

**Work-life balance among solo-living managers and
professionals: Exploring dynamics of structure, culture
and agency**

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The candidate confirms that the work submitted is her own and that appropriate credit has been given where reference has been made to the work of others.

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Abstract

One result of substantial demographic and social change in the UK in recent decades has been a marked increase in the proportion of the population that live alone – including amongst the working-age population. Whilst the trend has often been linked to arguments about increased freedom and choice in modern society, and a second demographic transition (Lesthaeghe & vande Kaa, 1986), the possible influence of structures and cultures should not be overlooked, nor the experiences of solo-living individuals assumed to be without problems or constraint. Of particular interest in this thesis is the influence of the modern labour market and organisations which can be ‘greedy’ (Coser, 1974) when it comes to employee time and energy. Whilst there is a considerable body of knowledge on the work-life interface, research has focused almost entirely on employees in family households (Casper et al, 2007a), meaning very little is known about the situation for those who live alone.

This thesis is based on the work-life attitudes and experiences of 36 young managers and professionals who live alone, and adopts a critical realist approach to analysing the interplay of structure, culture and agency over time (Archer, 1996). Following the identification of a range of work-life balance issues experienced by participants, and variation in levels of work-life satisfaction on the basis of participant gender and age, two theoretical lenses are used to explore the data. Firstly, distributive justice theory is used to understand variations in participant perceptions of the fairness of work-life balance support allocation in their organisations, and personal sense of entitlement to support. Secondly, broader elements of participant work-life experience are explored via the lens of individualisation theory, as conceptualised by Beck (1992) and Beck & Beck-Gernsheim (2002).

The overall thesis is that young solo-living managers and professionals are both enabled and constrained by their structural and cultural environment. Whilst these individuals are in a relatively privileged position when it comes to career progression, they experience a number of constraints to the achievement of work-life balance. Whether participants are satisfied with their work-life experience or dissatisfied, there is little evidence of challenge to the structural/cultural environment – which is explained via the inclusion in a temporally embedded conceptualisation of agency (Emirbayer and Mische, 1998) the issue of risk, an issue that is central to something here termed ‘gendered individualisation’.

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List of abbreviations

DJR	Distributive Justice Rule
BNIM	Biographical Narrative Interpretive Method
SQUIN	Single Question Designed to Induce Narrative

1. Introduction

The single-person household has been identified as the fastest growing household type in modern society throughout most of the developed world (Sorrentino, 1990). Solo-living can be defined in a number of ways, which will be discussed in the next chapter, but for the purpose of this study, it refers to one person living alone, or a person who does not live with a partner or family member, and does not share a living/sitting room or at least one meal a day with another resident (Census, 2001). Whilst some explanation for the growing prominence of solo-living comes from the ageing population, the trend is also evident in the working-age population. The latter has been linked to a number of economic and social trends – including lower levels of marriage, marriage occurring later in life, reduced fertility levels, and increased levels of divorce – that have resulted in more diverse lifestyles and an increase in both the total number of households, and the level of transitions from one type of household to another (Odgen & Hall, 2004).

Some see the growing prominence of solo-living in a positive light, signalling increased freedom for individuals to live their lives in a way that they choose. For example, solo-living was cited as the first of the ‘ten ideas that are changing life’ in a 2012 *The Time Magazine* cover in the US, with the author sociologist Eric Klinenberg drawing on his publication *Going Solo: The Extraordinary Rise and Surprising Appeal of Living Alone*, to depict the living situation as a platform for self-realisation, freedom, and social engagement. From this perspective, solo-living can be seen to be part of a wider transition in society towards more self-actualisation oriented lives, as in the notion of a second demographic transition (Lesthaeghe & vande Kaa, 1986). This theory links reduced fertility and a range of new living arrangements to not only changing socio-economic conditions and/or rising female employment, but to the expression of secular and anti-authoritarian sentiments by better educated individuals and a ‘Maslowian preference drift’ (Lesthaeghe, 2010:3) – suggesting that people have moved from a preoccupation with material needs (subsistence, shelter, physical and economic security) to high-order, non-material needs, including self-actualisation.

It is possible to see the trend in a different light however, with solo-living not necessarily the product of individual choice, but rather the product of circumstance and/or the structural and cultural environment in which individuals are situated. This speaks to a key debate in sociological enquiry: the relative significance of agency, structure and culture in explaining social phenomena. The central concepts and the nature of their relationship will be explored in the literature review, but put very simply, agency refers to the capacity of individuals to

make their own independent choices, whilst structure and culture refer to the recurrent patterned arrangements in society that enable and/or constrain this choice.

