislate about a parental insurance (Haas & Hwang:2008:85-86). There have been many discussions about how the parental insurance should be developed and who should decide how the parents should divide their parental leave. This has opened up for debates and different opinions about freedom and gender equality, and how much the state should interfere within the private sphere. Today there are different political opinions about the parental insurance which cover the whole political spectra. As an example the Left Party propose that the parental leave should be individualized and shared equally between the parents, and the Christian democrats who want to remove all the reserved days (the so called father's quota) and let the families decide for themselves (Ellingsæter, 2014:555-556, Kristdemokraterna, Vänsterpartiet).

Sweden has been highlighted and described as a leading country that has had great development concerning women's rights and gender equality the last 100 years. Even if Sweden still has issues and challenges that need to be acknowledged, women are a part of and included in the Swedish society today (Hirdman, 2003:172-173).

Gender equality is an important question all over the world and this question is being highlighted within organisations, both nationally and internationally in different ways. In 2010 the United Nations (UN) were creating the UN Women organ which is a part of the new UN reform agenda. UN women's main focus is that women should have a greater impact in the society, with a focal point on those women who are marginalized, to increase the gender equality over the world and to strengthen women's empowerment. The last few months there has been a campaign called 'heforshe' which has been promoted and supported by many celebrities all over the world (UN women, 1 & 2). This is one way to call further attention to the subject of gender equality and make it more visible at all levels in the world.

Since 1957 the EU has had the ambition that men and women should get equal pay for equal work and this was presented in the treaty of Rome. Even if it still exists inequality between men and women, there have been a lot of improvements mainly because of gender mainstreaming and equal legislation within the nations in Europe and the EU. The present strategy for gender equality, that is operative from 2010-2015, is focusing on equal economic possibilities, equal participation in decision-making, and that violence against women has to stop (European Commission).

During the 1960s, a new discourse about gender roles, equality, and women was established in Sweden and the 'issue' became a political question. At this time

it was the Social democrats and the Liberal Party that began to question the biological argument as an explanation for men and women being different, and shaped a new discourse about the sexes relationship in the society. Every human should be free from their gender roles and the issue about women being structurally disadvantaged in the society was acknowledged. In the end of 1960s and the beginning of 1970s these questions escalated both within families and at work places, and the dual breadwinner model become the new Swedish norm (Hirdman, 2003:162-167).

In the 1970s the new political ideal was to eliminate all the obstacles in the society that were holding back women and forced women to address their gender role. It was now possible, since the state provided many public services, for women to take care of themselves and their children without a husband. Many policies, like parental insurance, daycare centers, individual taxation, free abortion, and new divorce legislation were introduced during this time which was of great importance for men and women at a more intimate level than before. The Social democrats used the gender as an entrance to create a more equal society since they believed it was a political responsibility to solve inequalities. Justice should be for everyone, but the focus was not just on gender equality but also about equality between different social classes (Hirdman, 2003:167-177, 180).

The norm and the encouragement that parents should use more days during parental leave has been strengthened in Sweden since 1970s, (Almqvist & Duvander, 2014:26) and a lot of research has focused on men's participation in childcare depending on men's use of parental leave. Earlier studies in the 1970s-1980s indicated that fathers who took part of the parental leave and were engaged in the childcare also had the perception that the parents were more equal, and that the fathers engagement was increased also when the parental leave ended. This indicates that parental insurance policy is an effective strategy to change traditional gender roles about childcare but also to create a new norm concerning how a man should be a father. When fathers increase their use of parental leave it will spill over and have positive effects within other social areas, both within the family and at workplaces, and fathers will get a better participation and contact with their children. In Sweden and the other Scandinavian countries both parents have the right to get paid parental leave in opposite to the general rules within EU and OECD-countries where, even if men have the right to use parental leave, it is usually unpaid (Haas & Hwang:2008:85-88). The nordic countries have had far-reaching processes within the gender equality and this is one reason to why less radical reforms have to be introduced today. Many structures have been changed considering men and women's rights and opportunities, both within the family and at the labour market. Since this is the case it is important to investigate why this transformation is possible in some countries, and why the nordic countries have taken this course (Ellingsæter, 2014:555-556).

Even if a new normative picture was created in the beginning of the 1970s, with the dual breadwinner model, the gender contract is still available and existing today. There are a lot of different family constellations as well that have to be considered and thought about (Hirdman, 2003:175-177). Different reforms have been developed during various social and economic contexts but even when the

political situation has been turbulent (in the beginning of 1990 and during the finance crisis in 2008) the family policies have not been challenged or threatened. The last few years it has been noticeable that there has been a change towards more flexibility and the parents own choice of freedom within the parental insurance (Ellingsæter, 2014:559). It is from this starting point I would like to further investigate how the norms in the society about gender equality affect different social groups in Sweden and how this could be visualized through the parental insurance.

2.1. Parental insurance and gender equality policy

The parental insurance consists of three different parts: parental allowance, temporary parental leave and pregnancy allowance. The policy's main goal was and still is, even if there is more than one goal, that parents should be able to combine work with parenthood and have the same rights, possibilities, and responsibility for the economy and child care. In Sweden, when a child is born (or adopted), the parents get 480¹ days that can be used and divided between the parents as they like, except for 60 days that are reserved for each parent. The other parent, who does not give birth, gets 10 days to spend with the other parent and their newborn child as well (Försäkringskassan 1, Haas & Hwang:2008:85-86). Since 2014 there are new rules about the flexibility of the parental insurance which can now be distributed until the child is 12 years old, and not 8 years as it was before, if the child is born after 1/1 2014 (Försäkringskassan, 2).

Gender equality is closely attached to the Swedish family politics and several reforms have been introduced to increase fathers use of parental leave. The parental insurance is a debated policy since it is believed to have positive effects for the gender equality within other social areas as well like childcare and housework (Almqvist - Duvander, 2014:21).

The main goal of the gender equality policy in Sweden is that men and women shall have the same power to form the society and their own lives. To be able to achieve this goal the Swedish government has decided to work according to four milestones:

- *An equal distribution of power and influence.* Men and women shall have the same rights and possibilities to be active citizens and to create their own terms for decision making.
- *Economical gender equality.* Women and men shall have the same possibilities and conditions to get an education and paid work that will give economical independence for the rest of their lives.
- *An equal distribution of the unpaid house and childcare work.* Women and men shall take the same responsibility for the housework and have the same possibilities to get and give care at same conditions.

¹ This legislation is only applied when the parents have joint custody.

- *Men's violence against women has to stop.* Women and men, girls and boys shall have the same rights and possibilities to have integrity of their bodies. (Regeringen 1).

These goals are meant to pervade all decisions and processes at every level in the Swedish society within all institutions and the policy-making. These goals should be used as a guideline towards which direction Sweden should develop.

In the next section I will present my methodology and Bacchi,s WPR approach, and hopefully this section will give a broader understanding for how my research has been performed. My methodology will also lead into my next section where I present my theoretical framework and this thesis premisses.

3. Methodology

In this section I will present the methodology and method that I will use to investigate to what extent norms about gender equality have changed over time, and how the problem is represented in the policy documents about the Swedish parental insurance. My starting point for my research is to have a feminist approach and to highlight and investigate gender inequalities. First I will have a short introduction to feminist methodology and a discussion about the role of the researcher and the importance of reflexivity. After this I will present my method, Carol Bacchi's, "What's the problem represented to be" and finally finish the chapter to introduce my material and the delimitations of this thesis. This section and Bacchi's method should be understood as a starting point and introduction to my beliefs about how the world is constituted and my thoughts about how the reality can be studied and knowledge produced.

3.1. Feminist methodology

According to feminist methodology, method in itself could be understood as "hard science". This implies that there is a reality outside of ourselves that can be studied and this assumption is a contradiction for the feminism and the questions feminists seek to investigate (Ramazanoğlu & Holland, 2002:40-42). Since science should be regarded as a social product there is no method that can actually tell us the 'truth' about the world. Some feminists argue that the patriarchal structures that exist in society are ingrained in our consciousness and beliefs. This would imply that knowledge and science is socially constructed and therefore could be changed. Every feminist has different approaches towards what is true and what is not, and during what circumstances general criteria can be identified. These choices depend conditionally of how each feminist is positioned regarding epistemology and ontology. In order to show and value women's experiences, it is crucial to make the patriarchal consciousness visible in research that would be contradictory for feminists since they always have to relate to these patriarchal beliefs (Ramazanoğlu & Holland, 2002:44-47).

3.1.1. The power of interpretation and reflexivity

Feminism highlights the power of interpretation as the key process in the exercise of power. The interpretation process reveals the conditions under which it is possible or not to connect ideas, experiences and reality with each other. It is also

through this process that it will be noticed that feminists have different opinions and claims concerning epistemology and ontology towards the tension of whether there is or could be a connection between reality and experiences (Ramazanoğlu & Holland, 2002:116-118). Feminists oppose positivism since feminists criticize the possibility that knowledge could exist outside of the researcher's own values. This assumption is a challenge for social researchers since it is hard to claim validity when the researcher cannot be free from their own knowledge, position, language, and resources etc. (Ramazanoğlu & Holland, 2002:44-47). As researchers we cannot take for granted that connections or meanings could be legitimated since there are different ways to approach problems and questions about reality. How the power relations are deconstructed will depend on what theory has been used, and it is also the researchers responsibility to abide by the results and interpretations that are presented in the study (Ramazanoğlu & Holland, 2002:102, 116-118). Reflexivity is a crucial part of the research since our previous understandings will affect and shape our research. It is important to reflect upon our choices and which topics we choose to investigate, but also how we present and explain the problem in our research. It is also important to consider what assumptions we have and which we use to draw conclusions (Bacchi, 2009:19, Aranda 2006:141).

As a researcher I need to be aware and present other perspectives and interpretations, even if there is divergence between my own assumptions and what is discovered in the material. It is also important that the researcher is open and aware of how descriptions and interpretations can be affected by different contexts, and then observe how these contexts can influence the researcher's own understandings and results. Since language is a power tool that produces and gives meaning to an issue, it is important to be pragmatic while choosing ethical and political positions during the research process. The researcher itself needs to be conscious about what the study could be reproducing, on what assumptions the conclusions have been made, and which categories have been used in the text and why (Ramazanoğlu & Holland, 2002:102, 116-118).

Reflexivity is generally agreed upon within feminist methodology and can be understood as a circular relationship between cause and effect. For feminists it is also a way to explain power relations and the exercise of power in the research process. Even if researchers have different premisses about how knowledge should be produced, the researchers position, the shape of the process, and the power relations need to be visualized. The researcher need to be aware of how its own knowledge, culture, and experiences will affect the process (Ramazanoğlu & Holland, 2002:118-119).

