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Constructions of Gender Equality in Swedish Family Policy

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Abstract

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Exploring problem representations in the policy discourses on the parental leave insurance and cash-for-childcare (CFC) allowance in Swedish parliamentary debates, this study aims to look into different meanings and problematizations attached to the concept of gender equality in Swedish family policy. Comparing the framing of problematizations in these policies, the objective is to uncover underlying normative assumptions, silences and contradictions relating to the concept of gender equality. The analysis is inspired by the constructivist 'What's the Problem Represented to Be?' approach to policy analysis, which critically explores problem representations embedded within policy discourse. A gender systems approach and feminist conceptualizations of labor division form the theoretical underpinnings of the analysis, in order to provide a contextualized discussion of gender equality constructions in relation to the Swedish welfare state. The results reveal silences, contradictions and tensions between different problematizations. The parental leave discourse connects equal division of parental leave to children's rights to both parents, women's labor market participation and men's caregiving responsibilities, thus constructing gender equality as based on sameness, in terms of a type of dual-earner/dual-carer model. However, the different policy solutions that exist in order to promote equality in parenthood problematize this either as an issue of structure, or as an issue of agency, which results in each of the solutions failing to problematize the other side of this structure/agency dichotomy. In the policy discourse on the CFC allowance, the frames of children's well-being and parental choice are connected in order to legitimize the lack of problematizations on gender equality in the policy, which fails to address the constructions of gender equality promoted by the policy proposal. This construction arguably adheres to a weak form of breadwinner/caregiver model, since the normative assumption of employment at the same time functions as a contradiction to the reform. In conclusion, the frames of parental choice and children's well-being legitimize the contradictory gender equality construction in the CFC allowance, which promotes a diverging ideal family model.

Keywords: Gender Equality, Parental Leave, Cash-for-Childcare, Family Policy, Sweden

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1.Introduction

1.1 Introduction and Background to Research Area

The Swedish welfare system has long been considered a role model in terms of egalitarian values, including gender equality. A range of arguments speaking for the ‘women-friendliness’ or ‘gender equality-friendliness’ of the Nordic welfare model, and Sweden in particular, can be distinguished internationally, in the academic as well as the political sphere (Lister, 2009, p.242-244; Hernes, 1987; Sörensen and Bergqvist, 2002, pp.1-2). In recent decades, changing family structures and women’s employment have posed new challenges to post-industrial welfare states, and Sweden, which belongs to the social democratic welfare model, has responded to these challenges by actively working for a de-familialization of welfare burdens (Esping-Andersen, 1999, p.161).

Swedish family policies have developed over a long period of time and have gradually become more individualized and disconnected from the family, and are now a fundamental element of the welfare state, influencing the organization of work and family life for women as well as men (Lundqvist and Roman, 2010; Leira, 2002). The government goals on gender equality encompass the same rights and opportunities for men and women to shape their own lives, including equal division of power and influence, as well as "equal distribution of unpaid housework and provision of care" (Socialdepartementet¹, 2015). Gender equality is consequently regarded as institutionalized and part of the national identity in the Scandinavian welfare model (Lundqvist and Roman, 2010, p.65), and in Sweden, family policy is not just a means of providing support for the reconciliation of work and family life, but also a policy strategy that has a defined goal of promoting gender equality (Carlson, 2013, p.65).

Policies supporting work-family reconciliation, such as extensive parental leave and public childcare, can be said to have contributed to women's high labor market participation, and the shift from maternity leave to a gender-neutral parental leave policy in 1974 has been described as an institutional prerequisite in order to realize the goal of gender equality (Ahlberg, Roman and Duncan, 2008, p.84). The introduction of reserved parental leave months for each of the parents in 1995 and 2002, as well as a gender equality bonus in terms of tax credits for equal sharing of parental leave in 2008, have been additional measures

¹ Ministry of Health and Social Affairs

taken in order to promote equality in parenthood (Statens Offentliga Utredningar² - SOU, 2014:28, p.25). Fathers' low share of the total parental leave has resulted in recent suggestions for a third earmarked parental leave month being put forward by the current government (Departementsserien³ - Ds, 2015:8). A cash-for-childcare (CFC) allowance was introduced along with the gender equality bonus in 2008, with the rationale of increasing family choice in terms of the organization of childcare, and provide opportunities for parents to spend more time with their children. This heavily debated policy offers a non-taxable cash benefit for children who are not utilizing public childcare facilities full-time, which means that parents can utilize it to stay at home part-time or full-time, or continue to work full-time and arrange alternative care for the child (Tunberger and Sigle-Rushton, 2011, pp.227-228; Hiilamo and Kangas, 2009). While gendered divisions of labor are weaker than in many other countries, research shows that they still persist in the labor market as well as in the home (SOU, 2014:28, pp.9-12; Hassim, 2008, p.393), and it has been argued that the current extensive parental leave and childcare policies, coupled with a gender segregated labor market, are underpinning rather than weakening gender inequality in the private as well as the public sphere, since women, in a context of gendered labor market divisions, are the main users of parental leave and childcare allowances (Lister, 2009, pp.257-261; Evertsson and Duvander, 2011). Therefore, it is argued that these policies, which are presumed to promote gender equality, instead conceal the transformation and modernization of gender inequalities (Hassim, 2008, p.393; Rothstein, 2012, p.325), resulting in a "vicious circle in which policies and practices reinforce each other to undermine the very commitment to gender equality that frames those policies" (Lister, 2009, p.258).

Despite a family policy context in which gender equality goals have been explicitly emphasized since the 1960s (Ahlberg, Roman and Duncan, 2008, p.81), a discrepancy between the institutional development of gender equality in family policy, and gender equality in practice, is revealed, since these policies in reality have gendered outcomes (Leira, 2002; Lister, 2009; Ekberg, Eriksson and Friebel, 2013, pp.142-143). There also exist contradictions within the family policy area. The parental leave policy is promoted as actively working for a shared parental leave use, by reserving two of the months to each parent on a use-or-lose basis (Duvander and Johansson, 2012, pp.319-320). In contrast, the cash-for-childcare (CFC) allowance introduced in 2008 has been criticized as a 'women's trap' and for

² Official Government Commission Reports

³ Ministry Committee Publications

promoting traditional gender roles (Hiilamo and Kangas, 2006, p.470).

The contradiction between the 'gender equality-friendliness' and gender equality goals of the Swedish welfare state on the one hand, and the gendered outcomes of seemingly ambiguous family policies such as the parental leave policy and the cash-for-childcare allowance on the other, raise questions regarding the way gender equality is framed and represented in the family policy discourse, what underpins such framings, and how gender equality, rather than being a fixed concept, can be constructed and used in different, seemingly contradictory, policy proposals. While gender equality is used in order to promote a parental leave policy that is designed to challenge traditional gender roles, the same family policy context is also producing a cash-for-childcare scheme which, in the light of the current gendered labor market, arguably results in a reinforcement of unequal gendered divisions of labor. Comparing these seemingly contradictory policies can help uncover assumptions that are embedded within policy problematizations and the meanings attached to gender equality in such problem representations. Exploring the constraints, possibilities and underlying assumptions of such constructions, and the policy context in which they arise, can contribute to the understanding of the concept of gender equality in policy problematizations and solutions in Swedish family policy discourse.

1.2 Aim and Research Questions

In the light of current family policy contradictions in terms of the cash-for-childcare (CFC) allowance and reserved parental leave months, and considering that Sweden's family policy is not only in place to support the reconciliation of work and family life but also has an explicit goal of increasing gender equality, the aim of this study is to look at the Swedish family policy discourse on gender equality. The goal is to explore the problematizations and meanings attached to the concept of gender equality in two different Swedish family policies; the cash-for-childcare allowance and the parental leave insurance. This is done in order to analyze frames that emerge in the policies and the policy debates in Swedish Parliament, how the concept of gender equality is constructed and reflected in these frames, and the ideas behind which instruments that should be used to reach the goal of gender equality. Utilizing a social constructivist approach and feminist theoretical concepts, the purpose of looking into this is to contribute to the debate on the possibilities and limitations of the ways in which gender equality is constructed in Swedish parliamentary debates on family policy, and how these policy frames can promote or impede the reshaping of gender roles and the division of paid and unpaid labor.

The research questions are: (1) *In what ways is the concept of gender equality constructed and represented in Swedish parliamentary debates and policy documents on parental leave insurance and the cash-for-childcare allowance?* (2) *What limitations and silences in relation to gender equality arise with such framings?*

Choosing to focus on the Swedish welfare state in general, and the parental leave policy and cash-for-childcare policies in particular, is due to several reasons. Sweden has emphasized gender equality since the 1960s (Roman, Ahlberg and Duncan, 2008, p.81), and was the first country in the world to introduce a gender-neutral parental leave in 1974, and the policy has since then been regarded as central to the promotion of gender equality in terms of "equal opportunities, rights and responsibilities to become economically independent and to care for children" (Haas and Hwang, 2008, p.86). Despite an explicit goal of gender equality in family policy, and being referred to as a role model in terms of gender equality-friendly policies, the Swedish labor market is characterized by vertical as well as horizontal gender segregation, and women perform more of the unpaid work in the home (Leira, 2002, p.83; Hassim and Razavi, 2006, p.10). Focusing on the area of family policy, in which the private and public spheres of unpaid and paid work are interconnected, allows for an exploration of how such policies can reproduce or transform gendered labor divisions in Sweden. The parental leave insurance and the cash-for-childcare allowance illustrate the ambiguities that can arise in such policy settings, and help to uncover contradictions and constraints implied in constructions of gender equality embedded within Swedish family policy.

1.3 Delimitations

The focus of this study is on problematizations and underlying assumptions in Swedish family policy debates and constructions of gender equality that emerge in such problematizations. The empirical material used consists of policy documents and protocols from parliamentary debates, which means that the analysis is limited to the focus in policy debates and the political discussion on family policies. Consequently, the scope of this study is not to analyze different types of actors in the debates, nor the effects of the policies as such, which has been done in numerous ways in a range of previous studies, although such effects are to a certain extent discussed in the background, context and analysis sections, in order to situate the study within the context of the Swedish welfare state and family policy. Further, this thesis does not claim to assess these constructions of gender equality as more or less 'correct', but to explore

the ways in which these contextual meanings of gender equality influence frames in the policy debate, and the limitations and possibilities that arise with such meanings.

1.4 Disposition

This study explores the framing of the concept of gender equality in parliamentary debates and government bills related to two aspects of Swedish family policy; the parental leave insurance, including the gender equality bonus, and the cash-for-childcare (CFC) allowance. A brief outline of the gender equality goals in Swedish family policies, a policy overview of the development of the parental leave insurance and the cash-for-childcare allowance, as well as a section on previous studies, provide a contextual background to current policy debates and help to situate the study in a broader setting. After the introductory chapter, a discussion on the theoretical underpinnings and concepts follows, which includes the theoretical premises of the methodology, as well as sociological feminist approaches to gender roles and the gender division of labor. These theoretical approaches are chosen in order to facilitate the analysis of different problematizations of gender equality and the division of labor that underpin such various constructions. The following section presents the methodological approach used in this study, Bacchi's (1999, 2009a) 'What's the Problem Represented to Be?' (WPR) framework, as well as practical methodological considerations, including the empirical material consisting of government bills and protocols from parliamentary debates related to these policies. The analysis chapter moves from a descriptive to an analytical level in that it first presents the different frames identified in the empirical material, divided into one section on the parental leave insurance and another on the cash-for-childcare allowance. These highlight the frames or themes that provide the basis of the analytical discussion. Each of these two more descriptive sections is followed by an analytical discussion in which the dominant problematizations and assumptions are explored, using selected questions from the WPR approach. The concluding discussions compare the policy problematizations and constructions of gender equality highlighted in the parental leave and cash-for-childcare policy, in terms of silences and contradictions in the Swedish family policy context. Lastly, a concluding paragraph will summarize and conclude the results of the analysis, as well as place the study in a broader context of the Swedish welfare state.

1.5 Swedish Family Policy and the Gender Equality Goal

Looking at the ways in which welfare state research discusses Swedish family policy helps to situate and contextualize the analysis of this study, as these policies are not isolated but part of a wider welfare structure that has been formed through certain historical, social and economic processes. This study is situated in the context of the Swedish welfare state, which, according to Esping-Andersen's (1990) welfare typology, can be classified as a social democratic welfare regime, characterized by universalism, de-commodification and social equality. It has also been argued that social democratic welfare states emphasize de-familialization, which entails social policies aimed at maximizing the level of individuals', mainly women's, economic independence by reducing family responsibilities that restrict such independence (Esping-Andersen 1999, p.45). Further, the Swedish welfare state has been described as a gender-equality friendly welfare state (Sörensen and Bergqvist, 2002) or women-friendly welfare state (Hernes, 1987), for attempting to transform gendered welfare systems. The Nordic welfare model is distinguished by its focus on women's labor market participation, often signified as a dual-breadwinner model, both as a measure in order to realize gender equality, but also as a strategy for promoting and sustaining economic growth (Lundqvist, 2011, p.2; Kvist and Peterson, 2010, p.188). Current family policies have developed over an extensive period, and can be traced back to the early decades of the twentieth century. As argued by Lundqvist (2011, p.2), the politicization of the family through the idea of "the gender-neutral family" has to different extents influenced Swedish family policy since the 1930s, when family policies attempted to increase birth rates and decrease inequalities in society through the provision of maternity support, child welfare facilities, and a universal child allowance. These reforms, and the discourses from which they emanated, have formed the foundation of later family policy discourses emerging in the 1960s and onwards, emphasizing women's participation in the labor market as central to gender equality.