A theory that engages with issues of structure, culture and agency – and that has been cited in connection with some of the demographic and social trends noted above – is individualisation theory. Whilst a number of different conceptualisations of individualisation have been put forward by the key theorists in the field (including Ulrich Beck; Elizabeth Beck-Gernsheim; Anthony Giddens; Scott Lash and Zigmund Bauman), a central tenet is that individuals in late modernity are dis-embedded from the social institutions that tended to prescribe a certain life course at the time of simple modernity, these being the nuclear family, class, religion, and local community. This means that each individual is granted more freedom to decide their own path in life. According to Beck (1992) and Beck & Beck-Gernsheim's (2002) conceptualisation of individualisation however, individuals are simultaneously re-embedded in a newly prominent social institution – the labour market. Whilst individuals enjoy a certain freedom over their life course, they are required to navigate the structures and cultures of the labour market, and must take responsibility for the decisions that they make. This would suggest that the labour market/world of work is an important factor to consider when seeking an understanding of the experiences of solo-living individuals of working age.

One argument that has been made in relation to the world of work is that there is an increase in the prevalence of 'greedy organisations' (Coser, 1974) in modern society – organisations which demand considerable time and energy investment from their employees (Allan et al. 1999; Appelbaum et al., 2000; Burchielli et al. 2008; Green, 2001; Schor, 1992). It has been said that individuals are increasingly required to embody the 'ideal worker' (Acker, 1990) in order to be successful – someone with 'full-time availability...a strong work orientation and no responsibilities in life other than the ones required by the organization... [thus able to] go the extra mile... for example by working more than full-time and/or by taking on extra responsibilities and tasks' (Mescher et al. 2010: 24). It is possible that an increase in solo-living could be linked to such work requirements, if individuals have less time outside of work to build and maintain the personal relationships required for successful cohabitation.

When it comes to considering the relationship between employment and other areas of individuals' lives, research and policy interest falls under the broad banner of 'work-life balance' – although there are considerable conceptual debates around this term which will be explored in the next chapter. Work-life balance can be broadly defined as a situation in which 'an individual [has] sufficient control and autonomy over where, when and how they work to

enable them to fulfil their responsibilities both inside and outside paid work' (Visser & Williams, 2006: 14). The issue at the heart of this thesis is that despite the changes in the household profile of the UK population, and specifically the rise in solo-living amongst the working-age population, work-life balance research and interest is still focused almost entirely on the experience of employees who live in traditional family households – with cohabiting partners and children (Casper et al. 2007a). This means we know very little about work-life balance for those who live alone.

This thesis aims to address this omission, and also to explore some of the issues raised above. Via biographical narrative interviewing, it explores the work-life balance experiences of a group of 36 young (24-44 year old) managerial and professional employees who live alone and do not have children. It highlights a number of work-life balance issues that are experienced by the sample, including four issues of specific relevance to solo-living employees that have not previously been identified in the literature.

The thesis also explores participant attitudes towards the work-life balance provisions available in their organisation and how work-life balance is conceptualised in their working environment. A key issue here is perceptions of fairness. If organisations conceptualise work-life balance in a similar way to much of the research – conflating work-life balance with work-family balance – then solo-living employees might feel this is unfair, leading to a backlash (Flynn, 1996; Korabik & Warner, 2009; Kossek & Van Dyne, 2008; Young, 1999). Distributive justice theory is used to explore such issues, which refers to how individuals make judgements about the fairness of resource allocation. Attention is paid to the prevalence of each of the main distributive justice rules (DJRs) that have been identified in the literature (Deutsch, 1975): resource allocation on the basis of equality (everyone should get the same), equity (those who put more in should get more out), or need (those who most need the resource should have a greater share). It is argued that the national legislative framework has an influence on the DJRs used by both organisations and also solo-living participants when considering work-life balance support allocation.

Throughout the thesis, attention is paid to the interaction of agency, structure and culture when it comes to the work-life experiences of the group of solo-living managers and professionals. Individualisation theory proves to be a useful explanatory framework for understanding experiences, but an argument is made that individualisation is experienced differently on the basis of participant gender and age, with male and younger female participants emphasising the positive freedoms associated with their work and life situation;

whilst older female participants are more aware of the risks associated with such freedom, as well as the structural and cultural constraints to their decision-making ability.

The following two chapters provide a detailed review of the literature that is relevant to this thesis. Chapter two focuses on the conceptualisation and prevalence of solo-living; research into the work-life interface; and the application of distribute justice to the issue of work-life balance. Chapter three then focuses on how we can theorise the issue of work-life balance for solo-living employees sociologically, focusing on the structure, culture, agency debate and theories of individualisation. The chapter concludes with the research questions that derive from the review and form the basis for the empirical data collection.

Chapter four then sets out the methodological approach adopted – a small-scale qualitative study, using semi-structured interviews to explore the experience and attitudes of 36 solo-living individuals who work as managers or professionals in a range of different industries, mainly in the Greater Manchester area. The chapter sets out the philosophical position, research design approach, and the rationale for the various decisions made.

Chapters five, six and seven then present the key findings of the research. These chapters explore the specific work-life issues reported by the research participants as solo-living managers and professionals; their perceptions of the work-life balance provisions offered by their organisations; and variations in experience and attitudes within the sample. Key conceptual tools utilised in these chapters are distributive justice theory (Deutsch, 1975), and individualisation, as conceptualised by Beck (1992) and Beck & Beck-Gernsheim (2002).