3.2. Method

Method and methodology are connected in feminist research, but are still two different parts of the research where method is how the research will be carried out practically. In this section I will explain Carol Bacchi's method "What's the

problem represented to be”, the WPR approach which could be explained as a critical analysis of text documents. Bacchi sets up six questions that will be applied within the practical research while analyzing the text documents. First I will discuss why this method is a good choice for my research, and further on I will present Bacchi’s six questions and have a short summary about which questions that will be the main priority for my study.

3.2.1. What’s the problem represented to be?

The WRP approach is developed from social construction theory, poststructuralism and poststructuralism discourse psychology, feminist body theory, and governmentality studies (Bacchi, 2009:262-267). These theories and its premisses belong to the postmodern thoughts which I will present further in my theoretical framework. As I described above, feminism has a large variety of methodologies and methods and I believe that Bacchi’s WRP approach is a fruitful method to use for my study.

There has been a shift towards a new direction about how we should understand and frame a ‘problem’, and Bacchi means that we rather should discuss it as a problematization than a ‘problem’. Our perceptions of the world are a product of different social forces in society, and a problem representation is the way a policy problem is constituted in the real world (Bacchi, 2009:32-35).

According to the WRP approach a discourse is socially produced, which creates restrictions about what is thinkable to speak or write about, both concerning subjects and different practices. These discourses establish boundaries that are hard to think or speak outside. It is important to notice that neither Bacchi, nor I, as a researcher, claim that there is one ‘truth’. Instead I will describe the experiences, results and other valuable information as knowledges and not as knowledge (Bacchi, 2009:32-35).

As a starting point for the WRP approach state and the government have an important role in framing and shaping the understandings of a policy problem because they are able to constitute legislation and implement their version of what the problem is and how it should be solved. The WRP sees the government as an active force in creating the policy problem, and this approach gives the researcher awareness about how the governing processes are made. Bacchi also claims that we are governed by problematizations and not policies, and this is why it is important to interrogate the assumed problem. We as researchers should therefore focus on the *shaped implied problems* in policy documents (Bacchi, 2009:25-35).

Policies shape the understandings of what the problem actually is, and make the problem exist because of the representation. This means that the problem does not exist in itself except for how we think and chose to conceptualize it. How we think about a certain problem will affect how we are governed and how we live our lives (Bacchi, 2009:262-267). With this method it is possible to work backwards with the purpose to evaluate the underlying assumption in political proposals and documents rather than identifying them (Bacchi, 2009:39-44).

Bacchi claims, with the WPR approach, that policies in fact are problematizations and proposals for how something could be changed. Instead of thinking of policies as being problem-solving we should be questioning the problem represented in policies (Bacchi, 2009:262-267).

This method requires the researcher to take side of those who are harmed by a policy and the problematization that is dominating, which implies that this method has a normative agenda. How the problem is represented will have real consequences for people and it is important to investigate alternative ways to think about and understand the 'problem'. Another important thing is to engage alternative perspectives and experiences, and to understand that these processes are complex and cannot easily be explained. This method is about interrogating and questioning how 'problems' can be understood and presented in different ways. It is also necessary to engage different perspectives into my own problematization of the problem, so that I can acknowledge inherent limitations within my own thinking (Bacchi, 2009:32-35,39-46).

Inspired by the postmodern thoughts, the WPR approach also assumes that nothing is value-free or uncontested, and even if it is possible that groups can act in ways that will benefit themselves or the group, the WPR also rejects that certain groups can have inherent interests (Bacchi, 2009:25-32,36-39).

Finally it is important to choose a few policy documents, go through them carefully, and acknowledge the tensions and contradictions that exist within the policies. This method is complex and the context of the policy and its background needs to be addressed. I, as a researcher, am to be aware of how my choices will affect my study and my results because of my involvement in the research (Bacchi, 2009:20-21).

3.2.2. Bacchi's six questions to the text

In this section I will present the six questions that Carol Bacchi suggests to be asked to the text and explain what each question is supposed to answer or acknowledge from the policies that are investigated. These six questions will be applied on my chosen policy proposals about the Swedish parental insurance from four different years between 1973-2014, and will be investigated in my analysis later in this thesis.

Question number 1. *What is the problem represented to be in a specific policy?*

The goal with this first question is to identify the unspoken problem representation within the policy that is studied. Policies have underlying assumptions embedded in the problem representation that shapes our understanding of a problem which needs to be revealed and thought about differently. The policy makers should not only be seen as problem solvers since they form how the problem should be understood. Proposals are complex and one

policy can have many different problems represented at the same time (Bacchi, 2009:2-4).

Question number 2. *What presuppositions or assumptions underlie this representation of the problem?*

The second question is about revealing what is assumed and taken-for-granted within the policy. Are there statements, norms, or other things that are not questioned in the policy? This is not about finding the policy maker's assumptions but about the embedded assumptions within the problem representation. The WPR approach goes further on than what is in people's minds by questioning why something can happen and what conditions needs to be fulfilled to do so. The primary goal for question number two is to dig deeper into discourses and policies to understand how meaning is produced and how it is expressed in language. It is about searching for the cultural values at a profound level and to uncover the assumed thoughts that are underlying certain problem representations. These cultural values are challenging to find since we are all covered in the knowledge and perceptions of our time (Bacchi, 2009:5-7). To be able to investigate our assumptions Bacchi suggest three different things that we should follow or be looking for in the text, that would organize and make the investigation more practical. These are binaries, key concepts, and categories.

The public debate rests on *binaries* where one side is the privileged and the other one is the excluded. Through the WRP approach we have to acknowledged those relationships, be aware of where they emerge in policies and in what way they form our perceptions, and the limits about the problem. Policies are also filled with *key concepts* and some of these we almost take for granted since they are rooted in our history. This is why it is important to deeply investigate these concepts. Each concept is filled with different meanings, and one reason for this is the struggle between different political visions in the texts. Finally, *categories* have a central role in how governing and policies take place. We do not have to take these created categories as granted, but since categorization is a way to understand how we think about ourselves and others, we have to see how the categories are applied to give meaning to the problem representation (Bacchi, 2009:7-9).

Question number 3. *How has this representation of the problem come about?*

The purpose with this question is to highlight the conditions that make it possible for a certain problem representation to establish and become dominant. To be able to answer this question we first have to reflect over the developments and the decisions that have been taken and that made it possible to shape the particular problem representations. Secondly we need to be aware of other struggling problem representations that exist both over time and space and acknowledge that things have developed in different ways. This question focuses on the power functions and how rules take place through practices, strategies, and technologies (Bacchi, 2009:10-12, 39-44).

We need to start by investigating the present and how we got to this place by tracing the subjects roots backwards and this question is inspired by Foucaults genealogy. This path is often unclear and has many twists which need to be followed through the investigation and not be assumed that the thoughts about things have had a natural development over time. The geology will help to undermine things that are often taken-for-granted within problem representation and can also help the researcher to find the problem representation's origin, history, and mechanism (Bacchi, 2009:10-12).

Question number 4. *What is left unproblematic in this problem representation? Where are the silences? Can the problem be thought about differently?*

Problem representation is always available for change and is dependent on the institutional and cultural environment around it. Question number four is about finding the limitations and the perspectives that have been silenced by focusing on tensions and inconsistency within the problem representations. To investigate these contradictions and the policy limits we have to problematize the problematization and find their limits through a critical analysis (Bacchi, 2009:12-14).

Question number 5. *What effects are produced by this representation of the problem?*

If question number three focuses on the production of power, this question rather investigates and targets the effects of power and the specific problem representation that has been identified. One assumption of the WPR approach is that the definition of the problem representation will benefit some social groups more then others but that this pattern cannot be anticipated. We have to investigate these policies to revel unjustness and its effects within the problem representation that has been identified in the policy. Here we continue our critical analysis by looking at three different effects: discursive, subjectification and lived effects (Bacchi, 2009:15-18, 39-44).

It can be difficult to think outside the discourse where the problem representation has been identified, which could lead to some social groups being vulnerable and disadvantaged in society. The presented problem representation limits what can be said or even thought, and this will characterize the possible effects for different groups (Bacchi, 2009:15-18).

The discourse creates some subject positions that are available for people or groups to embrace. The public policies shape categories and relationships that we, as subjects, will be affected of since it will characterize how we identify ourselves and others. The categories within policies will 'explain' to us who is the problem and who is responsible for the problem, and will point out who belongs to the minority or majority in society. Subjects are constituted within discourses (Bacchi, 2009:15-18).

Finally we can also investigate how the problem representation is affecting the material and the lived effects for different groups in the community (Bacchi, 2009:15-18).

Bacchi also presents five questions that I believe will be very helpful to ask myself during this fifth question, and will help me to organize this critical analysis. I believe that this question is one of the most important ones and will be of great significance to answer my research question since one of my purposes is to investigate who is included in the Swedish norm about gender equality in the policy discussing parental insurance.

- What is likely to change with this representation of the problem?
- What is likely to stay the same?
- Who is likely to benefit from this representation of the problem?
- Who is likely to be harmed by this representation of the problem?
- How does the attribution of responsibility for the problem affect those who's targeted and the perception of the rest of the community about who is to blame (Bacchi, 2009:18)?

Question number 6. *How/where has this representation of the problem been produced, disseminated and defended? How could it be questioned, disrupted and replaced?*

The primary goal for this last question is to concentrate on how the identified problem representation has become dominant and to question, and challenge the problem representation that is judged to be harmful for someone or certain groups. In what way does the problem representation influence and get in touch with its target groups to accomplish legitimacy, and which groups in society have the ability to take part of the certain discourse (Bacchi, 2009:19)?

It is also important to investigate if there is any relationship and how it has been institutionalized between the discourse, speakers, and its intended target groups. How do discourses become legitimated through certain speakers and who will get the legal right to shape the problem? How come some peoples's statements and arguments have an institutional power and some not. Within this question we should also take the medias role into consideration (Bacchi, 2009:19, 39-44).

3.2.3. My main focus on Bacchi's questions

My main focus will be to identify and analyze taken-for-granted assumptions in the propositions, and to study why and how these representations have been able to emerge in Sweden. I will not divide the analysis into different sections were I go through each of Bacchi's questions separately, but will rather discuss the problem representation in its entirety and reconnect to Bacchi's questions gradually. The priority is to identify the problem representation in each proposition since this will give me a greater understanding about why some norms have been or are dominating in Sweden during different contexts. I will also focus

on identifying key concepts concerning political visions and categorization, and investigate how they have been produced and represented in the propositions. My focal point will be to investigate who the propositions are representing and who or what groups will benefit or not by this problem representation.