Looking at the institutional development and context in which Swedish family policies have emerged shows that the Swedish welfare state has emphasized egalitarianism, solidarity and universalism all through the twentieth century, a focus that has developed from concerning mostly class-based issues to include and highlight gender equality (Lister, 2009, pp.246-248; Roman, 2008, p.104; Ahlberg, Roman and Duncan, 2008, p.82). Consequently, social equality has constituted a central part of the development of the Swedish welfare state, and the economic and social modernization of Swedish society entailed cooperation between forces of capital, labor and politics. This modernization process resulted in a goal of reducing social inequalities through full employment, redistribution policies, and

family reforms, placing political focus on family policy, gender equality and the private sphere of the family, generating “a complex, and sometimes contradictory and paradoxical, interplay between gender equality, social policy reforms and labour market regulation” (Lundqvist, 2011, p.3). Increasing labor shortages and the notion of female employment were central to the Swedish gender equality discourse emerging during the 1940-1960s (Lundqvist, 2011, pp.1-2; Roman, 2009, p.103) and when male workers were not enough to fill the labor demand, a growing need for women to enter the labor force along with feminist advocacy facilitated women's access to the labor market, resulting in a focus on gender equality in the labor market during the latter half of the century (Borchorst and Siim, 2008, pp.207-208; Lundqvist and Roman, 2010, p.73; Haas, 1992).

The discourse on gender equality and the family policies emerging during the 1940s-1960s was rather contradictory as it focused on "women's two roles" and recognized similarities as well as differences in terms of gender roles. This resulted in ambivalent policies supporting both housewives and working women (Lundqvist, 2009, p.92; Roman, 2009, p.104). Consequently, the norm of the male breadwinner model remained dominant until the 1960s, when women were needed in the labor market and gender roles and equal opportunities for men and women were emphasized in the 'sex role debate' that was heavily influenced by social science research and became central in family policy discourse (Lundqvist, 2009, pp.92-93). This resulted in various government commissions concerning family and gender that influenced legislation and policy. This legislation was directed at individual rights and responsibilities rather than the family unit, which led to a weakening of the traditional family model that was replaced by a vision of a family of autonomous individuals (Ahlberg, Roman and Duncan, 2008, p.83). Following these sex role debates that transformed the perception of gender roles, gender neutral reforms were implemented in family policy, as a step towards an egalitarian society free of gender discrimination (Lundqvist, 2009, pp.94-95). The influence of researchers, scientific studies and commissions on social policy discourses signifies the interconnectedness of science and policy that is unique to the Swedish welfare state (Lundqvist, 2011, p.16). Historically, commissions have had an institutional role in knowledge production and consensus building, and are still used when developing government bills (Lundqvist and Roman, 2010, pp.66-67). The term for gender equality, '*jämställdhet*', gradually replaced 'women's issues' from the early 1960s and on, and was intended to highlight the relational aspects of the concept, as well as prevent a discussion based on biological underpinnings (Magnusson, 2000, pp.78-79).

Thus, the ambivalence of family policy discourse initially constructed the

reconciliation of work and family life as a women's issue, a discourse that later on changed to focus on gender neutrality, increasingly framing issues of work-family balance as a concern for men as well as women. This emphasis has to some extent shifted again in recent decades to highlight men's rights and responsibilities to care (Leira, 2002, p.88; Lundqvist, 2011, p.134). The changing discourse on fathers and masculinities is visible in the way fatherhood and paternity leave have been framed in Swedish paternity leave campaigns since the 1970s, which have come to emphasize the positive effects of shared parental leave for men as well as women (Klinth, 2008; p.34). When the parental leave insurance replaced the previous maternity leave scheme in 1974, this was the first parental leave policy in the world that entitled men as well as women to parental leave benefits (Duvander, Lappegård and Andersson, 2010, p.46). Haas (1992, p.19) argues that this strategy of equal parenthood was a result of mainly three concerns: "worry about a low birth rate, a need to encourage women's employment, and a desire to liberate men from gender stereotypes". Since then, parental leave reserved for each parent has been implemented in order to encourage fathers' responsibilities as well as rights to caretaking, thus emphasizing the private family sphere as an important policy objective, attempting to address the gendered labor division of childcare through the 'familizing' of fathers (Leira, 2002, p.85). The goal of gender equality in parental leave is to achieve gender equality in unpaid household and care work and a less segregated position for women in the labor market (Socialdepartementet, 2015; Duvander and Johansson, 2012, p.320).

2. Policy Overview: The Parental Leave Insurance and the Cash-for-Childcare Allowance

Since the introduction of the parental leave insurance in 1974, which replaced the previous maternity leave policy, the parental leave system has gone through various reforms, including several extensions of the leave period and the introduction of leave months earmarked for each of the parents, of which the first month was put in place in 1995, and a second month was added in 2002 (SOU, 2014:28, pp.24-25; Duvander, Lappegård and Andersson, 2010, pp.46-47; Carlson, 2013, pp.64-65). In 2008, a gender equality bonus was introduced, with the aim of raising economic incentives to share the parental leave equally, by partly decreasing the effects of income differences between parents (SOU, 2014:28, p.25). The bonus was designed as a tool for promoting women's labor market participation and men's caring responsibilities, connecting it to parents' use of leave days, which means that the more

equal the sharing is, the higher the bonus will be (Lundqvist, 2011, p.122). These reforms have been implemented in line with the underlying goal of changing the gendered division of labor in the private sphere by promoting the sharing of care and earning responsibilities, in order to facilitate “gender equality in the division of parenthood” (Duvander and Johansson, 2012, p.319). The debate on the father's role in childcare has been part of the parental leave discourse since the introduction of the system in 1974 (Socialförsäkringsrapport⁴, 2011:13, p.11).

The current parental benefit scheme is rather generous as well as flexible compared to systems in many other countries (SOU, 2014:28, p.23). It allows parents to stay at home to take care of their child for up to 480 days per child, 240 days per parent, of which 60 of those 240 days cannot be transferred to the other parent and are forfeited if not used, while the remaining days can be shared according to the parents' wishes. For 390 of the total 480 days, the compensation level is based on income, usually about 80 percent of previous income up to a maximum amount, and for the remaining 90 days there is a minimum flat rate compensation level (Försäkringskassan⁵, 2015, p.19; SOU, 2014:28, p.26; Duvander, Lappgård and Andersson, 2010, p.47). These benefits are often complemented by benefits received from the employer (Duvander and Johansson, 2012, p.321). The gender equality bonus makes it possible for parents to receive an additional 100 SEK for every day that the parent who has used the least amount of leave days stays at home, after the 60 reserved days have been used (Försäkringskassan, 2015, p.10).

Despite actively promoting equal sharing of parental leave, and while fathers' leave has increased since the introduction of the parental leave policy in 1974, fathers only take around 25% of the available parental leave, which means that women still take on most of the childcare (Almqvist and Duvander, 2014, p.19; Carlson, 2013, p.75). In order to further promote fathers' take-up of leave, suggestions to introduce a third earmarked month were made in 2015 (Ds, 2015:8). Studies on the effects of the two current reserved leave months suggest that there was a considerable increase in fathers' take-up after the introduction of these reforms (Socialförsäkringsrapport, 2011:13, p.5), but with the implementation of the second reserved month in 2002, an additional month was added to the leave length, which in practice meant that the increase in one parent's take-up did not have to result in a decrease in the leave length of other parent (Duvander and Johansson, 2012, p.321). The first reserved

⁴ Social Insurance Report

⁵ Social Insurance Agency

month had the most clear effect on fathers' take-up, while the second reserved month has had a greater effect than the gender equality bonus, although direct comparisons are difficult considering that the reforms have different types of incentives (ibid., p.328).

The effects of the gender equality bonus are not as clear. Several evaluations of the gender equality bonus, conducted between 2010 and 2012, concluded that it had little effect on the take-up of parental leave, and that the policy design was too complicated, which resulted in a reform of the policy in 2012. The bonus is now paid out automatically without the parents having to apply for it, yet a 2013 study shows that parents still lack sufficient information in order to fully take advantage of the bonus (Socialförsäkringsrapport, 2014:1, p.5). The reserved parental leave as well as the gender equality bonus are portrayed as gender neutral, yet, as pointed out by Duvander and Johansson, (2012, p.323), this does not mean that the policies cannot result in a gendered impact. Further, these reforms have been introduced together with other reforms, which might have an impact on the effectiveness of the reforms. This has resulted in paradoxes within the family policy context, such as the cash-for-childcare (CFC) allowance initially being introduced along with the first reserved parental leave month in 1995, but later abolished. It was then reintroduced together with the gender equality bonus in 2008, as part of a reform package for 'increased parental choice' (Lundqvist, 2011, pp.104,123-124).

The current CFC allowance, implemented in 2008, is slightly different from the 1995 policy. It is not a national policy but has instead been delegated to the municipalities, which have the option to implement, finance and manage the scheme within certain limits. It allows parents to receive an allowance for children between the ages of 1-3 (Lundqvist, 2011, p.124). The full amount, which is currently 3000SEK per month and child, can only be received after the parental leave benefits have been exhausted, if the child does not attend publicly funded pre-school, and cannot be combined with other benefits, such as unemployment benefits (Tunberger and Sigle-Rushton, 2001, pp.227-228).

The purpose of the policy is to give parents a possibility to spend more time with their small children, but if the childcare is arranged in another way, the parent can work part-time or full-time and still receive the CFC allowance (Nyberg, 2010, pp.67-69; Tunberger and Sigle-Rushton, 2011, pp.227-228). The CFC scheme has been much debated as a policy that, although it is gender-neutral, has gendered implications (Nyberg, 2010, p.82). Studies on similar policies in other countries suggest that it is mainly used by mothers, and often exacerbate labor market disparities among low-income groups, as it is mainly women with a weak labor market connection that use the benefit (Tunberger and Sigle-Rushton, 2011,

p.228; Earles, 2011, p.187). Consequently, it has been argued that the implementation of the CFC scheme contradicted the 'work strategy', encouraging increased employment for both men and women, especially for women with children, that was simultaneously promoted by the government at this time (Lundqvist, 2011, pp.123-127; Earles, 2011, p.187). Since it is mainly women that tend to use the allowance, it can be argued to reinforce traditional gender roles and increase economic dependence on the working spouse (Earles, 2011, pp.187-188), and if it is used to pay for private care in the home it might result in "a market for low-paid jobs, primarily taken by women and which attach a low value to care work" (Tunberger and Sigle-Rushton, 2011, p.228). Consequently, this type of policy can result in a specialization of labor division, and increase inequality not only between women and men, but also among women (Nyberg, 2010, p.82).

Thus, the emphasis on fathers' involvement in childcare and use of parental leave have been central to family policy for decades, yet it can be argued that the introduction of the CFC allowance diverges from this emphasis, reflecting how contradictions and ambivalent policies can arise in a certain policy area. These contradictions in current family policy highlight the importance of this study; exploring if, and how, the problematizations and assumptions of gender equality differ in these policy discourses.

3. Previous Research

There is a range of studies that have been conducted on gender equality and Swedish family policy, as well as the 'gender equality-friendliness' of the Swedish welfare state, focusing on different aspects and outcomes related to such policies and goals. Consequently, the concept of gender equality has been approached from different angles in a variety of studies. Considering the extensive amount of different types of research that has been conducted within this area, this section will focus on pointing out studies that are connected to the specific research topic of this thesis, as well as studies that will help position this study within a context of existing literature. From a sociological and social policy perspective, much previous research on Swedish family policy and its gender equality goals has been focusing on the discrepancy between these gender equality goals and the gendered effects of the family policies in place, as well as on the development of gender equality goals within the area of family policy. Therefore, this study aims to focus on the constructions of gender equality that underpin the policies that produce such gendered outcomes, in order to further add to the knowledge of the ways in which gender equality is conceptualized in the family policy

discourse, as a step towards better understanding the policies behind this discrepancy between policy and practice.

As previously mentioned, the Swedish welfare state, categorized as a social-democratic welfare regime type (Esping-Andersen, 1990), is often regarded as connected to gender equality-friendly welfare policies. Comparing gender policy logics across welfare state regimes, Sainsbury (1999, pp.259-261) concludes that the gender policy regime in Sweden and the other Scandinavian welfare states can be distinguished from most other countries, through the vision of a dual earner-carer regime and attempts to change the traditional gender division of labor. This type of gender policy regime, it is argued, has underlying logics that correspond to the rationale of the social democratic welfare regime, such as de-commodification and de-familialization as a result of citizenship-based, individualized social rights. Sainsbury's (1999) conclusion corresponds to other research on the development of family policies, which often highlights the intertwined processes of individualization and focus on gender role transformation that emerged during the 1960s. Analyzing Swedish family politics during the twentieth century, Lundqvist and Roman (2008) argue that family policies, strongly influenced by social science research, have played a major role in the development of this gender equality-friendly welfare state, and that from the second half of the twentieth century, family policy reforms have been directed at individuals rather than families. These decades also cemented the norm of women as workers (*ibid.*, p.225). The notion of the individualized members of family as a central aspect of Swedish family policy has been explored further in Roman, Ahlberg and Duncan's (2008) study, which highlights the discrepancy between family policy rhetoric and practice, by arguing that while policies have envisioned an individualized and democratic family unit since the 1970s, these have not been fully translated into practice. Although the notion of gender equality has become dominant and women engage more in paid work while men perform more unpaid work, gendered divisions of labor still remain, and men and women have different negotiating power when it comes to the shaping of family life. It is argued that these conclusions are important for further sociological research on the family unit, as it is revealed that even in the gender equality-friendly and egalitarian Swedish welfare state, gendered societal structures still persist (*ibid.*, p.94).