Chapter eight draws together the various strands of the thesis in a discussion, considering what the findings tell us about the nature of participant agency, and the interaction of structure, culture and agency over time. Chapter nine provides the conclusions – setting out the contributions to knowledge made by the thesis; suggesting implications for practice; evaluating the strengths and limitations of the research; and making suggestions for further research.

2. Literature Review (part one): Solo-living and work-life balance

This first literature review chapter aims to establish the state of knowledge on the themes of solo-living and work-life balance at the time that the research project was conducted (2011-2013). It also aims to identify gaps, debates and contradictions in the literature, to strengthen the rationale for the research questions at the heart of the thesis – which will conclude chapter three. The first section considers the solo-living domestic situation, and some of the issues involved in the conceptualisation and study of the subject. The second section explores the current state of interest in the intersection of the work and home domains. A range of concepts are introduced, with a focus on the term currently in vogue in research, government agenda and organisational policies – that of ‘work-life balance’. The concept is not unproblematic however, and the main issue of relevance to this research is discussed in detail – the frequent conflation of ‘life’ with ‘family’. This leads on to a discussion of the fairness of organisational work-life balance provisions, and an argument for the utility of the distributive justice theory for exploring perceptions of fairness. As well as providing a critique of the work-life balance concept, the chapter also sets out some of the main work-life balance issues that have been identified in the literature, including long working hours and the blurring of the boundaries between work and the rest of life.

2.1. Solo-living

2.1.1. Conceptualising solo-living

This thesis aims to shed some light on the work-life experience of ‘solo-living’ managers and professionals. Whilst appearing straightforward, this is not an entirely clear term, and so it is important at the outset to lay out the conceptualisation of ‘solo-living’ used in this thesis. The definition of ‘solo-living’ selected was that used in the 2001 UK Census – one person living alone, or a person who does not live with a partner or family member, and does not share a living/sitting room or at least one meal a day with another resident. An individual living in a house-share arrangement was therefore classed as solo-living provided they had no partnership or familial relationship with other residents and did not share living space or meals.

In general, there are three main categories of single-person household: widows and widowers who have no cohabiting dependents; people who have divorced or separated from long-term cohabiting partners, where any children are living elsewhere; and the broad group of

individuals who have yet to or do not intend to get married, cohabit and/or have children. Research has indicated that solo-living can be a transitory state. The British Household Panel Survey tracks individuals at annual intervals, and between 1991 and 2001, Wassoff et al. (2005) found that a significantly larger proportion of participants had lived alone at some time in the adult life course than the proportion living alone at any one time. They also found that transitions in to, and out of, solo-living were much more common for people of working age than for those above 65 years. Nevertheless, it was noted that 30 per cent of those who had ever lived alone had done so throughout the 10 years covered in the study – suggesting that there is some permanence to the lifestyle for a large number of individuals.

There are two main ambiguities when it comes to conceptualising solo-living, which are important to discuss here – both to set the parameters for the current research project, and also to bear in mind when reviewing the literature and making sense of secondary data. The first was noted by Palmer (2006), and is that ‘living alone’ is not the same as ‘being single’. He noted that important groups that are ‘single’ but not ‘living alone’ include concealed households (adults living with parents) and lone parents (single but living with dependent children). There are also individuals that choose to live alone, despite being in a committed relationship. Several terms have been proposed to describe different non-cohabiting relationships, including ‘commuter marriages’ (Gerstel & Gross, 1982), ‘weekend couples’ (Kim, 2001), ‘distance relationships’ (Holmes, 2004), and ‘living apart together’ or ‘LAT’ (Levin, 2004). Duncan & Phillips (2010: 133) reported that around 10 per cent of the total British adult population fall into the LAT category, a ‘figure which equates to over a quarter of all those not married or cohabiting’.

This distinction between solo-living and being single has not always been evident in research. Roseneil (2006:1.1) noted that social researchers have tended to operate with a ‘tripartite model of relationships in which people are single, cohabiting or married’. She noted that it was not until 1998 that the British Household Panel Survey examined non-residential partnerships, which were found to be prevalent. According to the results, 34 per cent of men, and 42 per cent of women under 35 years of age who had never been married nor had children were in such relationships.

Another important point is that solo-living is not the same as being ‘without a family’, and individuals do not necessarily consider their family to be any less significant just because they do not share a house. This was acknowledged by Wassoff et al. (2005: 222) when they stated that ‘although those who live in one person households are, by definition, not in ‘family

households', this does not mean that they see themselves as outside family boundaries'. Again, this distinction has not always been evident in the literature. Bien et al. (1992) observed that whilst the household and the family are different social entities, the two terms are frequently used in inconsistent and overlapping ways in both research and official census data – making it difficult to document true social trends. They mirrored Wassoff et al. (2005), and criticised the specific definition of family that is used in German Census data – based on living together – which they believe suggests that those who live alone are isolated, which may not be accurate. It is worth noting that in the empirical research of both studies, little difference was found between solo-livers and other groups in terms of the number and density of their social interactions, including those with family.