Since I have chosen four different propositions within a 40 year time period, an over all focus is to understand to what extent the norms about gender equality have developed and changed over time and space. However, my aim is not to create a chronological timeline and analyze why some decisions have been made at one certain time.

I will have my starting point in Bacchi's intent to focus on identifying and questioning who is included in the problem representation, and the norms about gender equality and parental insurance. Meanwhile I also should pay attention to how these representations and norms could be rethought and what could be done differently. I believe that these main points, together with identifying who has the possibility to participate and influence the problematization, are the most interesting parts within Bacchi's WPR approach.

4.2. Material

The main material for this thesis are four propositions from the Swedish government, during four different time periods, where they discuss the parental insurance. The first proposition was put forward in 1973 by the former Swedish government, the Swedish Social democratic party, as a proposal to change the general insurance to improve the benefits for families. In year 1974 the first parental insurance was legislated in Sweden.

Twenty years later, 1993/1994, a second proposition was put forward by the center-right government. They were discussing gender equality and had a suggestion to introduce the first father's quota, which became legislated in 1995.

A few years later, 2000/2001, the Swedish Social democratic party had produced a proposition about a changed parental insurance and parental leave where they promoted a second father's quota. This second father's quota was legislated in 2002.

The final proposition was put forward in 2013/2014 by the previous Swedish government, The Alliance² and was promoting an increased flexibility within the current parental insurance.

Even if each proposition is highlighting different perspectives of the parental insurance, I believe it is possible to investigate the language, argumentation and discourse as a whole, and compare them with each other. I have chosen certain parts within each proposition that are suitable for my thesis concerning gender equality.

² The Alliance is a coalition of four center and right parties in the Swedish parliament, The Moderate Party, Centre Party, Liberal Party and Liberals and Christian democrats (<http://www.alliansen.se>).

These propositions will be my main material for this thesis but I have also used secondary material as articles, previous research, and other interesting texts and documents about gender equality and parental insurance that were produced at the same time as the propositions. I especially would like to introduce a book that is written by Roger Klinth and Thomas Johansson and is called "Nya svenska fäder" (New Swedish fathers). The book is presenting a historical overview about the Swedish parental insurance and a study about parenthood and fathers today. This book and the authors' conclusions have inspired and helped me to gain more knowledge about the ideas and political process that made the parental insurance possible in Sweden. This book also gave me a wider understanding of the contexts during each different time period.

As Bacchi also mentions it is important to use other material to complement the main material, and at the same time gain an understanding and a background about how the issue and the problem representation belongs to the wider debates (Bacchi, 2009:20-21). In this study I will focus on debates about parental insurance, parental leave, and gender equality that have been present in Sweden.

4.3. Delimitations

Before I continue to discuss my understanding of gender I would like to motivate why I have chosen to focus on gender and not use an intersectional perspective. Intersectional perspective focuses on more than one category and investigates how they collaborate with each other. Different categories and concepts do not just exist individually since they are constituted and affected by each other. Intersectionality can also be understood as studies that investigate where and how different identities are being created. Usually categories as class, gender, ethnicity, age, sexuality, etc. are being investigated (Eriksson-Zetterquist & Styhre, 2007:11-15).

Gender equality has been a very central part in the over all political discussions in Sweden and has been promoted and discussed as an issue that needed to be solved. The Swedish government has had increased gender equality as a national goal were the parental insurance was one act to fullfil this goal. Even if I will not use the intersectional perspective as a theory, I will discuss and make parts of this perspective visible in the analysis. Focusing on gender and gender equality will help me answer my research questions and to pay attention to what is the problem with the representation. Using gender equality as my starting point will give me the opportunity to question and investigate how the norms have changed over time, and how it has affected different groups in society.

I would also like to clarify that my aim is not to highlight and present to what extent every norm has changed within the debates about parental insurance. With a starting point in the WPR approach and the feminist postmodern thoughts, I have identified a few categories and key concepts in the propositions that I believe are important to analyze. These concepts will be presented in the beginning of the analysis.

I had to limit the amount of research material and research for this thesis because of practical reasons and my limited space. These limitations are the cause of why only a few studies and arguments have been considered in this thesis. However, in order to analyze each proposition I tried to get a broad background understanding of each time period and the different contexts. But since gender equality has a great variety of concepts, understandings, and perspectives it is important to notice that I will not be able to acknowledge them all.

4. Theoretical framework

In this chapter I will present my theoretical framework and the premisses for my understandings of feminism, gender equality, and the assumptions about how the world is constituted. I have my starting point in the feminist postmodern thoughts and will present how these theories together with Bacchi's WPR approach can help me organize and analyze my material. This section will also provide my starting points about how power and gender should be conceptualized.

First I will discuss the feminist postmodern thoughts, which is a mix of different approaches as postmodernism, poststructuralism, postconstructivism, and others that are similar in their perspectives and premisses. Then I will present a discussion about women/gender, gender equality, and power relations to justify my use of these terms through this thesis.

4.1. Theoretical premisses

There are a lot of different epistemologies within the feminism scholars where each of them ask questions and provide answers to how much knowledge that can actually be reached by reasoning, with ideas, and through our senses. The approaches in feminisms³ are always partial and political and have different understandings about what is or even could be counted as true or valid knowledge. Feminisms want to acknowledge and understand the inequalities in the world with the purpose to change and improve structures. Even if most feminists share their main focus, there are still a lot of disagreements within the different scholars about how research should be done and what premisses should be followed. There are different starting points for feminists and I have chosen to have my focal point within the feminist postmodern thoughts (Ramazanoğlu & Holland, 2002:12-13, 57, 61-67, 132-140, Lykke, 2008:125-128).

My epistemological belief is that all knowledge is shaped and cannot be drawn upon global values or norms since they do not exist. Just as feminists and the postmodern thoughts, I draw my conclusions from the premise that all knowledge is contextual and shaped within culture, history, and institutions and that it cannot be separated from experiences. This is the reason to why knowledge cannot be drawn upon global values and norms (Ramazanoğlu & Holland, 2002:14-15, 140-141).

³ Since there are a lot of different methodologies and theories about feminism I will name feminism in plural (feminisms or feminists) when I talk about it in general. If I talk about my chosen theory I will name it feminist postmodern thoughts.

Feminisms have been inspired by many different theories and methods, have multidisciplinary qualities and are always a subject for change. Feminisms rest on claims rather than facts and cannot be understood or explained as chronological or as if it was divided into different fields. The research should rather be seen as if different ideas of science have been formed outside different perspectives such as feminist, anti-racist, sexism, xenophobic, democratic, and ecological thoughts. Feminist researchers wish to highlight and get broader insight to gendered social existens, and to conceptualize taken-for-granted male power in the society, and investigate how the social life is organized, structured and made meaningful, both in the private and public sphere. Feminisms also have a normative approach since feminists claim injustices and produces knowledge that maintain suggestions about how the injustice should be eliminated (Ramazanoğlu & Holland, 2002:40-42, 140-141, 146-148, Lykke, 2008:138).

In order to use the feminist postmodern thoughts as my theoretical framework, my understandings about the world have to rest on constructivist assumptions. I believe that we cannot separate language and knowledge, and that there is no objective or natural language through which we can understand different social relations (Bergström & Boréus, 2012:30-31).

Feminist postmodern thoughts include a lot of different perspectives and researches, and this approach is divided into various understandings. One main purpose for the feminist postmodern thoughts is to interrogate the taken-for-granted assumptions about the society's structures. The focal point is not to identify large structures within the society or in the world, but rather to investigate smaller contextualized stories. As constructivism, postmodern thoughts also reject that language, subjects, and reality can be separated from each other. Since the world, language and subjects are variable from time to time, different meanings become fluid and should be understood as nodal points instead of being stable (Lykke, 2008:163-164).

If everything is fluid then it is hard to make limitations within the research about how I should relate to my material, subjects, and objects. I believe that there have to be limitations within research and the procedure, otherwise it will not be possible to investigate or draw conclusions in a decent way. Donna Haraway and Karen Barad, are both feminists that operate within the postmodern field, and I agree with their assumptions that we as researchers have to be able to navigate methodologically in the research without an attitude that subjects and objects are destined (Lykke, 2008:170-172).

I do not claim to have a 'true' relativistic epistemology, but I do assume that our social relationships and the society's structures are bound by context and that these can be created in different ways. Donna Haraway has created a theory about situated knowledges where she is criticizing universal understandings about women and their way to liberation. She claims that the epistemology is fluid and cannot be determined, which is agreed within poststructuralism and postmodern thoughts. Haraway believes that we create categories that benefit diversification in different forms about social and cultural exclusion, privileges, resistance, and oppression. Even if she belongs to the postmodern approach she do not reject the objectivity that derives from the standpoint feminism. Researchers make

normative choices and argues for things that are more preferable than others, (Lykke, 2008:146-147) that is why things cannot be 'truly' relativistic.

4.1.1. Women and gender

Gender is one of my main focus in this thesis and my starting point is that gender is embedded and present in our culture and exists everywhere and within everything. Since I have argued that our perceptions are depending on the context, gender exists in every society but is expressed differently because of history, culture, and our institutions like legislation, marriage, ownership, etc. Gender is constructed and is therefore not inherited and cannot be explained through biology, even if there are differences between men and women's bodies. Gender and the roles of men and women may be, or have been, regarded as natural and stable in different contexts, but this is not my understanding of gender. For a long time the differences between the gender have been explained through biology where this statement justified unequal treatment of men and women. Biology in itself cannot, and does not create the norms about gender, this is why gender is constituted (Hirdman, 2003:72-75,82-83,97-98, Eriksson-Zetterquist & Styhre, 2007:61-62, Haas & Hwang:2008:86-87, Eveline & Bacchi 1, 2010:92-93). To be able to understand gender we need to rethink and erase the connection between sex and gender. It is problematic to use the term sex since it cements the old understandings and meanings of sex and women's subordination. The term of gender could give a distance from the term sex since the concept of gender is also available not just for bodies, but for everything around us. Female and male attributions are transferred to everything around us such as places, buildings, streets, and so on, while gender is transferred to abstractions (Hirdman, 2003:14-16).