Comparing the Swedish welfare state to other countries, it often stands out as gender-equality friendly (see Ray, Gornick and Schmitt, 2010; Hook, 2010; Anxo, et al., 2011). Yet, as concluded by Ciccia and Verloo (2012, p.524), current parental leave policies in many European countries still adhere to the male breadwinner ideal, and even in the Nordic

countries, policies encouraging fathers' involvement in caregiving can at best be described as a limited universal caregiver norm. Consequently, while previous research exploring Swedish family policy from a gender equality perspective represents Sweden as a positive example of a society that is attempting to move away from a traditional gender division of labor, these studies at the same time highlight the issues that remain, and the existing divergence between policy goals and gendered outcomes.

In terms of the political discourse and party-political rhetoric on gender equality in the Swedish context, Magnusson's (2000) study suggests that gender equality in terms of the equal worth of all humans, grounded in liberal-humanist rhetoric, can be distinguished within all the political parties in parliament at the time. Thus, gender equality has, after being part of the political debate since the 1960s, "achieved a general political-rhetorical status as a goal that practically everybody favours" (*ibid.*, p.78). However, while no political party would consider being against gender equality as a politically advantageous standpoint, divergences arise when specific and practical aspects are discussed. Such "practical-political versions" of gender equality are often fuzzy and lack clarification, which result in a discourse of, generally uncontested, discrepancies and inconsistencies (*ibid.*, p.90). Similarly, both Lundqvist's (2009) and Roman's (2009) studies on the history of Swedish family policy and gender equality discourse conclude that this development has been characterized by social science-driven discursive shifts, as well as contradictory and ambivalent policies and discourses.

The introduction of a cash-for-childcare (CFC) allowance in Swedish family policy has been highly debated and in sociological and social policy research, this reform has been regarded as a divergence from the dominant family policy discourse in Sweden. Exploring continuity in hegemonic political discourses, and how inertia and path dependency occur as a result of such discourses, Hiilamo and Kangas (2009) look at the political framing of cash-for-childcare policies in Sweden and Finland. While the same dominant frames were found in both countries, the use and interpretation of these frames differed greatly. In the Finnish political debate, cash-for-childcare was represented as something positive in terms of family choice and valuing care work in the home, while the Swedish debate centered around gender equality, portraying the policy as a women's trap (*ibid.*, p.470). This points to the importance of the welfare and policy context in which policies are implemented. As pointed out in a study by Ellingsaeter (2014, pp.570-572), policies aimed at promoting an earner-carer society are not static, and reforms continue to be contested, unstable and ambivalent; the reserved parental leave supports dual earning-caring, while the cash-for-childcare allowance

weakens this model. Thus, it is argued, Swedish family policy represents both policy stability, in terms of the generous parental leave insurance and childcare services, as well as policy instability, in the form of reserved parental leave and the CFC allowance, which represent equal parenthood versus parental choice. Leira (1998), similarly concludes that these two family policy reforms represent diverging care arrangements that support different labor divisions, and that highlighting the care rights of fathers through reserved parental leave is a new type of family policy intervening in the division of paid and unpaid work. Yet, as argued in a later study (Leira, 2002, p.88), the gendered use of parental leave and the diverging family policies representing equal parenthood on the one hand and parental choice on the other, result in gendered outcomes in labor division in the labor market and in the home.

Looking at changes in Swedish family policy during the twenty-first century, Lundqvist (2011, pp.107-128) concludes that certain paradoxes emerged in family policy when the centre-right alliance came to power in 2006; while there was an acknowledgment of structural gender inequality which necessitated continued reforms in terms of family policy and gender equality policy, the idea of freedom of choice was simultaneously promoted, which entails less governmental intervention in the family sphere. Further, the introduction of the cash-for-childcare allowance contradicted the goal of employment for both parents (*ibid.*, p.124). As argued by Ferrarini and Duvander (2010), developments in family policy after the government change in 2006 have resulted in the Swedish earner-carer model being at a crossroads, as such developments may result in long-term changes and increased differentiation. It is suggested that such changes may include growing intersectional disparity between different gender, class and ethnic groups, considering that the CFC allowance provides an alternative most likely used by women, of which many come from low-income groups. Thus, there is a risk of polarization where gender equality increases in some groups but decreases in other. With the changes made in recent decades, family policy development, which has seen a long-standing promotion of an earner-carer model, is now becoming more mixed as parental choice is increasingly being promoted on behalf of men's care rights and responsibilities.

Consequently, existing research on Swedish family policy and gender equality suggests that the development of family policy has been important in terms of establishing the Swedish welfare state and its gender equality-friendly characteristics, yet there is divergence between different policies, and a discrepancy between policy and practice, which highlights ambiguities and contradictions within this policy area. Considering the strong connection between gender equality and family policy in the Swedish welfare

discourse since the 1960s, and Magnusson's (2000) conclusions suggesting that while there is political consensus concerning the concept of gender equality as a general goal, the practical manifestations of the concept are often vague and contradictory, this study aims to contribute to the knowledge on constructions of gender equality within the family policy discourse. Further, by comparing the discourse on parental leave, which has an explicit gender equality goal, and the CFC allowance, which is criticized for promoting traditional gender roles, the study explores how gender equality can have different and even contradicting meanings and uses in a certain policy context.

4. Theory and Concepts

In order to analyze the problematizations of gender inequality in the policy debates, two theoretical approaches will be used. Bacchi's (1999; 2009) 'What's the Problem Represented to Be?' approach provides theoretical as well as methodological tools to explore problematizations and underlying assumptions embedded in the policies, and to expose contradictions and silences in the discourse. Feminist welfare state approaches to divisions of labor and gender roles and a gender systems approach (Crompton, 1999), help to situate these problematizations in a welfare context by facilitating the analysis of gender relations and gender divisions of labor. These complementing theoretical perspectives are chosen in order to connect the analysis of gender constructions to feminist conceptualization of gender and the role of the Swedish welfare state in the construction and reconstruction of gender relations.

4.1 Gender Equality as a Contested Concept

Focusing on the current dominant frames that occur repeatedly in the Swedish family policy discourse, this study aims to explore if and how the concept of gender equality takes on different meanings and problem representations in the parliamentary debates and government bills. Further, the purpose is to discuss if and how these constructions affect the ways in which the different family policies can promote gender equality, through implicit or explicit assumptions of divisions of labor embedded in the policy discourse. In order to explore such constructions and framings, the study is inspired by Bacchi's (1999; 2009a) constructionist '*What's the Problem Represented to Be?*' (WPR) approach, based on the premises that policy issues are constructed through discourses, as policy responses implicitly or explicitly imply 'solutions' to 'problems'. This approach has inspired and been developed further by researchers

such as Lombardo, Meier and Verloo (2009), Verloo (2007) and Kvist and Peterson (2010). The concept of gender equality has had a central role in Swedish family policy for a long period of time, and has to varying degrees influenced reforms and public debates concerning childcare and divisions of labor. However, as argued by Lundqvist (2011, pp.129-136), the development of family policy and its focus on gender equality has not been clear-cut, but characterized by paradoxes and contradictions. The varying representations and meanings attached to gender equality are shaped by different contextual aspects, such as economic, political and social processes, making it a concept that can be contested and interpreted differently depending on the context and actor. Thus, the policies and measures implemented in order to achieve gender equality can be regarded as "specific ways of labelling gender equality in a particular moment", labels which are constantly challenged and modified (Lombardo, Meier and Verloo, 2009, p.7).

Thus, this problematization of the concept of gender equality is based on the presumption that gender equality "is not a state of affairs nor a list of entitlements; rather it is a discourse, a framework of meaning, filled with complexities and ambiguities" (Bacchi, 2009b, p.304), and consequently, there are various representations of 'gender inequality issues' as well as visions of gender equality in policies (Verloo, 2007, p.22). Looking at how such constructions are produced reveals how certain meanings of gender equality are in focus while other meanings are disregarded, depending on the context (Bacchi, 1999, p.7). The possibilities, limits and subjectivities produced thus vary with different gender equality constructions, contextualized by policies and practices in different countries (Magnusson, Rönnblom and Silius, 2008, pp.7-8). Consequently, it is problem representations that are in focus, and exploring problematizations and solutions to gender inequality issues can facilitate the uncovering and analysis of competing and contradictory problematizations (Bacchi, 2009a, p.4). This is also useful when looking at what is left unproblematized in a policy debate (Bacchi, 1999, p.12). These theoretical underpinnings facilitate the uncovering of possible contradictory conceptualizations of gender equality in the parental leave insurance and the cash-for-childcare allowance, and allows for an analysis of silences and constraints that are embedded in these policies.

4.2 Feminist Conceptualizations of Gender Divisions of Labor

Considering the complexity of family policy, which affects both the 'private' sphere of the family and the 'public' sphere of the labor market and society, and to some extent connects these two areas into one policy context, the area of family policy provides an interesting case

of how gender divisions of labor and gender roles are implicitly or explicitly conveyed through such policies, and the main assumptions embedded within the policy discourse. Consequently, looking at gender equality in parenthood through a feminist theoretical viewpoint can facilitate an analysis that conceptualizes the types of family or labor division models that are produced and reproduced by policy problematizations and solutions, and the dominant assumptions as well as silences that are part of such problematizations.

With the transformations seen both in a shifting gender balance in labor market and employment, and diversifying family models, the Swedish as well as other welfare states have increasingly been restructured and faced with the challenges of reconciling work and family (Leira, 2002, p.81; Hobson, Lewis and Siim, 2002, p.5). This process has been mirrored in a growing focus on gender and feminist concepts in sociological, welfare state, and social policy research during the second half of the twentieth century. This focus includes a debate on whether women's employment or women's recognition as caregivers should be emphasized, but also what types of family models or division of labor that are conveyed through these differing viewpoints (Ray, Gornick and Schmitt, 2010, pp.196-198). These conflicting conceptualizations of gender equality are normatively different as one entails women's social, economic and political inclusion on the basis of 'sameness' or equality with men, while the other side of the debate argue for this inclusion on the premises of women's difference from men, by taking such differences into account when designing welfare policies (Crompton, 1999, p.4). Changing gender roles and employment patterns have also resulted in a growing feminist focus on the social organization of care and the division of paid and unpaid labor, as childcare has increasingly shifted from the private to the public sphere, becoming a responsibility shared by the family and the state/market (Ciccia and Verloo, 2012, p.509). Consequently, feminist research has not only explored existing welfare responses to changing family models (Hook, 2010, p.1486), but also conceptualized visions of gender equal breadwinning/caregiving models. Fraser (1994) has aimed to move beyond the sameness/equality versus difference debate by arguing for gender equity through the conceptual model of universal caregiving, in which breadwinning and caregiving are combined by both women and men. These ideal types of labor division have been further developed by scholars such as Crompton (1999), Gornick and Meyers (2005; 2008) and Pfau-Effinger (1999).

The weakening of the traditional gender contract signifies the decline of the male breadwinner model, closely connected to the agreement between labor and capital that has been a central constituent of the modern welfare state for much of the twentieth century

(Hobson, Lewis and Siim, 2002, p.4). This contract between labor and capital entailed a gender contract between the male economic provider and the female caregiver (Leira, 2002, p.81; Fraser, 1994, pp.591-592). Thus, there is a set of gendered assumptions about labor division underpinning the male breadwinner model, which places men in the role of earner and provider and women in the role of carer, resulting in a dependent relationship in which the woman is provided for, and dependent on, the man. Such a family model is based on the premises of full male employment and solid family structures (Hobson, Lewis and Siim, 2002, pp.4-5). While this type of family model has varied in its prevalence across welfare states during the twentieth century, it has never existed in its ideal form (Millar, 1999, p.28; Lewis, 2001, p.153). It did, however, prevail as "the normative picture of a proper family" (Fraser, 1994, p.591). Throughout the twentieth century, the Swedish welfare state has fluctuated between different family ideals; the male breadwinner ideal replaced the 'multiple' or dual breadwinner model in a time of increasing industrialization, but was contradicted by a simultaneous gender egalitarianism and paradoxical discourses on gender equality and difference (Lundqvist, 2009, pp.87-95). The male breadwinner ideal was promoted only for a rather short period and was thereafter replaced by a dual-earner model (Ravn, 2009, p.75), and the policy discourse shifted focus from women to both women and men, resulting in an emphasis on gender-neutrality in family policy (Lundqvist, 2009, p.96). Consequently, policy paradoxes and contradictions in discourse are not recent occurrences, but have existed throughout the emergence and development of modern family policy and visions of gender equality.

4.3 Gender Systems Approach

As argued by Leira (1998, pp.362-363; 2002, p.84), the current contradictions in Swedish family policy promote two different labor division models, as the cash-for-childcare policy in practice facilitates a male breadwinner/female caregiver model while the reserved parental leave, the so called 'daddy quota', encourages fathers' caregiving rights and responsibilities. Consequently, parental leave has the potential to impact not only employment, but also unpaid housework, by encouraging processes of "familialization" and "defamilization" (Leira, 2002, p.85). Considering the goal of gender equality that is central to family policy in the light of current policy contradictions, the analysis of problematizations and solutions of gender inequality issues can facilitate a better understanding of the divisions of labor that are promoted in this policy discourse. This study will use Crompton's (1999) gender systems approach in order to connect the discussion on problematizations and underlying assumptions

to the conceptual models of divisions of labor.