Another factor to consider is that solo-living is not necessarily a constant state. In a world where family breakdown is becoming more prevalent, there is an increasing trend for individuals to live alone for part of their time (i.e. during the working week) but perhaps have children living with them for some weekends or holidays. When researching solo-living individuals therefore, it is important to bear in mind the many individual differences – in terms of age, gender, background, relationship status, family situation, and reasons for living alone – and to avoid treating solo-living individuals as a homogenous group.

Considering such heterogeneity in the 'solo-living' group as a whole, it made sense to limit the current research study to a more manageable and well-defined population, which was 24-44 year old professional and managerial workers, who were currently living alone and had yet to have children. The rationale for this choice is set out in the methodology chapter (chapter four). It is acknowledged that the group selected for this research was quite specific, and that it was not possible to make generalisations onto the solo-living population as a whole, but it was felt that the more tightly defined group made the data more manageable and meaningful, and it is hoped that further research could be undertaken on other occupational groups, or different cohorts of solo-livers, such as older workers or widow(er)s.

2.1.2. Research on solo-living

When it comes to research into the issue of solo-living, much of the focus has been on the growing prevalence of the domestic situation, and the reasons for this. As stated in the Introduction, the single-person household has been identified as the fastest growing household type in modern society throughout most of the developed world (Sorrentino, 1990).

The most reliable information on British trends in household composition and demographics are found in publications from the Office for National Statistics, especially the longitudinal data sets that track large nationally-representative samples over time. Such sources support Sorrentino's argument. While the population of Great Britain grew by five per cent over three decades to 2000, the number of households with one occupant grew by 31 per cent (Social Trends, 2003). The most recent statistics report 7.7 million single-occupancy households (Census, 2011), up from around 1.7 in 1961, reflecting a climate where 'more people spend time living on their own, whether before, after, or instead of marriage or cohabitation' (Social Trends, 2009).

The trend has been partially explained in demographic terms – in relation to an aging population, and the likelihood that one partner will outlive their spouse. Importantly however, the trend is also seen in the working-age population. According to Palmer (2006), the number of people of working age who live alone has trebled since 1971 – from one million to 3.5 million – even though the number of multi-adult households of working age has remained broadly unchanged. According to Lewis (2005), it is particularly pronounced amongst young-to-middle aged workers (those aged 24-44), with a reported five-fold increase in solo-living for this group over the thirty years leading to her publication. It has also been seen to be more prominent for young men than women (Smith et al. 2005); amongst higher socio-economic groups (Hall et al. 1999); and in urban areas – with over 40 per cent of households in parts of Central London, 39 per cent of households in Manchester and 33 per cent of households in Birmingham, containing people who live on their own (Chandler et al. 2004).

A number of contributory factors have been identified for the increasing prevalence of solo-living in working-age individuals. There has been an increase in the number of individuals attending university (HESA, 2011), and so many students have experienced the freedom of living alone early in life; a single lifestyle is considered more socially acceptable (Duncan & Phillips, 2008); cohabitation and marriage tend to occur later in life (Simpson, 2005); there are increased opportunities for women in the workplace; divorce is easier and is considered more socially acceptable (Finch, 2002); and, as stated above, there is an increase in the numbers of non-cohabiting relationships.

While the rising prominence of solo-living has been the subject of research and debate in relation to several fields of social policy – including housing, urban planning and transport (i.e. Bennet & Dixon, 2006; Deka, 2014), elder care (i.e. Portacolone, 2011; Rolls et al, 2011); health (i.e. Demey et al, 2013; Haw & Hawton, 2011); and energy consumption (i.e. Gram-Hanssen et

al. 2009) – there seems to have been less interest in the phenomena from an employment perspective. Studies on the experiences of solo-living and single people in relation to a range of issues including employment have come closest, but many of these have been speculative opinion pieces, with only a handful of robust empirical investigations.

Wassoff et al. (2005) looked at data already collected in British and Scottish long-term surveys to explore patterns in living alone (around factors such as age, gender and ethnicity) and trends over time. There was some focus in the research on how solo-living related to patterns of social support and personal life, but there was no explicit focus in the study on employment or work-life balance issues. Lewis' (2005) Unilever Family Report charted the rise in solo-living (identifying patterns, for example in relation to age and gender) and also used interviews to investigate the reasons people cited for living alone, the financial implications, and the impact the arrangement had on family and social relations. Again however, there was no explicit focus on employment or work-life balance issues.

Other authors have considered the general life experiences of single people, often women. Lewis & Borders (1995), for example looked at what factors influence the life satisfaction of single, middle-aged professional women in America. While job satisfaction was one of the factors included, alongside things like locus of control, extent of regrets about their circumstance, satisfaction with their sex life and leisure activities, the study did not look into work-life conflict or balance issues. This study was very similar to the earlier work of Loewenstein et al. (1981).