Yvonne Hirdman presents and makes a review, since the antiquity until now, how women have been described through history. She points out that women have always been described as "not a man" and that women's qualities have been less valued. Men have been the norm in society and women have always been compared to men (Hirdman, 2003:26-33, 59-61).

To raise the question about women and their situation in society, the feminisms categorized women as a homogenous group. Feminisms wanted to highlight women's interests and create politics and a language that could increase women's influence and power in society. But the category of women has been questioned and a lot of feminist theorists claim that women should not and cannot be seen as a stable and lasting category. There is no unity of what a woman should be categorized as (Butler, 2007:49-51).

Judith Butler is one of many feminist theorists that has questioned the categorizing of women and gender, and claims that sex and gender should not be connected with each other since there is no reason to believe that it only exists two genders. Butler raised the discussion about how we can say that sex or gender is given without questioning how these categories are given (Butler, 2007:56-58). Gender should be understood as performative and is constructed through actions

and not through the subject that exists before the action is done (Butler, 2007:77, Eveline & Bacchi 1, 2010:93). Our gender identity has been created and controlled by our culture, which also has been regulating the gender's and sex's meaning and form. Women are stuck in these normative categories that have been constructed by politics and practices which have produced gendered people and concealed other assumptions (Butler, 2007:77, Lykke, 2009:142, Bacchi et al, 2010:61-62). These frameworks are not static and they are changing depending on the context (Bacchi et al, 2010:61-62).

As I mentioned before, gender has been conceptualized in many different ways and usually as a part of a person and not as an ongoing process. Through this thesis and my analysis, gender will be understood as a verb⁴ and the conception of it will have different political effects that will create conditions for how we talk about and understand the meaning of gender. Even if gender is not a fixed structure it will have effects on power and advantages in life. The most important thing may not be to create a theory about objective gender structures, but to be aware of how gender differentiation is constituted by institutions and organizations that produces asymmetric power relations and inequalities (Eveline & Bacchi 1, 2010: 87-88,95).

Before I continue to discuss gender equality and power relations, I would like to mention the method of gender mainstreaming. This method is mentioned and recommended in a lot of the material and research concerning gender equality. The purpose of gender mainstreaming is to make norms and practices available and adjusted for both men and women so that women should not have to adopt the existing norms. The question that should be asked is if men and women benefit equal from politics, programs and projects? Gender equality should be a guideline for how policies and practices should be developed and implemented in decisions and politics in the society (Bacchi et al, 2010:65-66).

4.1.2. Power relations and gender equality

Power is a central concept within feminism and power is constantly present everywhere. There are widespread understandings of power and various disagreements between different scholars. In this thesis I will proceed from the assumption that power is diverse, shifting, and inherent in all interactions and discourses (Allen 2014, Aranda, 2006:136, Ramazanoğlu & Holland, 2002:12-13). It is important to be aware of how we reproduce and constitute different power relations but also to question assumptions that are taken-for-granted. When we visualize power relations we can either reproduce its meaning or challenge it. In this thesis I am inspired by Steven Lukes approach that power should be understood as a potentiality and not as an actuality (Allen 2014). Power is something that emerges and adopts different shapes depending on the context. Power should never be understood as solid or universal.

⁴ Gender = it is something we do. Gender is constructed, and should not be taken for given.

I believe that our understandings and perceptions are shaped by power relations, and that our understanding of power is depending on our interests and what we aim to study (Allen 2014). Since I believe that power is unstable and shifting, and that no one or any group inheres in power, it is problematic to claim and explain how women are inferior to men at a structural level. I agree with Foucault thoughts that there are struggles about the distribution of power and who has the power to constitute the norms and the 'truth' (Ramazanoğlu & Holland, 2002:84-96). Since women (and other social groups) have been discriminated at a structural level for several years, they have not been able to participate in the creation of legislation, structures, norms and the 'truth'. But since I believe that our norms, and structures are socially constructed, I also believe that they can be changed.

Policies constitute or give shape to problems and are at the same time proposals for how things should be changed. Political subjects are constituted through the problem representation and policies will also affect how issues can be thought about (Bacchi, 2009:1-2, Bacchi, 2010:8-9, Bacchi & Eveline 2, 2010:114).

Policies have the power to constitute norms and limits of our visions of social change, and this is altered by different contexts. There are unequal power relations in how these understandings are created since everyone does not have the ability or possibility to participate in the process of decision-making. Some people or groups have interpretative prerogatives compared to others (Bacchi, 2009:180-18, 186-189). In this thesis I will investigate if the parental insurance policy has the same impact and effects, and if it is constituting equal opportunities for men and women (Bacchi & Eveline 1, 2010:20). Gender equality implies that men and women should have the same power to shape the society and their own lives (Regeringen 2).

4.2. Feminist postmodern thoughts

The postmodern tradition believes in multiple realities which should be understood through representations of culture or by deconstructing language and discourses. Identities and categories cannot be taken-for-granted since they are fluid and unstable. Different identities are influenced and depending on how they are operated, established and controlled within various contexts. Since knowledge and different categories are changing over time and space, postmodern theorists do not claim to tell the truth or that they have the right knowledge. Postmodern researchers tend to 'tell stories' rather than the truth. Knowledge is not normatively better or 'more true' than other knowledges and can therefore only be 'true' at a local and not global level. The feminist postmodern thoughts focus on problematizing the gendered power structures and investigating women's experiences that are reproduced in and of different discourses (Ramazanoğlu & Holland, 2002:84-96, 148-163, Lykke, 2009: 143-144, 154-155). Knowledge exists in conflicting discourses, and even thus knowledge cannot have an ultimate

authority we should not stop to investigating and searching for 'better' and new knowledge. The postmodernism gives us the opportunity to examine both social, individual, and political positions (Einstein & Shildrick, 2009:294-295). The feminist postmodern thoughts have a critique against the enlightenment assumptions where feminisms want to question, interrogate, and deconstruct assumptions about humanism, reason, truth, and progress. The purpose is not to give up all of our ideals but rather to reconsider and reuse them. We have to be aware of our own assumptions and recognize reflexivity as a social practice. The feminist postmodern thoughts want to replace certainty with doubt and replace the modern and global stories with local stories and multiple voices. Feminism is a political position that produces knowledge about how both material and social change could be improved at an individual and social level (Aranda, 2006:135-136).

It is problematic for feminists to ignore the category of 'women' since feminisms have to have knowledge about women in order to argue for any change in society. In order to change the power structures and the societal institutions it has to be possible to observe and get information about how women experience their lives and situations. Feminists have a problem with abandoning 'women' as a political category and even if postmodernism rejects categories, they can still be used to highlight situations and structures in society as long as the characteristics of the categories are considered. It is important to observe the relationships between people and see how these are constituted and structured in the society since it will be of great importance for people's daily lives. It is still important to investigate how these relationships are perceived both politically, epistemologically and ethically according to feminists (Ramazanoğlu & Holland, 2002:84-99).

Since feminisms rest on normative grounds, I think it is possible for feminists to claim that society's structures and power relations should be equal for men and women, even if everything depends on the context. However, since everything is a subject for change, and could vary within culture, history, and context, there is nothing to say that things could not be in the same way at the same time at the same place. As long as knowledge claims are made with the perception that this is one way to understand the issue/problem/policy, and not the only truth, there should not be a problem about using certain categories or make claims about change.

The feminist postmodern thoughts have made it possible to study and present subjects and make them visible in ways that have not been done before. The feminisms movements are representing a broad range of theoretical approaches and are trying to think differently about traditional philosophical questions. Gender is a great example where postmodern thoughts can, and have been, used to reveal the hierarchical relation between men and women and how these relations differ from each other in different contexts (Kostikova, 2013:24-25).

By deconstruction we can understand how texts, truths, and thoughts have been expressed in different contexts over time. The postmodernism brings forward assumptions that generally are taken-for-granted and points out the effects that will follow of that certain meaning. (Ramazanoğlu & Holland, 2002:84-96, 113).

Feminists aim to investigate how concepts are being produced within different contexts and since there are no chances for certainty or validity, knowledge can only be a product of different discourses.

Language is constitutive and shapes the conditions for what subjects and social organizations that are available rather than reflects the reality. The language shapes our perceptions about what meanings and knowledges that are dominating in certain times. Since definitions of concepts are constantly reshaping its character and meaning it is hard do maintain one definition of a concept. This makes it possible to open up for new understandings of a concept and create a new meaning. The people that have power over the discourses will also have the power to constitute the meaning of the language (Aranda, 2006:136, Eveline & Bacchi 2, 2010:141-143, Huntington & Gilmour, 2001:902-903, Lykke, 2009:165, Mann, 2005:46-49). Postmodern thoughts have been of great importance for gender research since they acknowledge temporary character and meaning of language and knowledge (Lykke, 2009:165). The feminist postmodern thoughts recognize the importance of language, but they also claim that gender is much more than language and that it is not enough to just investigate and deconstruct the language. The feminist approach claims that there are things that cannot be changed since people do not have the possibility to choose their own identity, and because of that we have to connect knowledge with material realities. When feminists argue that the experiences of women are important and necessary to investigate, they do not claim that they can make any general assumptions or that the researcher actually is able to understand another person and their experiences. But when we study experiences it will give us an opportunity to investigate and notice differences and similarities within gendered lives and situations which makes it possible to highlight inequality and institutionalized power. The 'results' we get should not be seen as facts, but rather as a way to understand other people's situations. Within postmodernism the focal point would be to deconstruct how people think about their experiences. It is important to notice that there are limitations and contradictions within feminism. Feminisms are connected with global interrelations at the same time as they need to acknowledge 'truth' as local and changing between different contexts. Since feminists aim to change the society's unequal relationships and structures, it is important to assume that knowledge can be valid (Ramazanoğlu & Holland, 2002:100-102, 123-124).

Even if language is an important ingredient in the feminism's research, embodiment and emotions cannot always be expressed in language. It is important to consider the value of experiences since people feel and understand situations differently and are bound by various contexts. The discussion about differences between men and women has been affected by the definition of the body and our sexuality. There have been, and still are, disagreements about whether the differences between men and women are biological or socially constructed. Feminists are criticizing assumptions about biological essentialism that have justified men's power, women's subordination, and what should be included or excluded from the definition of women. Our reality is constituted and contingent by language and the 'truth' is not universal or neutral (Mann, 2005:47-49, Ramazanoğlu & Holland, 2002:61-63, 84-99). Feminist postmodern thoughts are

questioning old philosophical questions and how these understandings operate and affect the society. Our social structures freeze women into certain positions in the society and even if feminisms are multiple and the category of women should not be universalized, there can still be common conditions that women may share (Mann, 2005:50-53).