Gender systems approaches developed by several feminist sociological and social policy researchers, including Crompton (1999), Pfau-Effinger (1999) and Ellingsaeter (1999), can facilitate an analysis of the constructed gender relations as well as the gendered division of labor embedded in Swedish family policies. Gender systems approaches avoid economic determinism and gender essentialism by recognizing the structural multidimensionality of gender relations and the diverse sources of such relations and by regarding gender relations as "*socially constructed*" (Crompton, 1999, p.204). Crompton (1999, pp.201-207) provides a feminist conceptual approach to labor divisions by placing different types of earner/carer arrangements on a continuum. This continuum spans from the traditional gender contract of the male breadwinner/female caregiver model to a vision of a dual-earner/dual-caregiver society, in which caring, earning and gender equality are emphasized. This continuum framework also helps in conceptualizing that there are several different alternatives to the male breadwinner model. Moving from the male breadwinner/female caregiver model at the one end of the continuum, to a dual-earner/female part-time model describes an earner/carer arrangement common in many industrialized countries; women combine part-time employment with a primary responsibility for caregiving. The third and fourth models on the continuum represent the dual-earner/state-carer and the dual-earner/marketized-carer societies, which respond to women's employment through state provided or marketized domestic care, and at the right end of the continuum is the dual-earner/dual-carer model, which entails a transformation of not only gender roles but also the current norm of 'full-time' employment. The importance of gender cultures becomes evident when looking at gender equality regimes from this perspective; while both the Scandinavian welfare states and the former socialist Eastern European welfare states can be categorized as forms of dual-earner/state-carer models, feminist influence and a vision of a dual-earner/dual-carer society have been greater in the Scandinavian states, and these states are consequently "associated with greater gender equality" (Crompton, 1999, p.206).

Rather than broadening explanatory concepts in an attempt to find a theory encompassing all possible situations, Crompton (1999, p.7,213) argues for a pluralistic approach not only to understanding gender, but also in terms of sociological theories used when analyzing gender, an approach which incorporates social structures and constraints as well as individual agency, to some extent inspired by T.H. Marshall's discussions on structures and the individual. Such theoretical pluralism also allows for the acknowledgement of the multiple alternatives that arise from the weakening of the male breadwinner ideal, as

there is a range of possible ways of organizing caregiving and breadwinning, of which some are more likely to result in gender and societal equality than others. A state supported form of a dual-earner/dual-carer model is the model of the division of labor most associated with gender equality and societal equality in the gender systems approach.

5. Methodological Framework

5.1 'What's the Problem Represented to Be?'

In order to explore the ways in which the problematizations of gender inequality and visions of gender equality are used and framed in Swedish family policy, the methodological framework applied in this study takes the form of a document analysis, in which the analysis of the empirical material is inspired by Bacchi's (1999; 2009a) 'What's the Problem Represented to Be?' (WPR) approach. The WPR approach presumes that policy discourse constructs problems, and provides tools to critically look into the implied problematizations underpinning problem solutions presented in policy proposals. Thus, policies are explored through the ways in which problematizations function as framing mechanism in discourse, and the role of governments in constructing policy problematizations and understandings (Bacchi, 2009a, pp.xv,263).

This methodological framework, which has inspired several researchers' development of frame analysis (see Verloo, 2007; Lombardo, Meier and Verloo, 2009; Kvist and Peterson, 2010), moves beyond conventional policy analysis, which focuses on problem-solving, as the WPR approach allows for a critical examination and problematization of the underlying assumptions connected to problem representations that influence and construct government policies. Further, identifying the underlying conceptual premises or assumptions of a policy discourse can expose the silences of what is left unproblematic or excluded in a particular policy discourse, and what constraints and limitations that arise with a certain problematization (Bacchi, 2009a, pp.xiii-xv,12-13; Kvist and Peterson, 2010, p.190).

As previously discussed, gender equality issues have been integral to Swedish family policy development for a relatively long period of time, even described as institutionalized and part of the national identity, yet this development has been characterized by ambiguities and contradictions (Lundqvist and Roman, 2010, Lundqvist, 2011). Identifying the problem representations and implied assumptions embedded in the policy discourses on both the parental leave and the CFC allowance, allows for an exploration of the ways in which gender equality is constructed and filled with meaning, and how such gender

constructions have different meanings in different contexts (Rönblom, 2008, pp.114-115). Looking at two different policies, of which one is explicitly aimed at actively supporting gender equality in domestic and care work, and the other one has been criticized for supporting traditional gender roles, facilitates a comparison between two different policy contexts and how gender equality is represented within these discourses, and helps to identify the silences as well as normative assumptions found in each of the policy debates (Bacchi, 2009a, p.13).

The textual analysis focuses on three of the six questions⁶ in the WPR approach, which Bacchi (2009a, p.101) proposes as a useful method in order to produce a more integrated analysis, rather than addressing each of the questions systematically. The questions utilized in this analysis are "*what is the 'problem' represented to be in a specific policy?*" - aimed at uncovering the problematizations implied by policy 'solutions'; "*what presuppositions or assumptions underlie this representation of the 'problem'?*" - looking at the dichotomies, categories and concepts that shape and give meaning to problematizations, and "*what is left unproblematic in this problem representation? Where are the silences?*" - explores the constraints and limitations in problem representations in order to uncover what is not being problematized (ibid., pp.2-17). Consequently, using three of the questions that are the basis of the WPR framework when approaching the policy discourses, and drawing on the contextual background of gender equality and the Swedish welfare state presented earlier in the study, the analysis aims to highlight reoccurring framings and problem representations, as well as conceptual premises that underpin the identified problematizations.

5.2 Empirical Material and Practical Methods

The empirical material used in order to explore the problematizations of gender inequality in a Swedish family policy context consists of records from parliamentary debates and government bills from the Swedish Parliament (*Riksdag*), and the debates and bills used in the analysis are key policy documents that concern issues related to Swedish family policy and gender equality, the earmarked parental leave months, the gender equality bonus, and the cash-for-childcare allowance in particular. The focus of the study is delimited to policy

⁶ The other three questions, '*How has this representation of the 'problem' come about?*', '*What effects are produced by this representation of the 'problem'?*', and '*How/where has this representation of the 'problem' been defended? How could it be questioned, disrupted and replaced?*', are not central to the aim of this study, and therefore not in focus in the analysis. However, the effects of the policies, as well as the development of the discourse on gender equality in Swedish family policy, are to some extent discussed in the introduction, context and policy overview sections, and thus form a part of the contextual framework of the study.

debates and government bills between 1994 and 2015, and selected based on the key events in family policy reform during this period. The selected texts include policy documents such as bills, reports, protocols from parliamentary debates, and motions from the parties in parliament, and documents were added until no new important information was provided by adding additional texts. As pointed out by Bacchi (2009a, p.20), choosing policies and documents to analyze is in itself an interpretive process, which is influenced by the researcher's interests and experiences. What types of biases I have as a researcher, and how these might influence this study, will be discussed later in this section. Further, limitations in using documents as empirical material include what types of documents that can be accessed, as well as the quality of those documents (Bowen, 2009, pp.31-32). The criteria that motivated the choice of documents were that the texts discuss the parental leave policy, including earmarked parental leave months and the gender equality bonus, and/or the cash-for-childcare allowance and that gender equality is discussed in relation to these policies rather than just in a general sense. The reason for focusing on these types of documents is because they provide an insight into the reoccurring dominant frames or concepts in the debates preceding and following these reforms, and thus facilitate the analysis of the problematization of gender equality and the normative assumptions that underpin such problem representations in the policy proposals.

The empirical material has been accessed through the Parliament (www.riksdagen.se) web page, and for the debates, the Parliament search engine was used in order to search for different debates in their archive. Different search words were used in various combinations, such as parental insurance (*föräldraförsäkring*), parental leave (*föräldraledighet*), cash-for-childcare allowance (*vårdnadsbidraget*) and gender equality (*jämställdhet*). The government bills are the 1993/94 and 2000/01 government bill proposing the first and the second reserved parental leave months, the 2007/08 government bills introducing the gender equality bonus and the cash-for-childcare allowance, as well as the 2015 proposal to introduce a third earmarked parental leave month. The parliamentary debate texts that were selected range from the year 2007 to 2015, as there are no protocols available from debates on the bills proposing the first and second earmarked parental leave months in 1994/95 and 2000/01. This means that the arguments and framings concerning these two reforms are limited. However, these bills are to varying extents discussed in later debates, making available some of the arguments used in relation to these bills. Further, in order to include arguments for and against the bill from 2000/01, the motions concerning this bill, presented by the different parliament parties, are included in the empirical material.

Only debates that discuss these policies in relation to gender equality have been included, thus some debates concerning family policy and other areas have been excluded, in order to keep the focus of the study. This resulted in twenty-four documents, which were categorized into three different categories depending on if they addressed the parental leave policy, the cash-for-childcare allowance, or both policies. The documents were then explored more closely, in order to identify dominant frames and themes used in different arguments. The coding or identification of frames was not pre-determined in order to allow for unexpected or contradictory frames to be discovered (Verloo and Lombardo, 2007, pp.38-39). These frames provide the basis for the analysis, in which questions from the WPR approach are integrated, in order to guide the analytical process.

A disadvantage of using this type of document analysis is arguably the issue of subjectivity and the influence of the researcher on the results of the study, which means it is important to ensure that excerpts used in the analysis are not chosen merely to represent a certain viewpoint or idea held by the researcher (Bowen, 2009, pp.33-34). The reflexive and interpretive aspects involved in this process include acknowledging contradictions to prevent misrepresentation of the material, and recognizing the need to assess my own problematizations and assumptions (Bacchi, 2009a, pp.19-21,101). In this case, my background as a Swedish woman growing up in the Swedish welfare state, means I need to recognize the biases that this could entail. This includes being subjective in terms of analyzing my home country, which indicates that I am partly shaped by the context that I aim to analyze and could perhaps more easily overlook and fail to question problematizations and assumptions than an 'outside' researcher, as these assumptions are being produced in a context that has influenced my life and experiences, and such assumptions may appear as 'truths' to me. Being aware of such a bias, no pre-determined coding guide was used, as has been discussed earlier, and further, I have taken care not only to recognize but also critically assess my own assumptions concerning the frames that were identified, as well as attempt to carefully account for the methodological process in this section. I also attempt to be as representative as possible in terms of the quotes chosen from the empirical material, and to account for the interpretation of the chosen quotes and frames in the analytical section. It should also be added that my background in the sociological field means I am looking at this research topic and empirical material from a sociological standpoint, which can be regarded as positive in the sense that it allows me to combine feminist and social policy concepts through an over-arching sociological framework.

6. Analysis

The analysis is divided into two parts; the first section deals with the parental leave insurance and the second part addresses the cash-for-childcare allowance. Each part is divided into one descriptive and one analytical section, which means that the frames identified in each discourse are presented and exemplified, and thereafter follows a discussion on the problematizations and assumptions that are found within these frames. These results are then compared and further discussed in the concluding discussions.

6.1 The Parental Leave Policy

The public debate concerning the introduction of the gender-neutral parental leave in 1974, centered around women's employment opportunities and men's caring responsibilities, and was one of several reforms during the 1970s with the purpose of promoting a dual-breadwinner model, including individual taxation and the expansion of public childcare (SOU, 2014, p.24). The main arguments for this reform were equality and choice, since it enabled women's labor market opportunities and men as well as women could choose to take parental leave (Nyberg, 2010, p.66). Since then, the parental insurance policy has undergone various reforms in order to realize the goal of gender equality in parenthood, a goal that has remained relatively uncontested (Duvander and Johansson, 2012, p.320). These reforms include reserved months for each parent, the first month introduced in 1995 and a second month added in 2002, and a gender equality bonus in the form of a tax credit for equal sharing of days was implemented in 2008 (Duvander and Johansson, 2012, p.320; Alsarve and Boye, 2012, p.104). Although the introduction of the first earmarked parental leave month by the right-wing government in 1995 caused a vivid debate, the second reserved month, put in place by the Social Democratic government in 2002, met with less resistance, partly because this month was added to the already existing leave period (SOU, 2014, p.25).

The over-arching purpose of the parental leave policy from 1974 is described as facilitating the reconciliation of work and family life and, complemented by individual taxation and extensive public child care, increasing women's labor force participation (Ds, 2015:8, p.11). The 2000/01 government bill on the second earmarked month, the gender equality bonus in 2007/08, and the proposal for a third reserved leave month in 2015, as well as the parliamentary debates related to these bills, are to some extent based on this goal from 1974, but also articulate further visions and challenges. Four reoccurring frames can be discerned in the policy debate concerning the reserved parental

leave months and gender equality bonus in the parental leave policy; the reconciliation of work and family life, equal sharing of parental leave, family choice/flexibility, and a child rights perspective. These aspects often interconnect and appear frequently in the debates and bills, and are used by the left-wing as well as the right-wing parties, albeit sometimes in order to highlight different arguments. While all the parties seem positive to the parental leave insurance as a policy for increased gender equality, different aspects of the policy is highlighted and problematized by different parties. Flexibility and family choice is the main frame articulated by the right-wing coalition, while equality is often emphasized by the left-wing parties. The gender equality bonus, however, introduced by the centre-right coalition in 2008 as part of a reform strategy in order to increase family choice and flexibility, has been met with criticism by the Social Democratic party, the Left party, and the Green party.

Looking at the 2000/01 government bill proposing a second reserved parental leave month, the Swedish parental leave insurance is represented as a flexible policy with several objectives, including all of the frames that reoccur in the policy discourse analysis in this study:

The Swedish parental leave insurance puts the child in focus, and through its *flexibility*, it provides families with different circumstances the opportunity to spend time with their children according to the needs of each child. The parental leave insurance aims to *support both parents in reconciling work and parenting* and especially emphasizes men's responsibilities for their children. It is an effective instrument for designing support aimed at improving the situation for families with small children. The parental insurance is based on *the child's best interests* and presupposes that the child needs and is entitled to both parents. The parental insurance is an important aspect of the government's work on *gender equality*. The parental insurance makes it possible for both parents to combine work and family life and has, through its design, made it easier for women as well as men to take responsibility for their children, especially when the children are young. (Government Bill 2000/01:44, p.22 - my translation, added emphasis).