In the UK context, Macvarish (2006) investigated the experiences of solo-living heterosexual women aged 34-50, who had never been married or had children and were currently single. As well as exploring how these women negotiated their identity and what they thought of being single, interviews also covered the individual's work and employment history, their daily lives and their future plans. When discussing the findings relating to the employment sphere, the author covers work importance for these women (which is reported to be generally low, with only one respondent claiming a strong personal attachment to her job), but again omits any reference to work-life conflict or balance issues.

Whilst there has been little research conducted on the work-life interface for individuals who live alone, there is a vast literature on the work-life interface in general, and it to this that the focus now turns.

2.2. The work-life interface

2.2.1. Introduction, main concepts

Interest in the interface between the work and non-work domains has been evident for both academics and practitioners for many years, and a variety of terms have been developed to discuss the nature of the interface. Edwards & Rothbard (2000) call these terms 'linking mechanisms' – 'a relationship between a work construct and a family construct' (2000: 180), or in other words a concept for explaining the interplay between work and family (or in this instance non-work) issues. They note that 'work-family researchers have identified numerous mechanisms linking work and family (Burke & Greenglass, 1987; Evans & Bartolome, 1986; Lambert, 1990; Payton-Miyazaki & Brayfield, 1976; Zedeck, 1992)' (Edwards & Rothbard, 2000: 179) which include balance; congruence; spillover; resource-drain; conflict; enrichment; and segmentation. The most common linking mechanism used for discussing the interface is 'work-life balance'. In simple terms, the ideal of work-life balance is for 'an individual to have sufficient control and autonomy over where, when and how they work to enable them to fulfil their responsibilities both inside and outside paid work' (Visser & Williams, 2006: 14). This is a suitable definition to use in this research project, as it does not limit the type of responsibilities outside of work. In the 2000 Work-Life Balance Baseline Survey (Hogarth et al. 2001), the topic was explored in relation to organisation policies and practices relating to one or more of the following: some flexibility with respect to hours of work; the option of working from home; leave arrangements that allow people to meet non-work commitments or realise non-work goals; workplace facilities to assist employees to attend work; and/or communication and consultation between employers and employees over relevant issues. These align with the practices discussed in practitioner publications at the time of writing (i.e. CIPD, 2014).

McMillan et al. (2011) note that traditionally, work-life balance has been defined and understood with reference to two other linking mechanisms, one denoting problems between the domains, and one denoting benefits. These are 'work-life conflict' and 'work-life enrichment' respectively. Attention has also been given to the direction of influence – whether work-to-home, or home-to-work.

Much of the focus in the literature has been on work-to-home work-life conflict. Work-life conflict is grounded in role theory, with inter-role conflict being defined as 'the simultaneous occurrence of two or more role expectations such that compliance with one would make compliance with the other more difficult' (Katz & Kahn, 1978: 204). In the case of work-to-

home work-life conflict, demands at work are seen to result in problems in meeting responsibilities in the home domain, often concerning childcare. Three distinct types of conflict are identified in the literature: time-based, strain-based and behaviour-based conflict (Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985), with time-based being acknowledged as the most prevalent (Hammer & Thompson, 2003). The conflict concept is grounded in scarcity theory, where the total amount of time and/or energy available to an individual is seen to be fixed, with excess expenditure in one field meaning less is available for another. Work-life enrichment comes from the opposite angle, seeing resources as cumulative, so that involvement in more than one domain is beneficial to an individual (Greenhaus & Powell, 2006), with for example skills learned in the work domain helping an individual manage personal responsibilities.

Whilst a review of the literature on the full range of concepts is beyond the scope of this review, it is important to understand the key developments in relation to the central balance concept, and the terminology used in the field over time. This is covered in the next section.

2.2.2. The development of the work-life balance concept

Concepts such as work-life balance are attempts at understanding and framing common aspects of social phenomena, which can then be used to inform and shape organisation policy. There is no fact/reality when it comes to such phenomena, and as Fleetwood (2007: 352) notes, in the case of work-life balance, it is unclear whether the concept refers to 'an objective state of affairs, a subjective experience, perception or feeling; an actuality or an aspiration; a discourse or a practice; a metaphor for flexible working; a metaphor for the gendered division of labour; or a metaphor for some other political agenda'.

This idea was picked up by Cohen et al. (2009: 229), when they set out to critique the prevailing metaphor of work-life balance that, in their view, was 'fast becoming a kind of cultural shorthand for a rather ill-defined set of lifestyle choices and workplace responses'. The authors acknowledge the potential of the work-life balance concept, but argue that it has been inadequately defined, and has become somewhat reified as it has become more common – something that simply exists and provides an easy answer (perpetuating prevailing practices), rather than something that should 'challenge, provoke and illuminate' (Cohen et al. 2009: 230). This critique is very important to the current research. If work-life balance has been conceptualised by governments and organisations in a limited way, in relation to a

limited section of workers, rather than something that needs to be constantly explored and developed, then the impact of any initiatives introduced as a result are likely to be limited too.