Donna Haraway points out the struggles of choosing between reality and relativism and that it is hard to let go of the scientific knowledge. It is problematic to claim that the truth and reality is socially constructed, and at the same time compete with the patriarchal truth about the society and knowledge. Haraway suggests that we should abandon the aims to choose between reality and relativism. Instead we should investigate why some people get the possibility to define what should be counted as knowledge, and explore what these knowledges and politics impose (Ramazanoğlu & Holland, 2002:61-63, 87-89).

4.2.1. My main focus on the feminist postmodern thoughts

First I would like to clarify that I will not use a strong version of postmodernism since Aranda describes in her article that this version is not compatible with feminism (2006:140). However, I do not claim that there cannot be any truth at all. My focus is to understand the construction of categories, structures, and representations. I need to be aware of my role as a researcher, and how I constitute and portrait others, and what kind of knowledge and power I reproduce through my text and analysis (Ramazanoğlu & Holland, 2002:105-112)

I proceed from the presumption that my standpoint is political and that my research focus is on gender. I also believe that my research process has to be visible through reflexivity, and that I as a researcher can find results and suggest alternative ways to how our structures/policies/politics or others can or should be changed and improved (Aranda, 2006:136, Ramazanoğlu & Holland, 2002:61-63).

I will connect Bacchi's WPR approach with the feminist postmodern thoughts and discuss my material outside a few key concepts in my analysis. The perspectives I would like to highlight from the postmodern thoughts are the ones focus on the context and the questioning about how something becomes possible in a certain time and space. I reject the thoughts about a universal truth, but I do still believe that it is possible to analyze and investigate how structures are changing at a national level, in this case, Sweden. The interesting part is to investigate how the 'truth' and the problem representation have changed over time and in different Swedish contexts.

Within these propositions I also want to investigate and deconstruct what is taken-for-granted and problematize what effects this could have for different social groups in the society. What is taken-for-granted in the discourses about gender equality, parental leave, and parental insurance, and in what way these discourses enable what is possible to talk and think about.

Since I believe that categories, language and identities are fluid and unstable it is also interesting to consider who has the power to advocate these changes. The

language will put up boundaries for how we should think and act concerning different practices.

Since my theoretical framework rests on feminism, I will also investigate and try to distinguish power structures and compare their differences and similarities over time, so that I can visualize inequalities.

5. Analysis

In this section I will present my analysis and the findings that have been discovered through my material review with a focal point on the four propositions. I choose to divide my analysis into four different key concepts where each concept has been elected based on the propositions, and outside Bacchi's WPR approach. Each of these concepts are present in all four propositions, even if it is to a various extent. Further, I will present the key concepts in the analysis introduction, and give the reader a review of my main focus and my research questions.

5.1. Introduction for my analysis

In the previous chapters I have introduced my methodology, method and my theoretical framework. My aim is to answer my research question, *how we can understand and explain the development of gender equality norms over time*, by connecting Bacchi's WPR approach with the feminist postmodern thoughts and use their main points for my analysis. During my material review I identified four different key concepts that were reoccurring in each proposition about parental insurance and gender equality. I chose these concepts through a narrow reading of the material, where my focal point was to identify key concepts in each proposition. Each concept is visible in all propositions even if they are discussed to a various extent, depending on the proposition's theme and the current context.

The key concepts, that I have identified in the propositions, are:

1. The State,
2. Family: men, women and parenthood,
3. Work,
4. Flexibility, and freedom of choice.

First I will describe each concept's discussion that is presented in each proposition, compare and analyze similarities and differences over time. To identify and analyze taken-for-granted assumptions, I will focus on Bacchi's WPR approach, and the feminist postmodern thoughts, and their question: Why these assumptions are possible to emerge in certain contexts?

How is the 'truth' represented and changed over time? Has the propositions' language put up boundaries for how it is possible to think and act during different times. In what way is it possible to make the propositions' power structures visible

in the Swedish parental insurance, and who has the power to participate and construct different norms at different times?

5.1.1. The State

In the 1960s the political landscape changed and voices about women's liberation and rights were raised, together with a demand for men to increase their responsibility and become an active parent. It became an obligation for women to have an employment, but with no relief on the responsibilities for the unpaid work. Meanwhile, men's parenthood was portrayed as a freedom of choice. Already in the 1970s there were voices that advocated an equally shared parental leave, but there was an insecurity about to what extent men could be 'forced' to take responsibility, and how much fathers could be trusted. The result of this new landscape became an expansion of child care services instead of a policy that made parents use the leave more equally (Bekkengen, 2002:10-13,158-159, Duvander, 2013:46). In the proposition from 1973, the dual breadwinner model was pointed out as the best way to continue the development and the gender equality. The most profitable way to reach gender equality was through changing family policies (Prop 73:18-19).

In order for women to become economically independent and participate in the labour market, the conditions had to be more equal. The dual breadwinner model became the new Swedish norm, where both parents worked and took responsibility for the family (Bekkengen, 2002:10-13,158-159, Duvander, 2013:46). The importance of paid work is noticed in the proposition. Different political actions had to be implemented in different sectors, in labour market, and public services at the same time. The State had an important and active role to increase the gender equality, first formally and then in reality (Prop 73:18-19,27,42).

The legislation did presume that mothers would take the largest responsibility, even if the policy pointed out the importance of both a mother and a father, for the sake of the child (Bekkengen, 2002:10-13,158-159, Duvander, 2013:46). So, in order for mothers to participate at the labour market, the child care services had to be expanded, this was as important as cash support. The State had to meet the society's developments, since both men and women got educations and wanted to be established at the labour market (Prop 73:35-37). There are a few signs within the proposition that interpret an understanding that men and women have different conditions in the society, which needed to change. Still, in the father's behalf, the parental insurance was shaped by the principal of freedom of choice (Prop 73:24-25,37-38,41-42).

There were critical voices against the freedom of choice approach, but instead of questioning the gender power relations, the government chose to practice the logics of consensus. The society's attitudes, and not the structures of the society, were presented as the problem that needed to be solved (Klinth & Johansson, 2010:59-61).

The fathers participation was intensified in the 1990s, and one reason was that the center-right government legislated the first father's quota in 1995. This new legislation officially divided the parental leave equally between the parents, but all of the leave could still be transferred to the other parent, except for 30 days that were exclusive. This action was meant to create a more equal labour market (Duvander, 2013:46). The division of days was meant to affect parents attitudes as well (Prop 93/94:70). The proposition from 93/94 emphasize that the gender equality goals have not been fulfilled, which the State, organisations, institutions, people, and especially men had to acknowledge (Prop 93/94:15). This statement, where men are pointed out as a problem, or at least as an obstacle, for an increased gender equality, is present as an underlying assumption in this proposition. Even if both men's and women's attitudes are stressed as obstacles, and there is a need for more information and knowledge about the parental insurance, men do not match their attitudes about gender equality with the distribution of unpaid work at home (Prop 93/94:70,72).

Gender equality had to be integrated in all political areas, the policies had to be long-termed, and contain active and goal-oriented solutions. Even if the formal obstacles had been eliminated, there were still deficits in reality (Prop 93/94:16-17). Compared to the 1970s, the attitudes are marked as an important factor in the work of gender equality. But previous changes within attitudes had not increased the gender equality in its entirety for the group of men and women, but only for some social groups (Prop 93/94:22,70).

In this proposition the power relations are acknowledged in the text, by describing difficulties with a gender segregated labour market and the deficiency of women's power and influence in the society. One suggested solution was to focus on the informal structures and make inequalities visible, and pursue the work towards an increased gender equality within all social areas (Prop 93/94:16-17,20,40-42).

The question about power relations between men and women was present in 1980s, but it was first a few decades later that the power structures were officially contested. In the beginning of the 21st century a window of opportunity was opened: now children have the right to expect their father to use parental leave. It is still the society's attitudes that have to change, but these attitudes have their roots in the power structures where women are inferior to men. Now, the formation of policies became gender neutral with focus to make power and different dimensions of gender visible. Gender mainstreaming became an important strategy for institutions, organizations, and companies, where the gender perspective should be implemented in the business's processes (Klinth & Johansson, 2019:97-100, 107-111).

In 2002 the second father's quota was legislated without any special resistens. At the same time, an individualized parental leave, with no possibility to transfer days to the other parent, was suggested. This proposal was, and still is, not established in the society and has little political support (Duvander, 2013:47, Klinth & Johansson, 2010:107-111).

The proposition that was put forward in 00/01 implied a political will, to once and for all, create gender equality in the families and at the labour market. Even

though families' preconditions and economical benefits have improved, it has to be further developed. During the financial crisis, in the 1990s, the economical differences between families had increased. Therefore, politics had to support and make it possible for both parents to be active and take responsibility for the child's care and development. The new formation of the parental insurance indicates that gender equality is a political question and that the child's best interest should be in focus. Another political goal was to increase fathers use of parental leave. Since there was a deficiency of knowledge and information about the division of the parental insurance, this must be interrogated further, in order to balance the inequalities (Prop 00/01:23-25).

The center-right government, that won the election in 2006, reintroduced the cash for childcare policy in 2008, but as an optional offer for the municipalities to carry out or not. A gender equality bonus, for those parents who shared equal, was also introduced. The government's purpose was that families should have the freedom to choose how they wanted to take care of their child (Duvander, 2013:46, Ellingsæter, 2014:569-571).

The proposition in 13/14 continues to cherish the families self-determination, freedom of choice, and flexibility. The government wanted to increase the possibilities for both parents to use parental leave and increase the gender equality at the labour market, so it would be easier to combine family and work (Prop 13/14:12-13,17). The State has to support parents to have an equal parenthood, and their equal opportunities to use parental leave. The changes in the parental insurance, a limitation of days that can be used after the child has turned four years and an extension of the age limit for when the days can be used⁵, are supposed to decrease the conflicts between parents, and make the parental insurance more fair (Prop 13/14:1,15-16,25-26). This proposition's focal point is to make the insurance more equal in order to increase children's possibilities to have a better relationship with both parents. This would favor an equal use of the parental leave as well. The parents are assumed to take an equal responsibility for their child (Prop 13/14:15-16,18), which is problematic to assume if this is not the reality at a structural level. A lot of research still indicates that the mother has the main responsibility for the unpaid work (Almqvist - Duvander, 2014:22-25, Haas & Hwang:2008:98, Duvander, 2013:48-49). This proposition in particular, wanted to highlight and strengthen female immigrants and their participation at the labour market. To increase the gender equality, these women need to have stronger incitements to become available at the labour market and to become economically independent (Prop 13/14:66,69)

5.1.2. Family: men, women and parenthood?

In Sweden, different governments have created terms and conditions by counteracting inequalities and differences in parenthood, by introducing changes at the labour market, and expansion of public child care (Haas & Hwang:

⁵ From eight to twelve years (Prop 13/14:25-26).