6.1.1 The Reconciliation of Work and Family Life

The work-family reconciliation frame is a reoccurring theme in the parental leave discourse, whether the discussion is concerning reserved parental leave or the gender equality bonus. It is often coupled with a gender equality frame. In the 1993/94 government bill proposing 30 earmarked parental leave days for each parent, one of the primary reasons for the proposed reform is to facilitate a work-family balance for both women and men. In this representation of the frame, the issue of women's double burden, often working part-time in order to be able to combine employment with raising children, is problematized as one of the main obstacles to improving women's labor market position, and by extension, to a gender equal society. The

consequences of combining work and family on gender equality are also highlighted in the latest 2015 proposal for additional reserved parental leave.

When the family situation is taken into account, it becomes evident that the gender wage gap is the highest for households consisting of couples that are living together and have children, but there are great variations within the group, based on the prestige of the profession, where there is a greater pay gap in high-prestige professions than in low-prestige occupations. Differences in working conditions between men and women may help to explain differences in pay, especially in high-prestige professions. This shows that having family responsibilities can be difficult to reconcile with paid work, and that being a parent can lead to labor market consequences. (Ds, 2015:8, pp.30-31, my translation)

The stated purpose of the 2000/01 government bill proposing a second earmarked parental leave month is to further improve parents' possibilities to combine family and work, thus presenting the policy reform as yet another step towards the government's goals of improving the situation for families with children and to increase single parents' financial situation (Government Bill, 2000/01:44, p.1). In the 2007/08 bill introducing the gender equality bonus and in the preceding parliamentary debate, the work-family reconciliation frame is interconnected with gender equality as well as parental choice. According to the proponents of the gender equality bonus, a shared responsibility for parenting should be promoted, without restricting families' autonomy, which also connects the frame with choice and flexibility. From a gender equality perspective, the reform is represented as an additional step towards facilitating work-family balance for women as well as men.

The gender equality bonus has a dual purpose in that it is aimed at promoting gender equality both in terms of parental leave and labor market participation. (Government Bill, 2007/08:93, p.21, my translation)

Thus, as well as a general support for balancing paid labor with parenthood, the work-family reconciliation frame is often presented as interconnected with parental choice and gender equality, representing the parental leave insurance as a way of promoting men's caring responsibilities, which is thought to facilitate women's labor market situation.

6.1.2 Equal Division of Parental Leave

In the parental leave policy debates, gender equality forms an overarching discourse, represented as having intrinsic value, and as one of the main goals in Swedish family policy, but also has a more concrete function, such as in the frame of equal sharing of parental leave. This frame can be distinguished as the foundation of the overarching gender equality focus in

the policy debate, and is deemed important in order to establish a close connection with the child, to promote a work-family balance for women as well as men, and to increase gender equality in the private and the public spheres.

In order for mothers as well as fathers to be able to combine employment and family life, and establish a close connection and relationship with the child early on, how the used parental leave days are divided between the parents is an important issue within the parental insurance. At the moment, fathers' take-up of parental days is low compared to mothers' take-up of days. (Government Bill 2000/01:44, p.23, my translation).

The importance of sharing parental leave is highlighted in the bills as well as the parliamentary debates, and articulated by all parties. How this is to be achieved, however, is framed differently by the liberal-conservative parties and the left-wing parties. The arguments against adding additional reserved months, following both the 2000/01 government bill and the suggestion for a third month in 2015, include claims that such changes will inhibit parental choice. In a motion following the 2000/01 bill, representatives of the Liberal Party argue that while family policy should facilitate a possibility to weaken traditional gender roles and emphasize shared responsibility for the care of children, adding an additional earmarked month in order to increase fathers' use of parental leave is not necessary. Instead, economic incentives are suggested as a way to increase fathers' parental leave use.

In the 2007/08 government bill and in the parliamentary debate preceding the legislation on a gender equality bonus, more equally shared parental leave is seen as one of the main reasons for implementing such a reform, and is central to the discussion. Equality in parenthood is framed as crucial in facilitating women's labor market opportunities, by making reference to the negative effects that arise in the labor market as a result of women doing most of the unpaid domestic work, including childcare. This is articulated as having negative labor market consequences for all women, not just mothers. Consequently, in this problematization, the dominant representation of gender equality is women's position in the labor market, which functions as the point of reference throughout the discussion.

Moreover, Madame Speaker, the lack of gender equality is also about a lack of gender equality in the family. In 2006, fathers only used about 20 percent of parental leave days. What are the problems behind this? What problems does this lead to in the Swedish labor market and in Swedish society? This naturally results in a weakening of women's status and position in the Swedish labor market. (Mp Tobias Krantz, the Liberal Party, in parliamentary debate 2007/08:SfU10, 20 May 2008, pp.7-8, my translation)

While all parties frame gender equality in the private sphere as important for improving women's labor market situation, the right-wing parties articulate that family choice is crucial for achieving this, by highlighting parents' agency and responsibility. Expanding parental

choice as a result of the gender equality bonus is expressed as facilitating a sustained increase in gender equality - because people make active choices that lead to changes in current gender structures. In contrast, the left-wing opposition argue that structural obstacles remain that will impede such changes, and therefore an incentive to share parental leave equally is not enough to transform societal gender relations. From this perspective, reserved parental leave for each of the parents is necessary. By highlighting gender norms and structures in society, the proponents of a third parental leave month argue that it is not enough to provide an incentive for more equal sharing. Economic incentives to share parental leave sanction the gender wage gap and an unequal labor market rather than facilitate structural change. Promoting men's caregiving rights and responsibilities through reserved parental leave is instead described as a more effective tool to for promoting gender equality and as a means to primarily two goals: in order for the child to form a close connection with both parents, and as a way of increasing equality between men and women in the home as well as in the labor market.

A more equal distribution of parental leave leads to increased gender equality both in the home and in the labor market. More fathers on parental leave creates greater opportunities for an equal division of domestic work and child-rearing. For fathers, this creates greater opportunities for establishing an early contact with their children. For women, this reduces the risk of falling behind in wage development and career opportunities. (MP Gunvor G. Ericson, the Green Party, in parliamentary debate 2007/08:SfU10, 20 May 2008, p.4, my translation).

Putting the frame of equality in parenthood in a wider perspective, it is described as the main factor in order to realize a gender equal society and labor market. Thus, the 'meaning' of gender equality in this context, is equal sharing of parenthood, as the current lack of gender equality is problematized in terms of an unequal labor division of care.

Let me begin by saying that the single most important reform in order to get a more gender equal society and work life is to get a more equal take-up of parental benefits. (Mp Teresa Carvalho, the Social Democratic Party, in parliamentary debate 2014/15:273, 10 March 2015, p.5, my translation)

Equality in parenthood is consequently a frame that encompasses different 'solutions' to gender equality issues in society, and functions to concretize the concept of gender equality in this context, mainly connecting it to women's labor market status.

6.1.3 Parental Choice and Flexibility

The frame of family or parental choice and flexibility is particularly salient in the gender equality bonus reform and the debates linked to this reform. The right-wing coalition, (the Conservative party, the Centre party, the Christian Democratic party, and the Liberal party), use this as a common reoccurring argument in favor of the bonus, but it is also repeatedly used in arguments against additional reserved parental leave.

In motions following the 2000/01 government bill on a second earmarked parental leave month, representatives of the right-wing parties argue that, by promoting choice and autonomy, opportunities increase for people to choose according to their needs and wishes, and to take responsibility for their own situation. Reserving an additional month for each of the parents is seen as detrimental to family choice, and in combination with a maximum benefit level, serves to exclude groups in society with a different perspective on family and childcare. In a motion from the Conservative Party, they are negative to an additional reserved parental leave month for each parent, as this circumscribes parental choice and flexibility. This use of the parental choice frame is interconnected with work-family reconciliation as well as children's well-being, as it is argued that the parents know what is best for their child in terms of childcare arrangements and work-family reconciliation. The stated reason behind the suggestion to introduce additional earmarked months, which is to increase equality in parenthood, is not discussed. Thus, the frame of parental choice, coupled with the frame of children's well-being, is in this case superseding the goal of gender equality.

In a 2011/12 parliamentary debate on the government's parental leave strategy, the proponents of the strategy, the centre-right coalition, emphasize the importance of parental choice, and parental responsibility, but also that parents should, and are capable of, making their own choices regarding the sharing of parental leave. This is referred to as a choice belonging the private sphere, and the government should not make this decision for the parents.

The government has confidence in that parents can decide for themselves how to share parental leave days. However, opportunities for both men and women to take responsibility for parenthood in an active and gender equal way, should of course be provided, without depriving parents their sovereignty. (Mp Göran Hägglund, the Christian Democratic Party, in parliamentary debate 2011/12:49, 21 October 2011, p.2, my translation)

The opponents to this parental choice strategy, the left-wing parties, on the contrary consider 'interfering' in the private sphere as necessary, due to the underlying gendered structures that connect both the private and public realms. While flexible solutions and parental choice are emphasized as important in the 2015 proposal for a third earmarked leave month, it is argued

that choices are affected by unequal structures. Changing attitudes and structures is consequently considered crucial in order to promote gender equality.

Additionally reserved days will more clearly signal that men and women have equal responsibility for the care of the child and, as with the previously implemented days, may result in significant changes in behavior. The men that currently use only a small percentage of the right to parental benefits, or use none of it, may change their behavior. (Ds, 2015:8, p.42, my translation)

Thus, the purpose of introducing an additional month reserved for each parent, is to indicate that men and women have equal responsibility for the care of their child, and that this will lead to changes in behavior, and thus affect agency. Further, the expectation is that this will affect employers' attitudes towards men's parental leave use.

6.1.5 The Child Rights Perspective

The child rights perspective or the frame of children's well-being is often used, by all parties, to underline a range of different arguments. In the debate on the gender equality bonus, it is closely connected to the family choice frame, as it is argued that parents know what is best for their children and should be able to choose according to their own needs and wishes.

It is important to once again emphasize that the gender equality bonus is first and foremost a part of the Alliance's family policy reform, in which the child rights perspective and choice go hand in hand. The Alliance trusts that the parents - not the politicians - know what is best for their own family and the needs of their child. That is why choice is so important to us, and that is why the child rights perspective must always be emphasized. (Mp Lars-Arne Staxäng, the Conservative Party, in parliamentary debate 2007/08:SfU10, 20 May 2008, p.6, my translation)

The child perspective and family choice are also connected to the work-reconciliation frame, in particular when it is used by the centre-right parties as an argument against additional reserved parental leave, again by emphasizing that children have different needs and that families thus need to find different solutions and strategies to work-family reconciliation. In this use, the child rights perspective, together with flexibility and family choice, function as arguments against a reform that is presented as an approach to tackle gendered structures.

However, in discussions from another perspective, the child rights frame is used in connection with gender equality, in order to promote men's caring responsibilities, with the underlying argument being that children have a right to both parents. With this use of the frame, the child rights perspective becomes an argument in favor of additional reserved parental leave, as is the case in the government bill from 2000/01.

The implementation of the so called daddy and mommy months has resulted in a significant increase in the number of fathers who take part in the care of their child compared to before the reform, which is important not only from a gender equality perspective, but also in regard to children's well-being. It is important that the child established a close contact and relationship with both parents early on in life (...) Therefore, it is important to continue to support this development through the reservation of additional parental leave days for each of the parents. (Government Bill 2000/01:44, p.25, my translation).

Consequently, the frame of children's rights and well-being is used both as an argument against reforms promoting gender equality, when children's caring needs are situated in opposition to parents' labor market participation, but also as a way of emphasizing the importance of fathers' caring responsibilities for the sake of gender equality and children's well-being.

6.2 Problem Representations and Assumptions in the Parental Leave Policy

6.2.1 Employment and Family Tensions

Several layers of problem representations are revealed in the policy debate on parental leave, and the frames identified in the analysis are often interconnected and overlapping. One of the main objectives of the parental leave insurance is to facilitate a reconciliation of child-rearing and employment, which reappears as a dominant frame in the discourse. The problematization implied in solutions to work-family reconciliation issues is arguably that having children and participating in the labor force are not particularly compatible, hence there is a need for a 'solution' that provides support for parents to be able to combine child-rearing and paid labor. Such a discord between work and family can be connected to Ellingsaeter's (1999, pp.40-41) argument of the current dual-earner model clashing with labor market structures emanating from a period of industrialization and male breadwinner norms. It can be argued that this tension is problematized as a societal or public issue rather than just a personal responsibility, as it is constructed as a problem that requires government or welfare state support through family policies, regardless if the proposed solution is reserved parental leave or a gender equality bonus. This problem representation should arguably be seen in the light of the emphasis placed on equality and individualization in family policy since the 1970s, which has resulted in a process of defamilialization (Ahlberg, Roman and Duncan, 2008, p.82; Roman, 2009, p.101). Taking these processes of individualization and defamilialization into consideration help explaining the underlying premises of the problematization of work-family reconciliation as a shared responsibility between the state and the family, since policy support for care needs is more likely to be provided in welfare states such as the Scandinavian ones, in which individual autonomy and rights are in focus, as opposed to states in which the family is

expected and assumed to provide care (Millar. 1999, p.34).