The work-life balance concept has evolved over time in an attempt to be more inclusive, but it is debatable how successful this has been. In the 1970s, with an increase in the numbers of mothers in the workforce, employers started to acknowledge the issue that many workers had responsibilities outside of the workplace that needed their time and energy. This led to pioneering organisations such as Deloitte & Touche and IBM beginning to change their internal workplace policies and procedures (Bird, 2006). It has been noted however that the responsibilities outside work that were acknowledged at the time were mainly linked to childcare and so the focus was very much on work-family balance (Bird, 2006). IBM's early provision, for example, was a dependent care programme (IBM website), whilst others started to introduce maternity leave, flexitime, home-based work and child-care referral (Bird, 2006).

During the late 1980s and 1990s, concern grew about employee burnout and stress in connection with workplace changes, and scholars and organisations became aware that the notion of conflict was not just an issue for working mothers, but also men, couples, single people, and whole organisations. Young (1999: 34) for example challenged the assumption that family was the 'primary force that pulls employees mentally, emotionally, or physically away from the workplace'. She cited evidence, including Campbell and Koblenz's extensive 1997 study of Baxter Healthcare employees, that confirms the assertion that dependent care was not the only – or at some work sites, even the main – reason for employee work-life conflict (Young, 1999: 34). She noted that when asked about the main factors that limit availability for work, respondents cited personal preference, spouse's work, fitness, pursuit of education, a second job and commuting, as well as child and elder care.

This is powerful evidence that a shift in terminology, and conceptualisation, was needed – from the idea of 'family' concerns to general 'life' concerns. Lewis & Campbell (2008) noted the introduction of the term 'work-life balance' in the political realm in the publication in March 2000 of a DfEE discussion paper: 'Work-Life Balance: Changing Patterns in a Changing World'. The emphasis in the document was very different from earlier government 'family-friendly' policies:

'Some people talk of making jobs 'family-friendly'. We do indeed want to help employees who have family responsibilities. But we also want to see benefits for other people in work and for employers. So we are using the term 'work-life balance'. Good practice in work-life balance benefits everyone' (DfEE, 2000: para.1.3)

This marked the start of the British government's work-life balance campaign, part of the agenda for employment relations policy and led by the Department of Trade and Industry (DTI). The focus was to be very much on tackling the long-hours culture, targeting sectors with acute work-life balance problems and providing support and guidance for everyone. The applicability to all of the work-life balance concept has been further justified in research findings that have linked work-life imbalance to negative consequences for employees, organisations and society as whole, linked to individual physical and mental ill-health (Eby et al. 2005; Van Steenbergen & Ellemers, 2009) and burnout and psychological strain (Allen et al. 2000).

Daniels et al. (2000) documented a four-stage development process in terms of organisational work-life balance culture. At Stage 1 (Grass Roots), work-life balance provisions are limited to the issue of child-care – responding to the demands of working mothers. At Stage 2 (Human Resources) there is recognition of the broader benefits provided by introducing work-life balance policies. At the third stage (Culture Change) provisions are broadened to cater for the work-life concerns of all employees, and it is acknowledged that work-life balance policies will only work in a culture that is fully supportive of their aims. Finally, at Stage 4 (Work Redesign) there is a real awareness of how organisational objectives and employee needs can be simultaneously satisfied, and so work-life balance is integral to the aims of the organisation (Kinman & McDowell, 2009).

An important question is whether the reality of work-life balance over the last ten years has matched this evolved rhetoric – from work-family to work-life balance, and from ‘grass roots’ cultures to ‘work redesign’. Sadly, it seems not – with ‘life’ and ‘family’ conflation remaining evident in a number of different domains, including academic literature, organisational practice, the media, and to an extent in legislation. The next section will provide evidence in relation to each of these domains.

2.2.3. On-going work-life and work-family conflation and issues of distributive justice

In terms of academic research, a brief overview of the work-life balance literature suggests a common linking of the issue of work-life balance with employee domestic commitments and the notion of the traditional family. Casper et al. (2007a) found that married individuals comprised 83 per cent of study samples in 225 work-life balance studies published between

1980 and 2003, and that parents of dependent children accounted for 77 per cent. In a similar review of the literature, Eby et al. (2005: 185) identified the 'virtual omission' of non-work factors such as leisure activities, community involvement, religious affiliation, volunteer commitments and the support of extended family.

A similar life and family conflation appears to have been made by organisations and the media. Hoffman & Cowan (2008) investigated the construction of work/life issues on the websites of companies on Fortune's 2004 list of '100 Best Companies to Work for' in the US, and found that it was the traditional family life – involving 2.4 children and the occasional elderly parent – that usually stood for 'life' in this context. The authors believe that website analysis is a useful way to access 'official organisation discourse' and thus the managerial perspective of what work-life balance means, which appears to equate to 'work-family' balance. Whilst this research was not based in the UK, Kinman & McDowall (2009) provide interesting information in relation to Daniels et al.'s (2000) four-stage model of work-life balance culture development. They state that although many examples of good practice exist, the majority of organisations remain at Stage 1 (Grass Roots) of work-life balance culture development, focusing only on helping employees meet their caring responsibilities. In terms of the media, in Canada, Reece et al. (2009) conducted an analysis of 100 National newspaper articles citing the term 'work-life balance' published between 2003 and 2005, to explore how the topic was presented. Amongst their findings, the authors note that work-life negotiations were shown to predominantly affect upper-middle class working families with children, thus seeming to exclude many other types of worker.