2008:92). Today the dominating norm in Sweden is a shared responsibility between the parents (Klinth & Johansson, 2010:22).

In 1961 the term *jämställdhet*⁶ was introduced by Eva Moberg⁷, which got strong penetration power in the Swedish society. *Jämställdhet* replaced all the concepts about women, like *women's issues* and *women's questions*, and implied that both men and women have to be included in this discussion (Klinth & Johansson, 2010:46-48). Sweden was the first country to claim that men should take responsibility for their children as well (Klinth & Johansson, 2010:37). In the Swedish debate, in the 1960s and 1970s, the general idea was that men and women shared equal interests and that men and women should be released from their gender roles. We are primarily humans, and if we were released, we could get access to a broader human register. The traditional role of the family was questioned just as a redistribution of responsibility was requested. At this time Sweden got a higher status as a gender equal pioneer (Klinth & Johansson, 2010:49-51).

But, in the 1970s, when redistribution and gender equality was supposed to reflect the policies, something happened. The individual became the focal point rather than the family, and providing for the family by paid work became more important than an equal responsibility for home and children. The paternity leave became optional (Klinth & Johansson, 2010:55-59). The primary development in the proposition from 73, was that the insurance's focus changed from motherhood towards parenthood (Prop 73/74:20). For the first time, the father's role as a parent was emphasized and he was given the opportunity to stay at home with the child, but his choice, was still optional (Prop 73:24-25, 37-38, 41-42).

Since the paternity leave was optional, men and women had different roles toward the child. Since the father could choose when and if he wanted to use parental leave, he had a limited role as a parent, compared to the mother. But, the father's possibilities to choose parental leave was superior to women's opportunities at the labour market and their time (Klinth & Johansson, 2010:85-97). Even if the proposition did point out the necessity of both parents staying at home with their children, and that men should learn to take a greater responsibility for children and home (Prop 73:24-25, 37-38, 41-42), the gender differences still remained.

One argument, to why men should use more parental leave, was that men and women had complementary roles, and this approach was especially strong in the beginning of the 1990s. Each man could stay home with their child, without any loss of his manhood. This idea reshaped and criticized the traditional view of what a man 'should be'. At this time the family policies was marked by a heterosexual and twoness norm. From the 1970s until 2001 the family policies and the gender equality debate was based on the same premisses, even if there were some developments and changes. The picture of fatherhood was reshaped during this

⁶ Jämställdhet = gender equality. I chose to use the Swedish term to highlight the effects and the power this concept have had for the debates and understanding of gender equality in Sweden since 1960s.

⁷ Eva Moberg (1932-2011) was a Swedish writer and feminist (<http://www.fokus.se/2011/06/eva-moberg/>)

time, and even though policies and campaigns pointed out men's responsibility for both work and home, it still reproduced the traditional complementary gender roles (Klinth & Johansson, 2010:69-78).

In the proposition from 93/94, the general understanding of the society and its structures was that they are socially constructed and that women are inferior to men. The uneven division of unpaid work is a consequence of the unequal distribution of power and economy. Power relations have to be acknowledged and our structures have to change (Prop 93/94:20-21,64). Even though this is the opinion that is represented and described in the text, there are still explanations and suggested actions in the proposition that indicate underlying assumptions about men and women's differences. One example is the assumption that both men and women have *good* possibilities to combine work and family, (Prop 93/94:16) or that the proposition still reproduces the thoughts about *women's research* and *women's questions* (Prop 93/94:80-81). Even if this proposition presents a broad understanding of how the society is constructed and why there are inequalities, the suggested actions do not reflect this knowledge. The proposition points out the importance of men taking more responsibility (Prop 93/94:22) and that women need to increase their power and influence at all levels (Prop 93/94:64). This indicates that these thoughts, about structures and unequal power, are not fully developed, and that there still are underlying assumptions about how men and women should be.

During this time the thoughts were optimistic about men's will to become more equal, and even though a change could be distinguished, there was a time-lag between attitudes and practice. Gender equality became a question about reason and knowledge (Klinth & Johansson, 2010:78-85). That gender equality was connected with knowledge during this time is explicitly explained in the proposition, since knowledge is almost used as a synonym for change (Prop 93/94:73,77-81).

In the proposition from 93/94, the parents are portrayed with both rights and responsibilities, but the most central part is the child's economical stability and the child's need of two available parents (Prop 93/94:63-65). Even if the best interest of the child was important in the propositions from 73/74 and 93/94, it is possible to distinguish a changed representation of the child from the beginning of the 2000s. Now the child should be seen as a person that has rights and demands. A new norm was created in the society that was highlighting the best interest of the child and children's rights (Klinth & Johansson, 2010:100-107).

In the two previous propositions the rights of the child are more central and they also refer to UN:s convention on the rights of the child. It is for the child's sake that there should be two parents that have responsibility and could contribute to the growth of the child. It is for the child's sake that both parents should be involved in the child's care, and it is the child's rights and needs that should be at the center (Prop 01/02:22,25).

After 2002, new ideas about parenthood and gender equality were also established in Sweden, where the complementarily gender roles were replaced by a gender neutral approach. Now, the value of a shared parental leave and parenthood is emphasized with focus on both parents value and how they benefit

from an equal share (Klinth & Johansson, 2010:100-107). In the proposition from 00/01, the parents equal possibilities and responsibilities are pointed out. The greatest difference is that this proposal is gender neutral, which increased the flexibility so both men and women can use the parental insurance. For example, if no father is available, someone else can use the days and be a support for the mother (Prop 00/01:22,28-30). The exclusive month that was legislated in 1995 did increase fathers use of parental leave. Another exclusive month was therefore legislated to increase men's participation in the parental insurance, and to strengthen the gender equality in the families and at the labour market further (Prop 00/01:1,7,24-26).

The gender equality bonus that was introduced in 2008 showed few positive effects, compared to the extended father's quota. It is therefore more likely that policies, together with attitudes and expectations of motherhood and fatherhood, are affecting how the parental leave is divided (Almqvist - Duvander, 2014:21, Persson 2014).

The proposition from 13/14 has the most explicit child centered approach, where the rights of the child are respected and the child is given the possibility to develop in a safe environment together with two available parents. This proposition is supposed to favor the children and give them more time with their parents when they are under four years old. The child has the right to have a good relationship with both parents (Prop 13/14:12-13,15,49,68). Every family is unique, and that is why the parental insurance has to be flexible and developed on the basis of the best of the child and parents will. But to decrease conflicts between parents, an individual right to use half of the parental leave is legislated, but all days can be transferred, except for 60 exclusive days, to the other parent (Prop 13/14:1,12,14,20). Since a limitation was introduced, the government's wish was that men should use a longer parental leave when the child is younger than four years, and that the parents will adapt their use of parental leave outside the new legislation. The government's expectations are that these changes will increase the gender equality and strengthen the father's relationship to the child (Prop 13/14:31-32,66-68).

The question is whether it is possible, or not, to have both a child centered and gender equality perspective at the same time within the parental insurance. The center of the child could create a threat against the goal of gender equality since the power structures and injustices between men and women are made invisible. The focal point is first of all about the parent-father-child relationship and not between men and women. In the legislation the gender equality is secondarily prioritized compared to men and children's needs (Bekkengen, 2002:116-117,144-147).

Parental leave is often used as an indicator for how much gender equality there is in the society. Gender roles are continuously reproduced by parents actions, expectations, and attitudes, and many couples are identifying themselves as equal, even if the distribution of paid and unpaid work is uneven. The parental leave's division is an indicator for how some parts of the gender equality can be changed, since studies have shown that chores like tuck the child to bed, will be divided more equally. Other chores will still be the woman's responsibility,

regardless to how the parental leave is divided (Almqvist - Duvander, 2014:22-25). Fathers with egalitarian attitudes, or a higher education level tend to use more parental leave, also if the woman is highly educated. Men with better resources and that are operative at the labour market tend to use more leave (Haas & Hwang:2008:98, Duvander, 2013:48-49). It is still the same social group of men, as in 1960s-1970s, that use parental leave today (Bekkengen, 2002:16-17).

5.1.3. Work

Already in the 1930s the government began to root and lay ground for the current legislation about gender equality and parental insurance. Our preconditions were built early since Sweden had required female workforce, and because of that the single breadwinner model was weaker compared to other countries. A few examples are, that legislation about gender neutral work law, citizenship and women's economical rights were implemented in the 1930s. During this time it did not exist any active politics about an increased involvement from fathers in the homes and families, but there were still critical voices about this subject. The Myrdals pointed out the importance of fathers engagement in the private sphere since this was, according to them, a prerequisite to build the Swedish welfare state (Klinth & Johansson, 2010:37-39).

In the 1970s the politics had an individual, rather than a family perspective with focus on provision from paid work rather than care and unpaid work. Prioritized political goals were women's rights to have employment and their possibilities to become economically independent. There was an expansion of the welfare State with new legislation concerning the tax system, economic independency, child care services and parental insurance. An expansion of the professional day care services were of great importance for the welfare state and women's possibilities to establish at the labour market (Klinth & Johansson, 2010:55-59).

In the proposition from 1973 the main focus is to strengthen women's work possibilities and to develop the professional child care. One reason to why the maternity insurance was changing to a parental insurance, was because of the changes in society. At this time both men and women were working to a larger extent, and the politics had to adjust to the current social conditions (Prop 73:39). Even if this proposition was focusing on women's possibilities to employment, I can also distinguish that there was an awareness, expressed in the text, of men's and women's different conditions (Prop 73:18-19). It was important that both men and women were protected at the labour market and that both parents were able to get parental allowance. If parents used the parental leave more equally it would have positive effects for women since they would be able to return to the labour market earlier. If the parental leave was divided more equally, women would be less discriminated and have better conditions to get an employment (Prop 73:21, 43-44). Women's access to the labour market together with an expansion of public services, especially childcare, are the most central parts of this proposition.