A gendered division of labor in the home as well as in the labor market, which is represented as women's double burden, is problematized as a central issue not only when it comes to combining paid and unpaid work, but also in terms of gender equality and women's employment opportunities. Situating this work-family problematization into the broader context of the Swedish welfare state draws attention to the gender segregated labor market. From a gender systems perspective, women's expanding roles as earner-carers in a labor market that has been premised on norms from the industrial period of male breadwinning, have resulted in flexible employment models such as part-time, public sector work among women. According to Ellingsaeter (1999, pp.47-57), while parental leave policies have contributed to the shaping of new work-family organization, vertical and horizontal gender segregation in labor markets can result in a two-tier model of work-family reconciliation that reinforce gender differences; one for fathers and one for mothers. Even with the reserved leave actively encouraging fathers' take-up, such gender segregation in the labor market means that men, who often work long hours in the private sector, only have a short absence from the labor market compared to women, who often have a longer period of parental leave coupled with part-time work (*ibid.*, p.59).

Several underlying assumptions can be discerned in connection to the problem representation of work-family reconciliation, including the norm of paid labor, arguably a norm that is dominant and uncontested in the Swedish welfare state, as is the expectation that women as well as men participate in the labor market. Thus, adults are recognized as workers in order to obtain rights to caregiving through welfare policies (Lewis, 2001, pp.163-164). It can be argued that this normative underpinning functions to give meaning to the problematization of child-rearing as an obstacle to women's labor market participation. As argued by Levitas (1996, pp.9-19), social inclusion is strongly connected to paid work, resulting in the undervaluing of unpaid labor. The changes seen in the social organization of care coupled with women's increasing employment, have resulted in care work moving from the family to the public sphere, constructing it as a societal rather than just a private issue, which is evident when exploring the problematizations and solutions of care in relation to paid labor in the parental leave discourse. Yet, as pointed out by Ciccia and Verloo (2012, p.509), care cannot be fully commodified, which is why it is crucial to explore the gendered division of unpaid labor; the low value attached to care work conceptualizes it as obstructing employment, consequently disregarding its significance for reproduction and personal fulfillment.

6.2.2 Tensions between Family Choice and Regulation

The assumptions of care work as an obstacle to women's employment can also be connected to the problematizations of gender (in)equality created in the policy discourse. Both the 'solutions' proposed in the reforms for reserved parental leave and the gender equality bonus concern a more equal sharing of parental leave between the parents. These solutions contain problematizations of unequally shared parental leave as an issue that has negative consequences for women, in terms of a weaker labor market position and unbalanced division of labor in the home.

The solutions established by the reserved parental leave on the one hand, and the gender equality bonus on the other, reveal contradictions in the underlying assumptions that are embedded in the policy discourse. In a 2011/12 debate discussing the goal of equally shared parental leave, taking away the earmarked months is described as resulting in disastrous consequences by a representative of the Social Democratic party, and that fathers would take less or no leave at all if it was solely up to each family. This problematization highlights structures but also constrains the solutions to structural changes, which overlooks or contains silences on people's agency. This contradicts the parental choice that is simultaneously promoted by the centre-right coalition. The gender equality bonus is directed at individuals' agency rather than structures, as it is believed that parents that choose to share equally will change gendered structures, but it is not the government's role to change the structures in order to facilitate agency, rather it is the parents who are given the 'opportunity' to make 'the right choice' which will have a positive impact on these structures. The assumptions behind arguments for or against the gender equality bonus as well as reserved parental leave, arguably rest on a public/private binary. Binaries, according to Bacchi (2009a, p.7) function to "simplify complex relationships", and places more value on one of the binaries, in this case the private sphere, through an implied hierarchy. The proponents of the gender equality bonus emphasize the importance of parental choice, and the organization of care as a parental responsibility, but also that parents should, and are capable of, making their own choices regarding the sharing of parental leave, which is mainly regarded as a choice belonging the private sphere, and consequently does not require government regulation. Conversely, the opponents emphasize the public side of this dichotomy, resulting in a left-right divide between additional reserved parental leave and parental choice, in which the gender equality bonus corresponds to the centre-right policy focus on individual agency and 'choice' (Ellingsaeter, 2014, p.564).

There are tensions as well as contradictions not only in the arguments put

forward in the parliamentary debates, which can be expected considering that it is a political setting, but also within the policies. The problematizations within the gender equality bonus policy reveal a tension between parental choice and a problem representation that seems to imply that individuals make the 'wrong' choice. Parents know what is best for their children and should therefore be provided with the opportunity to make their own choices regarding the family, yet the implicit assumption behind the policy is that parents do not share enough of the parental leave, which is then a disadvantage economically for women, and emotionally for children, and that they therefore need an incentive to 'make the right choice'. Herein lies a contradiction; while parental choice or agency is constructed as a policy solution, it is at the same time constructed as the problem.

Thus, the underlying assumptions can be said to produce tensions between parental choice and limited political interference in the domestic sphere on one hand, and the need to challenge unequal power structures by further politicizing the family sphere on the other. Further, while proponents of parental choice argue that individuals' agency will contribute to a change of such structures, there is still a tendency to argue for incentives to make the 'right choice', such as the incentives provided by the gender equality bonus, constructing agency as the norm *and* as the problem.

6.2.3 Men's Caring Responsibilities and Women's Employment

Looking closer at the problematizations of unequal sharing of parental leave as negative for gender equality, the underlying assumptions identified can be connected to women's position in the labor market as the meaning of equality or inequality in this context. Even when inequality in the home is discussed, this is often problematized as being bad *because* it leads to inequality in the labor market, tying women's equality to labor market participation. In this problematization, women are put into one category, which includes *all* women, thus disregarding other aspects such as class and ethnicity, but also women's longstanding labor market participation, which has not yet changed the division of labor (Bacchi, 1999, pp.68-70). This categorization can be connected to Lundqvist's (2011, p.117) argument of the division between men and women being considered the dominant, overarching category in society in family policy discourse. This illustrates how categories operate in public policy (Bacchi, 2009a, p.9); in this problematization, women as a group, whether or not they are mothers, are regarded as disadvantaged by unequal sharing of parental leave. Thus, although this is a 'parental issue', it is seen as something that goes beyond parenthood, affecting all women, rather than a gendered division of labor affecting mothers' situation. Thus, an

underlying problem representation of unequal share of parental leave is that women's labor market status is negatively affected, not just mothers' situation, but the situation of *every* woman. This reveals an assumption of women as 'equal in their inequality', and therefore that solutions directed at some women, will benefit all women (Bacchi, 1999, p.69). Consequently, the tension between structures and subjects is visible in this categorization of women as one group, disregarding the actual lives and experiences of women, which might have similarities as well as differences in terms of a gender identity (Crompton, 1999, pp.7-9). Further, as in the problematizations behind work-family reconciliation, the concept of the labor market is used as a fixed, uncontested concept, and forms an underlying assumption that paid labor is 'what counts'.

Central to the problematizations of women's labor market participation as key to gender equality, are policy solutions that encourage fathers' caregiving responsibilities and parental leave take-up, which is the case with reserved parental days as well as the gender equality bonus. Children's well-being is also central to this problematization, since fathers' increased take-up of parental leave is connected to children's rights to both parents. This illustrates how parenthood and especially fatherhood is increasingly being constructed in terms of equal caregiving and breadwinning responsibilities, which is moving towards the idea of a dual-earner/dual-carer society (Klinth, 2008, p.34), though there is no uncontested hegemonic representation of fatherhood, as 'new' roles of fatherhood are various and complex (Johansson, 2011, p.178). The underlying premise for women's employment as well as men's rights to caregiving as key to gender equality is inclusion based on sameness in that women have the same rights and opportunities as men (Crompton, 1999, p.4; Verloo, 2007, pp.23-24; Ray, Gornick and Schmitt, 2010, pp.198-198; Leira, 1998, p.375). While several scholars (Ciccia and Verloo, 2012; Björk Eydal and Rostgaard, 2011; Ellingsaeter, 2014) have categorized Sweden as a dual-earner society that aims to promote a dual-earner/dual-carer model through the introduction of reserved parental leave, there are ambiguities in the policies and such a dual-earner/dual-carer society has not yet been realized (Ciccia and Verloo, 2012, p.524; Morgan, 2008, p.416). As argued by Leira (2006, p.45), there are still gendered norms underpinning parenthood which influence work-family organization.

6.3 The Cash-for-Childcare Allowance

The debate on a cash-for-childcare (CFC) policy goes back to the middle of the twentieth century, and has been influenced by different opinions both among and within parties. The discussion has mainly been centered around choice and equality. Proponents have in the past

highlighted choice and equality in terms of a CFC allowance enabling working-class women, and not only middle-class women, to choose caregiving in the home. Opponents have also argued for choice and equality, but maintained that economic independence and the importance of women being able to choose to participate in the labor market are arguments against, rather than for, a CFC scheme (Nyberg, 2010, pp.65-66; Hiilamo and Kangas, 2009, p.463).

The current cash-for-childcare allowance has been much debated both before and after its implementation in 2008 (Tunberger and Sigle-Rushton, 2011, p.227; Hiilamo and Kangas, 2009, p.470). The center-right government in power at the time, introduced the CFC scheme together with the gender equality bonus and a tax credit on domestic services, as part of a family policy strategy to increase flexibility and family choice (Tunberger and Sigle-Rushton, 2011, p.226). Criticism voiced by the opponents, the left-wing parties, has primarily concerned the impact of the CFC scheme on gender equality, depicting the allowance as a 'women's trap' and as promoting traditional gender roles (Hiilamo and Kangas, 2009, p.470). Also within the parties that promote the CFC policy, there have been differences in opinion, as female politicians, in particular, have articulated concern for the possible negative effects the scheme might have for women (Nyberg, 2010, p.86).

In the government bill introducing the CFC allowance, as well as the debates preceding and following the implementation of the policy, four reoccurring frames can be identified, which are articulated by the proponents as well as opponents of the policy, and forming the focus of the discussion; family choice and flexibility, work-family reconciliation, equality, and children's well-being. The center-right coalition argue for the CFC allowance as a way of increasing family choice and flexibility, work-family reconciliation, and children's well-being. The opposition, the Social Democratic Party, the Green Party and the Left Party, also highlight work-family reconciliation and children's well-being, but emphasize what they perceive as equality issues as a result of the policy, especially in terms of gender and class/income groups.

6.3.1 Family Choice and Flexibility

The proponents of the policy, the centre-right coalition, frame the CFC allowance as a way of increasing flexibility and parental choice in childcare issues, and as a way for parents to spend more time with their children, since it allows them to stay at home even after the parental leave days are used. The argument articulated in support of a more flexible parental leave insurance is the diversity of family types, and the different needs and wishes that different

families have. Thus, the government should control less of the family sphere, and facilitating family choices for work-family reconciliation should be one of the main objectives when developing family policy.

According to the government, a modern family policy has to be based on the assumption that families are different, have different wishes and needs, and are equal. That is why choice and flexibility are important. Family policy should respect the choices of individual families and focus on being supportive, not controlling. (Government Bill 2007/08:91, p.17, my translation)

From this perspective, the problem representation is that of a parental choice/work-family reconciliation issue, and that the government should offer support rather than steer families in one particular direction. Childcare is a parental responsibility and parental insurance should merely offer support rather than control this. Thus, by referring to a diversity of family situations and constellations, the discourse places choice - as well as responsibility - on (the) families. Arguably, it is implied that choice supersedes gender equality as well as the 'work strategy' in this case.

Gender equality is important. The work strategy is important. It is also important to recognize that people have different preferences regarding how to shape their lives. I think it is good if we, as politicians, affirm that will. (Mp Göran Hägglund, the Christian Democratic Party, in parliamentary debate 2013/14:341, 25 March 2014, p.9, my translation)

Yet, tensions within the family policies are revealed when the right-wing government keep referring to the gender equality bonus when debating the CFC allowance; parents are the ones with the main responsibility and should thus have as much power as possible to make their own choices, yet since there is gender inequality in parenthood, incentives are needed, in the form of a gender equality bonus, in order to make people 'choose right'.

The concrete gains in terms of flexibility and choice are questioned by representatives from the opposing parties, by connecting the discussion to the frame of equality and claiming that this policy will only be a choice for those who can afford it, thus the CFC risks becoming a benefit for the rich. The CFC allowance is also portrayed as negative in terms of gender equality.

But this freedom of choice is not for everyone. For many single parents, the CFC allowance is a mockery. There are few of them who can survive on a benefit of 3000 SEK a month. Furthermore, it is not likely that it will increase the incentive for more fathers to stay at home with their children. Besides, the freedom of choice will depend on the municipality that you live in, since it is up to each municipality to implement the allowance. The CFC allowance is a defeat for gender equality. (Mp Gunvor Ericson, the Green Party, in parliamentary debate 2007/08:SfU9, p.6, my translation) .

Instead, they argue that there is already family choice and flexibility in the legislation, including the right to take a leave of absence in order to stay at home with your children until they are three years old, or to reduce working hours.

6.3.2 Work-Family Reconciliation

The CFC allowance is further framed as a policy that facilitates work-family reconciliation, based on families' autonomy. The frame is commonly used by the proponents of the policy as an argument for improving families' opportunities to spend more time with their small children. Further, the flexibility of the policy, which allows parents to use it part-time or keep working full-time if the childcare is otherwise arranged, is represented as an improved support for parents balancing employment and family life.