In the UK, organisational conflation of work-life and work-family issues perhaps derives from the positioning of work-life balance in UK employment legislation. Whilst there are regulations relating to the wellbeing of all employees, including laws on a national minimum wage, working time, and the management of stress in the workplace, a lot of the provisions relating to time off work and flexibility with schedules – key issues in work-life balance field – cover employees with children/caring responsibilities only. These provisions include maternity leave and pay; paternity leave and pay; adoption leave; time off for dependents; parental leave; and until 2014, the right to request flexible working. Eikhof et al. (2007: 328) state that despite their talk about equality for all, for the government, the key priority 'is not having better lives but breeding new lives; more specifically the reproduction of the future labour force at a time when birth-rates are in decline'. This is only one opinion, and it is important not to ignore the fact that those with children do require specific coverage in order to have equal opportunity in the workplace. It should also be noted that the 2014 extension to the

right to request flexible working does cover all employees. Having said this, this particular legislation has always been subject to critique because the right is simply to 'request' flexible working, and not to actually receive any support (Croucher & Kelliher, 2005).

The point being made in this section is that if the implicit assumption in a range of domains is that work-life balance is only/primarily a concern for those with a family (and a limited definition of family at that), then groups of worker that do not fall into this narrowly defined category could perceive themselves to be at a disadvantage, or actually be at a disadvantage. This is starting to be acknowledged by academics. While a search of the literature has not revealed any research into the conceptualisation of work-life balance explicitly in relation to solo-living workers, there are a few studies that address the issue of work-life balance conceptualisation. Kamenou (2008: 99) argues for 'a broader, more diverse approach to the 'life' component of the work-life balance equation' in her research into the experiences of ethnic minority women workers in the UK. She sought to 'question existing understandings of work-life balance debates that focus almost exclusively on gender and childcare, ignoring issues around ethnicity, culture and religion' (2008: 99). She also argued that further research was needed to understand the work-life issues faced by disabled or older workers, or carers of older/disabled people.

Progress has also been made by Ransome (2007: 374), who argues for a broader conceptualisation in terms of the 'total responsibility burden' of a household. This is seen to refer to not only market and non-market necessary labour, but also 'recreational labour', where people satisfy their needs for pleasure, leisure and enjoyment and engage with the community. Whilst the terminology here may be considered somewhat questionable – equating recreation to 'labour' in the same way that employed work and domestic work are – the notion is useful in acknowledging a full range of activities that people can be involved in outside of work that require a time investment – and can thus be applied to all types of household. Perhaps if the wording here were changed to 'recovery' (time for recovery from the demands of work and home 'labour'), it would seem more logical. Unfortunately, no explicit attention is paid in the article to those who live alone.

There is a small literature that considers the work-life balance experiences of single people. Hamilton et al. (2006) investigated work-life conflict levels in never-married women without children using survey data from three large organisations in America. They found that these women did experience work-life conflict, often at similar levels as other women, but that company work-life benefits were seen to be less useful and were less used by this group.

Casper et al. (2007b) considered the extent to which companies could be seen to be 'singles-friendly', by examining how single employees' perceptions of company support for work-life balance compared to the perceptions of employees with families. They developed a scale assessing five dimensions of singles-friendly culture (social inclusion, equal work opportunities, equal access to benefits, equal respect for non-work life and equal work expectations) and surveyed 543 workers – both singles and those with families, from a range of organisations. They found that respondents with families perceived more equity in most of these facets than did singles, suggesting that American workplaces are not especially 'singles friendly'. While these studies come the closest to filling the gaps identified, it is important to remember that solo-living is not the same as being 'single', as noted above, and that both of these studies were conducted in America, not the UK, where there are a number of cultural and institutional differences.

Casper et al.'s (2007b) study measured employee perceptions of the fairness of resource/outcome (social inclusion, work opportunities, benefits, respect for non-work life and work expectations) allocation. This relates to distributive justice theory. The theory suggests that there are different principles or distributive justice rules (DJRs) that can be used when an individual assesses whether or not a particular distribution of resources is fair: need, equality, and equity (Deutsch, 1975). Taking the issue work-life balance support allocation, from the review above it seems that much research on the subject has been conducted from a needs-based DJR perspective – suggesting that work-life balance provisions are needed by employees with children/dependents to a greater extent than employees without. The stance also appears to have been evident in the legislative provision of the right to request flexible working at the time that this research was conducted (2011-2013), which was open to those with caring responsibilities only. It might also be a common approach taken by organisations when it comes to work-life balance provisions. Alternative approaches to the allocation of work-life balance support would be equality-based, where it is believed that all employees should be provided with equal access to work-life balance support; or equity-based, where it is believed that the amount of work-life balance support (a valued output) that is available to an individual should be calculated according to their contribution to the organisation (their input). In the research by Casper et al. (2007b), the discrepancy noted between those with and without families – respondents with families perceiving more fairness in the range of facets explored – could be linked to the different groups of staff using different DJRs: those with families using the needs-based rule and those without using an equality-based rule.