The next proposition points out discrimination and injustices at the labour market between men and women, and that this unequal conditions have to be counteracted. Work had to be stimulated and methods had to be found to stop inequalities (Prop 93/94:37-40). The purposes of the parental insurance was that men and women should be able to work and get established at the labour market based on the same conditions. Both men and women must be able to provide for themselves and their children. The gender equality would increase at the labour market if the parental leave was shared more equally. This would lead to increased career possibilities for women and reduced time away from their workplace. If men used more parental leave it would become more natural for men to take responsibilities for the child, which would have positive effects for his working life (Prop 93/94:66-67).

The Swedish labour market is gender-segregated, which is one explanation to the large wage differences between men and women. Another explanation in the proposition was that women are expected to take a greater responsibility for the unpaid work and children. This proposition noticed the importance of gaining more information and knowledge of the economical differences between men and women. Research indicates that the use of parental leave and the distribution of paid and unpaid work, is affected by the parents socioeconomic status (Prop 93/94:30-33).

The challenges for the labour market are still present and similar to the 93/94 proposition. The government's aim was to facilitate women's access to the labour market with a focal point at parents with small children, and their possibilities to combine family and work. Some employers' associations are skeptical about an expansion of the exclusive quota, and points out the families freedom of choice. One suggestion was that parents should be able to reduce their hours of work. The parents rights and flexibility must be provided but at the same time must employers and companies interest be protected (Prop 00/01:22-27,36-39).

The political goals in the latest proposition also promotes work related actions. Men and women shall have equal pay for equal work, women's possibilities to get a career, and increased participation in the decision-making is important for an increased gender equality. Men and women have different conditions and possibilities to get an employment, and an income so they can provide for themselves. The shape of the parental insurance create incentives for parents to get established at the labour market before they decides to have children (Prop 13/14:13, 29-30).

Different social groups, gender, and households have various conditions for how much time they spend at work. Women who have immigrated to Sweden are particular exposed and have a hard time to get established at the labour market. This proposition highlights that this social group have to use a shorter parental leave, in order to improve their conditions at the labour market. Many consultations bodies points out that there are other problems and challenges for this social group to be established, and that a long parental leave is just one out of many reasons (Prop 13/14:20-23,27-28, Carlsson 2013). Försäkringskassan is skeptical towards this new legislation since they aim that one out of two parents will be affected by the new legislation (Carlsson 2013).

Even if many legal actions have been implemented to overcome the differences between men's and women's conditions at the labour market, there are still injustices concerning wages, pensions, and development. There are still discrimination against women in fertile age since many companies and employers choose men over women. The companies experiences are that men will be present and available more than women, because of (expected) maternity leave (Persson 2014, Haas & Hwang:2008:90). A strong labour force is a requisite for the prosperous welfare state. When men and women decides to have a family women will, in most cases, have more sick days, and be more absent from work than men during the same circumstances. Women with small children are therefore not included in this 'strong labour force'. Distribution patterns have consequences for women since they loose number of worked hours, career and possibilities in life (Nilsson 2013). The parental insurance formation is constructed to develop and help women to maintain their occupational identity, and the parental allowance is dependent of women's previous working lengths. With an equally shared parental leave women would be able to return to work earlier and it would be harder for employers to discriminate women because of (excepted) maternity leave. But as long as the labour market is contained by discriminating practices women will continue to use the main part of the parental leave, which will reproduce the traditional gender roles (Haas & Hwang:2008:90).

5.1.4. Flexibility and freedom of choice

The most substantial change in the proposition from 1973 was that parents should be able to decide and share their parental leave as they preferred. The watchwords were freedom of choice and flexibility and that men should not be prevented by the legislation to use parental leave. The opinion was that it would be positive for the child to have contact with both the mother and the father (Prop 73:20,22,41). The goal was for women to return to work as quickly as possible after giving birth which made flexibility problematic during this time. But because of flexibility, it was now possible for men to participate more in the private sphere if they wanted to. Men's participation were not explained or promoted as a natural part of their identity, but rather as a possibility and a freedom of choice. The debates were more or less dominating by this view until the beginning of the 21st century (Klinth & Johansson, 2010:2010-97).

The flexibility and freedom of choice were also highly valued in 93/94 and the parental insurance was not supposed to regulate how families decided to use their leave. But since women still were subjects for discrimination at the labour market, and still took a greater responsibility for the unpaid work, the government had to push for development, and stimulate men's increased responsibility. One way to increase men's responsibility and decrease obstacles within the families were to give each parent 30 nontransferable parental leave days. The gender equality would increase with these changes and it would also help women to establish at the labour market (Prop 93/94:63-65,70-71).

In 00/01 an increased flexibility for families, since they have different constellations and needs, were continuously promoted. The shape of the parental insurance would give families preconditions to combine work with family. The parents would be able to reduce their working hours and have more advantaged levels at work while having small children. To increase the flexibility it was now possible to transfer the temporarily parental allowance to another relative or family member if the parent was not able to take care of the child because of work or sickness (Prop 00/01:1,10, 22,25,27).

The parents freedom of choice and flexibility have a central role in the proposition from 13/14 as well. The changes⁸ that were made would increase the flexibility, especially for those parents who had less flexibility at work. Each parent has an individual right and is assigned half of the parental insurance, were 60 days are exclusive, and all transfers to the other parent have to be signed and permitted (Prop 13/14:6-7,14, 25-26,30,41,49,68). A few consultation bodies delivered critiques towards this proposition since they thought this new legislation would become recondite and complicated for parents. Parents must take a greater responsibility of understanding the rules while they apply for parental allowance. Rädna barnen is questioning if the child automatically will have better conditions if the parents use the parental leave more equal. RFSL (The Swedish Federation for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender Rights) points out parents rights to have the possibility to transfer parental leave to other guardians, and not just the biological mother or father. There are also critique and suggestions that the parental insurance should be individualized, with no possibilities to transfer the days to the other parent (Prop 13/14:15,34-35, Carlsson 2013).

Before I continue to discuss if a more equal parental leave has led to an increased gender equality, I would like to highlight a few starting points.

It is important to notice how the parental insurance's flexibility affect mothers and fathers differently. One consequence is that mothers tend to stay at home for a longer period by taking out less days per week. This will increase the time children spent with a parent rather than increased gender equality (Duvander, 2013:50-51). This indicates that there is a conflict between the freedom of choice and equality, especially within the labour market conditions (Persson 2014).

But, should the family's freedom of choice and each individual's right be considered as more important then the structural differences between men and women, concerning work and career conditions, and other possibilities in life (Nilsson 2013)?

5.2. Does equal parental leave lead to gender equality?

In this section I will continue to discuss and analyze to what extent gender equality norms have developed, and if an equal parental leave tends to increase

⁸ See further explanation in 5.1.1. about the State. Limitations of days that can be saved after the child has turned four, and an extension of the age restriction for how long the parental leave can be used.

the gender equality? I will focus on how gender equality is identified, and who's included in the norm and problem representations. Which goals and values should be superior in this debate, or is it possible to satisfy all needs and social groups at the same time? In this final section my aim is to answer Bacchi's six questions, as well as incorporate the feminist postmodern thoughts.

How can we understand development within gender equality norms in Sweden over the last 40 years? First I would like to highlight the development of Swedish legislation and men's and women's formal rights. Already in the 1930s⁹ the government introduced a legislation that created preconditions for the expansion of welfare and gender equality. Even if there is a time-lag between legislation and practices, and we are still not gender equal, different policies have affected how people have organized their lives and perceptions of which norms and structures that are available or desirable. Earlier studies (Bekkengen, 2002:169-170, Haas & Hwang, 2008:100, Persson 2014, Stanfors, 2004:156) indicate that policies have substantial influence on peoples' attitudes. One thing that all four propositions have in common, is a strong work related focus. Work, and especially women's right to have an employment and equal rights at the labour market, are highlighted and explained as a basic condition for using parental allowance. In the 1970s, men and women were portrayed as having complementary gender roles, which was one reason, together with access to labour market, to why men and women should share parental leave. Structural reasons and unequal power relations between men and women, were highlighted in the 1990s, but it was still traditional gender roles and differences between men and women that were empathized in the proposition. Even though governmental investigations (Prop 93/94) pointed out structural inequalities between men and women, legislation and policies did not reflect the problem and could not solve the issue. In the 1990s, it is also visible that men's rights, to be an active parent and to have the freedom of choice to use parental leave, are highlighted in the proposition. In 21st century, the rights of the child, but also men's increased right to use parental leave, were established as the new norm.

Gender equality, and the definition of what gender equality is, or should be, is a perfect example for how complicated and dependent various variables this discussion is. Definitions are always reshaping and depending on the context which creates new understandings. Another thing that is visible, and different, especially in the propositions from 1973 and 13/14, is the understanding of how and why there are inequalities between men and women. In the latest proposition, it is almost taken-for-granted that it is our structures that need to change, but also that people, both men and women and different groups, have various conditions and possibilities in society. Even if, according to my theory and method, conditions cannot be generalized for one group, I believe it is important to recognize that there can be similar conditions.

All four propositions highlight freedom of choice and flexibility, which is problematic, since injustices and inequalities could be overlooked. If freedom of

⁹ Primary, it was work related policies that were established in 1930s. More information in section 5.1.3.

choice is superior to other values as equal opportunities, gender equality, or others, what happens to those who do not have the possibility to choose freely. My assumption, that is based on the feminist postmodern thoughts, is that there are conditions and material realities that cannot be changed. These conditions could be genetical, and therefore not able to change, or it could be difficult, and problematic to carry out the freedom of choice in practice. I claim that the possibility to have the freedom of choice, is taken for granted in all four propositions.

I would also like to highlight the fact that, even if gender inequalities have decreased (Klinth & Johansson, 2010:115-120), there are still a lot of norms and structures that remain as obstacles for both men and women, and different social groups in the society. It is not just gender that affects power relations but also other categories as class, religion, ethnicity, sexuality, culture, etc. (Klinth & Johansson, 2010:120-122). Even if it is possible to identify some understanding for different groups' conditions in the propositions, the parental insurance is still formed based on certain criteria that creates a relatively homogenous norm.

So, what's the problem representation and what is taken-for-granted? As I said, all four propositions, more or less, proceed from the same norm and one type of family. Even if the propositions, especially the latest one, acknowledge that there are differences and that each family is unique, I still claim that the parental leave is built upon one or few norms.

First of all, it is taken-for-granted that the mother should stay at home¹⁰ with the child for the first period after the child has been born, and then the father can choose how much parental leave he wants to use. For me, this assumption is visible in the propositions, even though the legislation state that both parents should have responsibility for the child care and that it is the child's right to have *two* available parents. Even if each parent has two exclusive months, that cannot be transferred, men's and women's roles and their relationship towards the child, is not equal. Men and women are expected to have different roles, both biologically and socially. There are deep-rooted values about motherhood and fatherhood and how a family should be constructed.