Family policy should make it easier for parents to combine work and family life, by improving opportunities for both parents to participate in the labor market and take care of the children when they are small. (Government Bill 2007/08:91, p.17, my translation)

An underlying principle of the Swedish welfare state, that paid work is key to a high-quality living situation, is reflected in the premise of women's employment as key to gender equality. The proponents of the bill argue for a low benefit level and particular restrictions on receiving the allowance, for example not being able to combine it with other social security benefits such as unemployment benefits. High levels of benefits are articulated as impeding the work strategy and incentives to engage in paid work. Offering the possibility to combine the CFC allowance with other benefits, such as the unemployment benefit, is thought to work against the strategy in place to make labor market policies more effective and streamlined (Government Bill 2007/08:91, pp.33-37).

The CFC allowance is not meant to be a replacement covering the loss of income from paid labor. The CFC allowance is, just like the parental leave insurance, meant to facilitate parental leave when the child is young. It does not contradict active participation in the labor market. The allowance is designed so that it can be combined with full-time or part-time work, and is not encumbered with demands for a reduction of working hours. (Mp Göran Hägglund, the Christian Democratic Party, in parliamentary debate 2010/13:384, 3 May 2013, pp.1-2, my translation).

Arguments against the CFC allowance as a support for work-family reconciliation include gender equality concerns. A CFC allowance could mean that a parent, presumably the mother, stays at home to take care of a child for 3000SEK/month, thus becoming economically dependent on their partner during this period. Thus, while the CFC is said to promote work-family reconciliation partly by a low benefit level that is aimed at impeding incentives not to engage in paid labor, this low benefit could also result in people moving away from the labor

market and into economic dependence. The opposition argues that this is an antiquated family model that goes against Sweden's gender equality goals. Further, it brings people away from the labor market, thus contradicting the work strategy. In this sense, it can be argued that the strong norm of employment results in a devaluing of care and domestic work in the home.

6.3.3 Equality

In the parliamentary debate discussing the cash-for-childcare bill, as well as in subsequent debates on the different aspects of the CFC allowance, one of the main frames expressed by the opponents of the scheme is that of equality and unequal outcomes of the policy, partly because the implementation of the scheme is optional and decided by the municipalities. Several aspects of equality are highlighted in the discussion; the consequences for gender equality, class equality and child equality.

The opponents thus present the policy proposal as an equality/inequality problem, particularly as a gender equality problem, claiming that the allowance will have a negative impact on women's labor market participation and economic independence, as well as being detrimental to the public daycare system that has facilitated women's employment. The gender equality gains of the policy are questioned by comparing the outcomes of a CFC allowance to the unequal power structures of a male breadwinner model, in which the woman is economically dependent on the man, and by painting a scenario of a retreat to, and reinforcement of, traditional gender roles.

It tends to become a housewife model in which the man works and the woman stays at home with the children. It weakens the woman's position and makes her more dependent. She risks losing ground in the labor market. (Mp Hillevi Larsson, , the Social Democratic Party, in parliamentary debate 2013/14:341, 25 March 2014, p.4, my translation)

This 'women's trap' is put forward as a possible consequence of the CFC allowance, since it is more likely that women stay at home, due to the gendered labor market. Immigrant women are depicted as especially likely to get stuck in this 'women's trap', since they are already far from the labor market in many cases. Further, if the children of these families do not attend public daycare, their opportunities for developing their Swedish language skills decrease, which also makes this a child equality issue. The opponents suggest that, rather than reinforcing a gendered division of labor through an allowance, the parental insurance should be expanded to allow parents to spend more time with their children without having to lose their connection to the labor market, and by improving and expanding public childcare facilities.

In contrast, the proponents of the CFC allowance highlight the gender-

neutrality of the proposal, which gives men as well as women equal opportunity to spend more time with their small children. By making reference to unequal gender structures in society, it is argued that the policy itself is not contributing to gender inequality, rather, it is placing a value on the care work that has traditionally been women's responsibility, which on the contrary promotes gender equality.

At last, a value is put on the unpaid but important work that many women and the occasional man have performed for decades. For me, the CFC allowance is therefore a gender equality reform to some extent. Along with the gender equality bonus in the parental insurance, this is an indication from the government that taking care of and raising your own children is a valuable contribution to society. (Mp Jan Ericson, the Conservative Party, in parliamentary debate 2007/08:SfU0, 20 May 2008, p. 31, my translation)

Further, representatives of the centre-right coalition argue against the claim that the CFC is a trap for women, by referring to the CFC as part of a broader reform that also includes the gender equality bonus, and thus that there is an incentive for both parents to stay at home. The 'gender inequality factor' of the CFC thus depends on how the parents choose to organize the care for their children, and this does not necessarily have to be unequal, since men as well as women can choose to stay at home. The impact of structural factors, such as the gender-segregated labor market, which likely results in a majority of women using the CFC allowance, are not more thoroughly discussed by the proponents in the bill or the debates.

Several people from the opposition have raised the issue of this reform being a women's trap, and thus counteracting gender equality. As is known, the Bill is gender neutral in itself, and gives both parents equal opportunity to spend time with the child. Moreover, the law is designed so that it can be shared if that is preferred. The issue raised here, the issue of gender equality, is a much more comprehensive issue that is not about the CFC allowance. It is about a societal structure that makes it more common for women than men to stay at home with their children, and this really has nothing to do with this family reform. (Mp Lars-Arne Staxäng, the Conservative Party, in parliamentary debate 2007/08:SfU9, 20 May 2008, p. 10, my translation)

Thus, the possible effects of the CFC allowance on gender equality are not acknowledged or discussed by the proponents of the reform, instead, they repeatedly refer to the gender equality bonus when gender equality is brought up in the discussion. Consequently, having to face the criticism directed at the CFC in terms of gender inequality outcomes, is avoided. Instead, family choice is continuously articulated as the most important frame.

Regarding women's labor market participation, the perspective should be widened. The CFC allowance is only one part of the Government's family policy reform. The reform also include a gender equality bonus that rewards an equal division of parental leave. This gives parents better financial possibilities and incentives for an equal distribution of parental leave. (Mp Göran Hägglund, the Christian Democratic Party, in parliamentary debate 2007/08:751, 19 June 2008, p.2)

Further, the left-wing opponents of the CFC allowance frame the proposal as an issue of equality/inequality in terms of access, redistribution, and class/income, by arguing that the maximum amount that can be received every month is not sufficient to live on, and that the allowance therefore excludes people who cannot afford to take time off from a paid job in order to stay at home with their child, or risks pushing unemployed people further from the labor market. Thus, the CFC allowance is problematized as benefiting privileged groups in society at the expense of lower income groups, but also as an issue of children's well-being.

A CFC allowance does not actually result in increased equality between men and women. The great losers in this reform are ordinary people who are concerned about their children and want a high quality pre-school. They want to be able to combine work and family life. However, it is not possible to live on these 3000 SEK, and not everyone has a rich spouse that can provide for them. This is a rich people's benefit, or it is a means to make women stay at home with an income of maximum 3000 SEK. It also ensures that children do not get to take part in the sense of community and the development that a good pre-school can provide. (Mp Ann-Christin Ahlberg, the Social Democratic Party, in parliamentary debate 2007/08:751, 19 June 2008, p.9, my translation)

The proponents on the other hand, argue that this is not the case, since there are many forms of childcare and a single parent, for example, can use the CFC allowance, continue to work and organize the childcare in a different way. The important aspect here, according to the proponents, is that it is the parents that choose how and who to take care of their child.

This is met with a counter-argument from representatives of the opposing parties, who question the gains for children's well-being, claiming that one of the main reasons for implementing the CFC allowance - that parents are given the opportunity to spend more time with their children - is undermined by the optional aspect of the allowance, as well as the possibility to receive benefits if parents are working full time and arranging another type of childcare. The low compensation rate makes this a gender equality issue, a class issue and an issue of inequality among children, as it results in some parents being able to stay at home with their children while others, such as low-income families and single parents, cannot afford this.

It is about privatizing childcare for those who can afford to choose, and about forgetting the women who are already isolated from the labor market. It is about forgetting the children who do not live in a well-established nuclear family, and last but not least, it is about forgetting and hiding the fact that both women and men are needed in the labor market and the family. (Mp Matilda Ernkrans, the Social Democratic Party, in parliamentary debate 2007/08:751, 19 June 2008, p.7, my translation)

Consequently, the equality frame and its multiple dimensions have several uses in the discussion, and interlinked with other frames, function as arguments for or against the cash-for-childcare allowance.

6.3.4 Children's Well-Being

As in the parental leave discourse, the frame of children's well-being or the child rights perspective, is used both in order to promote gender equality, but also as a way to legitimize that gender equality effects of the allowance are overlooked, by using it to support arguments for as well as against the cash-for-childcare allowance. The child rights perspective, or the best interest of the child, is agreed upon as a general starting point for the shaping of family policy, but the practical aspects of this frame differ. The proponents of the CFC scheme use children's well-being as a rationale for increased family choice, since it is argued that parents know what is best for their children, and should be given the opportunity to choose what type of childcare that suits them. Further, the frame is repeatedly used as a way of avoiding to discuss criticism, often in terms of gender equality, against the CFC policy.

With regard to the interpellant's question concerning the CFC allowance and the gender equality goals set by the Parliament, I want to emphasize that the allowance is not in conflict with these goals. In this context, it is also important to highlight that the CFC allowance is not a reform focusing on gender equality, but a reform focusing on strengthening the child rights perspective. Mp Göran Hägglund, the Christian Democratic Party, in parliamentary debate 2007/08:408, 11 March 2008, p.3, my translation).

From a child equality perspective, the representatives from the Social Democratic party argue that the CFC allowance will have negative consequences for children who do not attend public childcare, since they are not given the same opportunities to get access to educated childcare staff and learning exercises, which might have negative consequences when the child is in school. Such concerns are especially directed at children with an immigrant background, since their opportunities to learn Swedish and integrate into Swedish society decrease if they do not attend public daycare. In contrast to the proponents of the CFC policy, children's well-being is in this perspective connected to public childcare and, in terms of children's rights to both parents, it is also used together with gender equality as an argument against the allowance. It is argued that, if the majority of the caregivers are women, this policy will contradict the child rights perspective as well as the gender equality goals in Swedish family policy, since the outcome of such a scenario will result in fathers spending less time with their children and women spending less time on paid labor. From this perspective, the cash-for-childcare allowance is presented not just as a women's trap, but also a men's trap.

If it is mainly women who stay at home, this results in children having less contact with their fathers. Women once again have primary responsibility for the home and children, while we men are expected to have a career. In reality, this means that the CFC allowance is also a trap for us men, a men's trap (...) This is happening even though we know that men who take a practical parental responsibility will develop closer relationships with their children, which is

important for so many different reasons throughout life. (Mp Fredrik Lundh, the Social Democratic Party, in parliamentary debate 2006/07:342, 20 March 2007, pp.12-13, my translation)

The gains for children in terms of spending more time with their parents, are being questioned by highlighting the fact that the criteria for receiving a CFC allowance are not that the parents do not engage in paid labor, but that the child does not attend public daycare full-time. Thus, nothing guarantees that the CFC allowance will be used by parents to spend more time with their children. By interconnecting gender equality with children's well-being, it is argued that unequal gender structures cannot be weakened only through increasing people's choices.

6.4 Problem Representations and Assumptions in the Cash-for-Childcare Allowance

6.4.1 Equality as Sameness or Difference

The frames distinguished in the policy debate on the CFC allowance include problematizations concerning family choice, gender equality, children's well-being and reconciliation of work and family. The proponents of the policy put a clear emphasis on parental responsibility, and on the government's facilitating role rather than steering function in the organization of care. Thus, this discourse constructs childcare as an issue of parental choice which belongs to the private sphere, yet welfare support is still part of the solution, although not through intervention in childcare organization. This policy proposal can thus be regarded as a means of shifting caregiving responsibilities from the state to the family (Tunberger and Sigle-Rushton, 2011, p.234), that is, from the public to the private sphere. The opponents of the CFC scheme similarly frame childcare as a public/societal responsibility as well as a parental one, but from a different perspective, which is premised on the importance of public childcare services as facilitating work-family reconciliation, flexibility and gender equality.

The policy proposal problematizes current work-family reconciliation schemes, such as public childcare facilities, as inflexible, and puts emphasis on parental choice as central to children's well-being, since the policy is intended to facilitate having children and engaging in paid work, by offering support to stay at home longer with a child, but also to allow for more flexibility and parental choice in organizing childcare. These are relatively new policy objectives, which have been increasingly promoted in the last decade, and placed against the 'traditional' family policy concerns of the Social Democratic welfare

regime (Björk Eydal and Rostgaard, 2011, pp.161-162). As highlighted by Leira (1998, p.367), the rationales of parental choice and spending more time with children can be contradictory since parents can choose not to spend more time with the child, but instead use the cash benefit to pay for private care and continue to work. Further, the compensation level of the CFC benefit is proposed to be low enough not to serve as an incentive to completely leave the labor market. The underlying norm of 'paid work is what counts' is visible also here, as in the parental leave policy. This is evident in the government bill (2007/08:91, pp.28-29); the CFC allowance is not meant to replace an income earned through paid labor, which is one rationale behind the relatively low benefit level of maximum 3000SEK/month. Thus, an underlying assumption behind the low benefit level is that it should not create 'welfare dependants' that choose to 'depend' on the welfare system rather than work, which can be connected to the premise of paid labor as a taken-for-granted norm. Another underlying assumption identified here is arguably that childcare in the home is not equal to paid labor, and therefore should not be compensated as such. Taking care of a child in the home is not valued the same as participating in the labor market, which, it could be argued, devalues this work and reinforces the 'invisibility' of domestic work.