These values, probably, have their roots in the Swedish People's home¹¹, together with the changes that have been implemented to increase the equality, both between gender and classes. The propositions proceed from the fact that there are two parents available, the twoness norm, that want to take responsibility for the child and the family. I would also like to claim that the propositions rest on a heteronorm, even if the legislation today is (more) gender neutral. It is hard to change attitudes and the perceptions of the reality, even if there is a greater focus on different family constellations.

Except for the twoness and heteronorm, I would say that the most important condition, that is expressed in all four propositions, is to have an employment.

¹⁰ I do not put any value into this statement, since it may be the right decision for the majorities of families, but it is not always given, that the mother can, want or should stay at home for the first period.

¹¹ The Swedish term: Folkhemmet, has its roots in the Swedish Social democrats history and the expansion of the welfare state since 1930s.

This is closely connected to the dual breadwinner model, where both parents should provide for the family.

Since I believe these are the most central norms in the propositions, who is in favor of this legislation? Second, I would like to emphasize the working parents and their possibility to use the parental insurance to the full, since one basic principal for getting paid parental leave is to have an employment. This insurance also favors those families that consist of two parents, and where the propositions assume that both parents are available and willing to take responsibility for home and child care. In the propositions from the 1970s and 1990s, the heteronorm, with emphasis on a mother and a father, was more available than in the two recent propositions. Since the beginning of the 21st century, the parental insurance is gender neutral where focus is on parents, rather than mother and father¹².

So, what happens to those who do not fit into these norms? Here, I think of the unemployed, but also of immigrants who lack the knowledge and understanding of how the parental insurance is constructed and about the Swedish norms. I claim, as I have tried to demonstrate in this thesis, that Sweden has a different approach and culture concerning gender equality, motherhood, and fatherhood compared to other countries¹³. This could indicate that the parental insurance could be less available for those who do not have the same understanding and share the norms that are represented in the propositions. The parental insurance creates a discourse about what is possible and not, and towards which direction parents could (or should) move.

Since the Swedish parental leave is flexible and emphasizing an equal use and responsibility for children and home, it is still important to notice that there are different conditions and situations depending on the diversity of social, cultural, and economic groups in society. Some studies indicate that the structural conditions have changed for some groups, but that gender equality also has decreased for some (Bekkengen, 2002:170-171, Hirdman, 2003:191-194).

Since unequal structures are embedded in society we also have differences between groups, and not just between gender, but also between class and socioeconomic groups. First of all, we proceed from the man as our norm, which all of our institutions and organisations are built upon. Even though it is women's subordinated status that is pointed out as a structural problem, the propositions continue to act based on the male norm, and highlight men's rights and possibilities as a solution to become more equal. By highlighting men, and in the 21st century children, women's needs and positions could easily be overlooked. It is also crucial to continue to investigate how women (and men) with different social and economic conditions are able to use the parental leave more equal, and what consequences it has for their daily lives.

There are a lot of tensions within the propositions, and the most central one is the tension between parents flexibility and freedom of choice, and how much the

¹² Even if the two propositions from 00/01 and 13/14 are gender neutral, and use the term parents more frequently, the terms of mother and father, are also present, even if all families do not have both a mother and/or father.

¹³ Except for Norway and Iceland.

State should interfere to counteract unequal structures to reach desired governmental goals. Is it possible to both request and cherish the freedom of choice and flexibility, and at the same time introduce restrictions and recommendations about how parents should divide their parental leave? This is a very hard question to answer and I do not believe that there is any right answer, since each answer will depend on the context and what definitions and value we put into different concepts.

How can the parental insurance be rethought, and is it possible to notice if a new norm is establishing? Over the last 40 years norms have been created, reshaped, and established depending on the context and development in other sectors. Today, the right's of the child is the most important focus in the parental insurance, which is a large difference compared to the 1970s. Within this debate there are different solutions to how we should increase gender equality.

With the knowledge that I have gained about how the parental insurance has developed and changed depending on the context and on the legislation that has been implemented, I would like to claim that the parental insurance is an important norm creator. Other researchers and their studies also indicate that the parental insurance sets up standards about child care, use of parental leave, etc (Bekkengen, 2002:169-170, Persson 2014).

If the parental insurance sets up norms, then it is crucial that the legislation is including as many men and women as possible, and that the parental insurance assumptions and premisses are questioned and rethought.

Just as other researchers (Bekkengen, 2002:189-192, Duvander, 2013:45, Haas & Hwang, 2008:99-100, Klinth & Johansson, 2010:120-122,163-166, Persson 2014) have pointed out, I would like to highlight the importance of being careful about how we draw our conclusions about the parental insurance and gender equality. It is too easy to say that a more equal use of parental leave will increase the gender equality in society. I believe that we have to investigate gender equality based on many different perspectives, and have a legislation that is open and flexible. We also need to rethink our definitions, and whether or not the parental leave should be based on the assumption that a more equal use will increase gender equality, since this may not be the case.

6. Conclusion

In this final section I will submit the results and conclusions of my research questions and my analysis. Secondly, I will present a short summary of this thesis, and finally, I will raise a few questions, which I believe would be interesting to investigate further.

These are my research questions for this thesis:

- *How can we understand and explain the development of gender equality norms over time?*
- *To what extent have the Swedish gender equality norms developed and changed within the parental insurance over the last 40 years?*

6.1. Results

Which differences and similarities have been acknowledged in this thesis? What has the main focus of each proposition been? And which are the most substantial changes concerning gender and gender equality in the Swedish parental insurance between the 1970s until today.

An over all focus that is present in all four propositions from 1973 until today, is the parents being able to combine work with family. The parental insurance has also been justified as an act that should both increase the gender equality and solve the unequal labour market conditions between men and women.

Work, and to have an employment is the most central piece over the last 40 years, which also connects the propositions with each other. Since the 1970s, there has been a recommendation that men and women should divide the parental leave more equal, but it is the reasons to why it should be divided that have reshaped. At first, a more equal use was justified by men's and women's different and complementary roles, later women's rights was highlighted and needed to increase. In order to do that men had to take more responsibility for both home and child care, even if the responsibility still was a freedom of choice. Now, the main focus is on the rights of the child, and that it is the child who has the right to have two available parents. A formally equal divided parental leave is also justified by that it should decrease conflicts between the parents.

There are also two norms that have been expressed, both explicit and implicit in the propositions, and those are the twoness and heteronorm. The twoness norm is available in all propositions and the legislation assumes that a family consist of two parents. In the propositions from 1973 and 93/94, the parents are supposed to be a mother and a father, but since the 21st century the legislation is gender

neutral. But even if the formal legislation is gender neutral, that does not mean that there are no obstacles in the society. Norms about how a parent, and especially how a mother and father should be, are affecting how people decide to live their lives. Even if men and women have the formal responsibility to provide for the family and take care of home and children, there are still inequalities. Men are still portrayed as having a freedom of choice of how much parental leave they want to use, even though the legislation stresses both parents' responsibility. This time-lag between policy and practice indicates that men and women are still assumed to have different roles.

There are many different approaches towards the debate about gender equality and how the parental insurance should be divided. There are also various definitions and understandings about how gender equality should be understood, and how it could be increased.

Even if a change can be noticed by investigating four propositions over 40 years, it seems like this discussion will always be an issue for struggles of which values should be superior to others. Who should have the privilege to decide, who should decide how the parental leave should be divided, the parents or the State?

The parental insurance is norm creating. When new knowledges are gained, a new focus and new thoughts about how the intended goals should be fulfilled will become dominating. Maybe a new norm will be created, but it seems like the most central assumption, to have an employment, will remain as an important criteria for the parental leave. One thought that still needs to be rethought, is whether or not the definition of gender equality is the same now as it was when the parental insurance was legislated, in 1974.

6.2. Summery

In this thesis my aim was to investigate how gender equality norms have developed over the last 40 years in Sweden, and how can this development be understood, with focus on four propositions about the parental insurance.

To interrogate my research questions, I had my starting point in feminist methodology, with Carol Bacchi's method and her six questions in *What's the problem represented to be*, and feminist postmodern thoughts as my theoretical framework. Bacchi's method was used to identify four different key concepts, The State, Family: men, women and parenthood, Work, and lastly, Flexibility and freedom of choice. All of these concepts were present in all four propositions, and were put forward in year 73, 93/94, 00/01 and 13/14.

My main focus of Bacchi's method was to investigate, what is the problem representation, and are there assumptions that are taken-for-granted in the propositions. I also wanted to interrogate who was included, or not, in the identified representations, and what or who, the propositions were reproducing, or representing.

The feminist postmodern thoughts gave me the ability to investigate how different propositions and the proposals they suggested are bound by context, and

why some representations, or suggestions become dominant at one certain time. Just as Bacchi, the feminist postmodern thoughts focus on what is taken-for-granted, and how this could be rethought. Different discourses will create boundaries for how it is possible to think and act at different times.

My analysis was divided and discussed outside my four identified key concepts, where I narrated each concept's differences, similarities, and changes over time. As a closure for my analysis, I had a discussion about whether or not a more equal use of parental leave will increase the gender equality. In this part, I highlighted which norms I believe have been dominating in the propositions and how these have effected the gender equality. I also tried to answer Bacchi's six questions and raise the question about why gender equality is a hard subject to investigate. The understandings of gender are of great diversity, and the results we get will be depending on our understandings and definitions.

6.3. Future research

For further research, I believe it would be interesting to get deeper understanding whether or not the parental insurance actually leads to an increase gender equality. As discussed above, an increased gender equality should not be taken for granted, as a result of a more equal use of parental leave. But since gender equality is an argument of great importance, and a basic principal in the formation of the parental insurance policy, how could this policy be rethought?

If the parental insurance does not increase the gender equality at the labour market, or in the public and private sphere, which political actions need to be requested? It is important to interrogating what effects the changed parental insurance have had since the 1990s, and compare the effects and results with the more recent changes in the 21st century. Should more political actions be implemented in the parental insurance? Or are there other political areas that have to be rethought, that could affect the gender equality as well?

Finally, I believe it is crucial to discuss the definition(s) of gender equality further. Is it possible to continue to proceed from the categories of men and women, or do we have to change our definitions? I know that there are researches that include more categories than gender, but I believe that the diversity of understandings about gender equality have to be visible in legislation and political actions as well. What does it mean to be gender equal? And who should have the right to decide which values are the most important in this debate?

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