Consequently, there are contradictions in the way care work is framed by the proponents of the allowance. It can be argued that the arguments in favor of the CFC allowance construct gender equality as a model of equality based on difference rather than 'sameness', that is, a labor division that is premised on a caregiver parity model, in which women as carers are recognized (Crompton, 1999, p.4), as it is argued in the parliamentary debates that a CFC benefit will raise the value of care work, and consequently indicate that such work is important and valuable. Yet the government bill itself contradicts the argument of increasing the value of care work as a result of the scheme since the stated reason for the low benefit level is that the allowance is not meant to replace an income earned through paid labor (Government Bill, 2007/08:91, pp.28-29).

In contrast to this, the arguments put forward in opposition to the CFC allowance are problematizations premised on gender equality as sameness, that is, men and women should act and be treated the same in the private and public spheres (Leira, 1998, p.375), which entails a type of dual-earner/state-carer model (Crompton, 1999, p.206), with the additional prominence on equal sharing of parental leave and caregiving. The arguments used by the opponents of the CFC allowance often highlight traditional policy objectives that have been central to the family policy debate since the 1970s, including women's employment, gender equality in parenthood and the best interest of the child. These objectives

are attempting to promote a dual-earner/dual-carer model, even though this has not been fully realized (Björk Eydal and Rostgaard, 2011, p.163).

6.4.2 Children's Well-Being and Equality in Parenthood

As in the discussion on parental leave, the debate on equality in parenthood is centered around choice versus regulation, but unlike the parental leave debate in which there is a common goal of equal sharing of parental leave, the underlying objectives in this debate differ. This results in the debate on parental choice being discussed on two different levels, as the proponents highlight gender neutrality and people's agency, and the opponents highlight unequal gendered structures, that will have an impact on people's choices.

As highlighted in earlier, both sides of the debate problematize children's well-being and gender equality in different ways, in order to support their own argument. By constructing childcare as education for young children and as necessary for women's labor market participation, which in turn is connected to gender equality, the CFC allowance is represented as detrimental to children's equality and well-being, as well as to gender equality. The underlying assumptions of these problematization thus adhere to the 'traditional' family policy objectives of gender equality as sameness, in which women's employment and men's caregiving rights are important, and children's well-being and equal opportunities (Björk Eydal and Rostgaard, 2011, p.162).

The centre-right focus on agency is evident in the problem representations that frame the arguments of gender equality effects of the CFC scheme. According to this argument, since the policy is gender-neutral, the gender (in)equality outcomes of the policy depend on the actions and choices of individuals, since both men and women can choose to use the allowance. Further, it is represented as promoting gender equality, by valuing care work in the home. This emphasizes individual or private responsibility in relation to public/societal responsibility. The logics underpinning this construction of choices regarding divisions of labor to some extent disregards the ways in which gendered structures function to constrain or shape choices (Crompton, 2006, p.12). This suggests that this problematization rests on an agency/structure binary that gives precedence to agency (see Bacchi, 2009a), thus failing to problematize gender equality. This results in silences not only on the gender equality goals that are central to Swedish family policy, but also on the apparent divergence from a dual-earner/dual-carer vision by promoting a caregiver parity model, as well as on the gendered outcomes of supposedly gender-neutral policies (see Lister, 2009, pp.259-260; Leira

(2002, pp.87-88; Nyberg, 2010, p.70). The problematizations of the organization of care as an issue of parental choice and children's well-being in this case function as a way of legitimizing these silences on gender equality. Further, by framing children's well-being as a parental responsibility, and the organizing of care as a parental choice, this results in silences on issues of children's equal opportunities, concerns that are raised by the left-wing opposition.

7. Concluding Discussion: Gender Equality in the Parental Leave Insurance and the Cash-for-Childcare Allowance

Comparing policy problematizations and solutions, as well as constructions of gender equality, in the policy debates on parental leave and the cash-for-childcare allowance, certain reoccurring frames can be identified, which have varying functions in different arguments. In both the policy discourses, the tension between individual choice and regulation becomes apparent, which can be linked to underlying assumptions of structure and agency, and the private/public divide in terms of the organization of care. Consequently, the assumptions that underpin the problem representations distinguishable in the discussions are coming from two different perspectives. In the parental leave debate, proponents of the 'freedom of choice' frame, the centre-right parties, problematize gender inequality in parenthood as an issue of agency, by proposing a solution that offers parents the choice and incentive to share parental leave, while proponents of additional reserved months construct this as a structural problem, a societal issue that should be 'solved' on a societal level, by reserving leave for both the mother and father. In terms of the gender equality bonus debate, structural obstacles to equality in parenthood are recognized by both the proponents and the opponents in the parliamentary debates, but the problematizations in the policy itself, only offers a solution that is directed at peoples' agency.

Thus, the dichotomy of agency versus structure underpins the different constructions of inequality in parenthood as a personal responsibility issue or as a societal/structural responsibility issue. From a gender systems standpoint, talking about individual choice as separate from the context in which a choice is being made is problematic, as "gendered structures both describe and impose an order on individuals, but are nevertheless developed and interpreted by these individuals" (Crompton, 1999, p.7). Thus, problematizing gender inequality either as an issue of choice or an issue of structures, risks resulting in policy constructions that fail to problematize how gender relations are shaped by contexts on the one

hand, and on the other, how structures are negotiated and changed by individuals. In the CFC allowance discourse, the proponents' focus on agency results in the failure to problematize gender equality in the policy proposal, which leads to silences on the impact of gendered structures on individual choice. Instead, the policy is represented as gender neutral, which is somewhat a return to the heavily criticized gender neutral discourse that dominated family policy in the 1970s, during which the divergences in men's and women's living situations, and the gendered outcomes that such differences resulted in, were largely overlooked (Lundqvist and Roman, 2010, pp.77-78; Lundqvist, 2011, p.134).

The 'problem' of gender inequality is something that all parties participating in the debates agree upon, yet, as discussed by Magnusson (2000), it is when practical solutions to achieve gender equality are discussed that divergences and contradictions are revealed. These divergences include whether policies should be aimed at structures or individuals, such as the reserved parental leave compared to the gender equality bonus, but also what type of gender equality model that should be promoted, which is revealed when comparing the constructions of gender equality in the parental leave discourse, including the gender equality bonus, and the CFC discourse. While the reserved parental leave and the gender equality bonus differ in their approaches, the problematization of gender equality is in both cases related to men's and women's equal participation in the labor market as an underlying premise for gender equality, which means that, although the gender equality bonus is represented as a parental choice issue, the policy objective in the policy itself, more equal sharing of parental leave, is in line with the 'traditional' goals of the Social Democratic welfare regime, even if the problematization and solution concerning this issue differs (Tunberger and Sigle-Rushton, 2011, p.234). Accordingly, increasing women's labor market participation and men's parental leave take-up are considered important in order to realize the goals of gender equality that are part of Swedish family policy. In the CFC discourse, on the other hand, one parent is encouraged to exit the labor market for a longer period of time, a solution that is arguably underpinned by some form of breadwinner/caregiver or caregiver parity vision. Yet there are contradictions also within this policy proposal, as it is represented as a reform that values care work in the private sphere, yet the value of care work is not equal to that of paid labor, revealing that the dominant normative construction of employment is to some extent undermining such a care arrangement. The different problematizations identified in the parental leave and the CFC allowance suggest that the premises underpinning the constructions of gender equality in these two policy discourses are somewhat contradictory, since gender equality in the parental leave debate is that of sameness connected to a vision of

the dual-earner/dual-carer model, while gender equality in the CFC allowance arguably adheres to some form of breadwinner/caregiver parity model.

Exploring the frame of children's well-being is particularly interesting when comparing the discourses on parental leave and the CFC allowance. While this frame has been a constituent of Swedish family policy for a long time (Björk Eydal and Rostgaard, 2011, p.176), it takes on new meanings in the parental choice agenda promoted by the centre-right coalition in the recent decade. The best interest of the child, or the child rights perspective, functions as some sort of moral signifier that none of the parties wants to oppose since they do not want to appear as being against children's well-being, which makes it useful in order to support different arguments. This is particularly evident in the framings of gender equality in the CFC debates, in which parental choice and children's well-being take priority over gender equality in the frames put forward by the proponents of the allowance. In this case, the use of children's well-being becomes an argument for disregarding gender equality, that is to say, a family policy goal that is not concerned by the gender equality objectives. In contrast to this, the child rights perspective is also referred to when arguing for gender equality by reserving additional parental leave months in the parental leave discourse. In the problematizations regarding inequality in parenthood, children's rights to both parents is an underlying premise that functions as an argument for fathers' increased involvement in caregiving.

In conclusion, exploring the problematizations and underlying assumptions used in the parental leave insurance and cash-for-childcare allowance, and how such problematizations construct gender equality, the results of this study reveal contradicting problem representations of gender equality embedded in the Swedish family policy discourse. In two central reforms of the parental leave insurance, reserved leave months and the gender equality bonus, gender equality is primarily problematized as unequally shared parental leave, which is an issue that impedes women's labor market opportunities. Women's labor market participation and inclusion based on equal opportunities and treatment for men and women, forms a central part of this construction of gender equality. The frame of equality in parenthood is interconnected with several other frames; work-family reconciliation, parental choice, and a child rights perspective. In order to facilitate reconciliation of work and family for both women and men, and in order for children to establish a close relationship with both parents, supporting men's caregiving opportunities and women's labor market opportunities is in focus in the problem representations. In what ways this support should promote equal sharing of leave differs in the two reforms, however. While the frame of parental choice is used as an argument for the gender equality bonus and increased equality in parenthood

through individual agency, the reserved parental leave is primarily directed at structures, by dividing part of the parental insurance between the parents. These different policy solutions result in tensions between problematizations in the policy discourse concerning parental leave. Exploring implicit assumptions of these problematizations also reveals tensions within the reforms, as the gender equality bonus constructs agency both as a solution and as a problem, by implying that an incentive is needed in order for parents to share parental leave more equally. Each reform fails to problematize one side of the structure/agency binary: the reserved parental leave disregards agency while the gender equality bonus overlooks the impact of structures on individual choice.

In the debate on the cash-for-childcare allowance, the proponents of the reform use the frame of children's well-being in order to construct the organization of care as an issue of parental choice, which consequently necessitates a policy solution that reduces government regulation of childcare arrangements. By constructing parental choice as crucial to children's well-being, the gender equality effects of this reform are not being problematized, instead, the gender equality bonus is referred to as a solution to unequal division of parental leave. In contrast, the opponents of the CFC allowance highlight societal responsibility regarding the organization of care, which is constructed as a key factor for gender equality. In this problematization of the frame, children's well-being is connected to public childcare facilities, as these are regarded as a source of education and development. Exploring underlying assumptions on which these problematizations are based, uncovers a public/private dichotomy which suggests that there are tensions between the attempt to raise the value of care work in the home on one hand, and the uncontested norm of labor market participation on the other. Thus, although it could be argued that the CFC allowance is attempting to construct gender equality based on difference, which promotes some form of caregiver parity model, the low value of care proposed in the policy contests such a model. There are also contradictions between the underlying premises of gender equality in the CFC policy and the construction of gender equality as sameness, which entails a family model of dual earners, used by the opponents of the CFC allowance, as they argue that the allowance counteracts gender equality by obstructing equal division of labor in the home and in the labor market.

Placing the identified problem representations and underlying assumptions of gender equality in family policy in the wider perspective of the Swedish welfare state, the norm of paid labor and full employment for men and women that has been part of the welfare state for a long period of time, is a dominant and uncontested aspect in the frames identified

in the discourses, which functions as an underlying assumption in several ways. This uncontested norm gives meaning to the problematization of child-rearing as obstructive to paid labor, which consequently becomes an issue that requires government support. It also functions to undermine the form of breadwinner/carer model that is to some extent promoted in the CFC allowance, as it places a low value on care work in the home, visible in the hierarchical dichotomy of employment and care work, in which employment takes precedence over caregiving. Further, the organization of care as a shared responsibility, in line with 'traditional' values belonging to the social democratic welfare model, functions as an underlying premise in the problematizations explored in the parental leave policy, even though the solutions to the problematization of unequally shared parental leave differ, in terms of being primarily aimed either at structures or individuals. Yet the frame of parental choice, both in the parental leave debates and in the CFC discourse, attempts to shift responsibility back to the private sphere, by emphasizing diversity in terms of the wishes and needs of families.

This taken-for-granted assumption of employment is also identifiable in the problematizations on gender equality. Gender equality on the premise of sameness and a dual-earner/dual-carer vision has promoted fathers' involvement in caregiving, which adheres to these enduring norms of full employment for men as well as women in the Swedish welfare state, visible in women's recognition as breadwinners and the shifting of childcare to the public sphere. At the same time, tensions between structures and subjects in the discourse result in policies that constrain problematizations as well as solutions, such as individuals' agency to some extent being constructed as both the problem and the solution in the gender equality bonus. In contrast, the cash-for-childcare allowance somewhat contradicts this by arguing for the best interest of the child in relation to family choice, disregarding gendered structures in its policy problematizations, and by attempting to shift the organization and responsibility of childcare back to the private sphere of the family. The result is that the frame of children's well-being or best interest is used in order to promote a choice agenda that does not fully adhere to the gender equality goals that are central to Swedish family policy. Consequently, it is possible to conclude that the policy reforms seen in the past decades are characterized by contradictions, between as well as within policies, which mirror the ambiguities and paradoxes that have been part of the gender equality discourse and development of family policy in the Swedish welfare state for a long time. The choice agenda that has been part of family policy in the past decade results in a somewhat divided policy discourse, which diverges from the family policy goal of gender equality as dual-

earning/dual-caregiving, a divergence that is legitimized by the problematization of parental choice as crucial to children's well-being.

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