I believe that a difference in distributive justice rules is at the heart of the phenomenon that has been identified – especially in the media in the US – known as family-friendly backlash (Flynn, 1996; Korabik & Warner, 2009; Kossek & Van Dyne, 2008). This is where employees without children/dependents perceive unfairness in their organisations because different supports are given to, and expectations made of, employees with dependents compared to those without. Key issues of contention are generous family leave provisions, health insurance coverage for dependents, protected working hours (the ability to leave work on time), and flexibility over working time. Whilst articles on the phenomenon tend not to mention distributive justice theory, it seems that the crux of the problem is that employees without children/dependents resent their organisations applying a needs-based DJR when allocating work-life balance support and other outcomes (offering extra for those with dependents), because they personally believe an equality-based DJR should prevail. Most of the articles and blogs on the topic of family-friendly backlash appear to be written from an equality-based perspective. One blogger even suggested that working parents are unfairly paid higher salaries than single colleagues because of their family status. In an American blog on ‘singles discrimination’ (HEW, 2008), a US university study was cited that found that unmarried men in general earn 14.1 per cent less than their married counterparts. The author suggested that this indicated a ‘marriage premium’, where ‘married men [were being] rewarded for qualities people think come with marriage, i.e., being breadwinners or being responsible and stable’. That the blogger termed this ‘singles discrimination’ suggests that he held an equality-based DJR and assumed a needs-based DJR to be at the heart of the discrepancy. The blog failed to acknowledge that the research data cited referred to the salaries of males only, and that the same trend might not have been true for female employees – where marriage would perhaps be seen to bring a second (possibly larger) male income and thus reduce the need for money to support the household, and where the qualities associated with marriage (such as impending motherhood) might be less highly desired by the organisation. The blog also failed to acknowledge that the correlation noted could be influenced by other factors.

Family-friendly backlash has also been discussed in relation to expected behaviours in the workplace. In another non-academic article, Collyer (2007) suggested that employers and colleagues often make extra demands of single/childless workers, including giving them more work than colleagues with children (especially last-minute assignments); expecting them to work longer hours and on holidays; expecting them to travel for work more; and expecting them to be willing to relocate if needed. The author states that employers and colleagues do this because they believe that those without children have explicitly chosen the lifestyle in order to prioritise work, and use this as a rationale for different treatment. He seems to take

an equality-based DJR, and so considers the situation to be unfair. It could be argued however that that a needs-based perspective is being taken by the employers and colleagues he refers to, where they recognise the needs of those with children to leave work at a specific time and the constraints these individuals would have regarding relocation, and so allocate activities accordingly.

Despite the limitations of the media articles on the backlash issue, there is some evidence in support of the phenomenon – suggesting that a proportion of individuals without children do use an equality-based DJR when considering issues of work-life balance. In America, organisations such as ‘Unmarried America’ and ‘No Kidding!’ are springing up to unite ‘child-free’ adults. It could be argued that this sort of organisation express extreme views, and do not reflect general attitudes, but there is evidence to suggest that many people are not happy with the surfeit of family-friendly accommodations in the workplace. Survey evidence conducted by the Families and Work Institute in New York City, for example, revealed that ‘about four in ten workers said they do resent employers who provide work/family benefits to those with families only’ and that ‘16.5 per cent of workers said they resented having to do extra work to cover for a parent who is busy parenting’ (Darcey, 2005).

This is mirrored here in the UK. A pioneering British campaign group ‘Kidding Aside’ was established in 2000, and *The Guardian* cited the results of a survey of 4000 people which found that whilst most single people were happy being single, many felt that they were disadvantaged at work – being left out of couple-dominated social occasions, put under pressure to attend after-hours dos and work weekends, being expected to travel more for work, and some even feeling penalised financially (Curtis, 2006). Furthermore, when asked about colleague flexible working in the Third Work-Life Balance Survey (Hooker et al. 2007), 38 per cent of respondents cited one or more negative consequence, which were grouped into three main categories: work-related consequences (‘having to cover colleagues work’, ‘more responsibilities’, ‘increased workload’); individual consequences (‘lack of flexibility in work hours/days’, ‘more stressful’, ‘restrictions in holidays/time off’); and communication-related consequences (‘colleagues not available for meetings’, ‘people not knowing what’s going on’).

Whether we personally believe that an equality-based or a needs-based DJR should be taken when it comes to work-life balance support, the consequences of employees perceiving unfairness can be significant. Backlash can manifest in negative outcomes for colleagues with children and also for organisations. In relation to the former, Korabik & Warner (2009) state that workers with families can perceive or receive ‘opposition, resentment, animosity, or

annoyance... from their co-workers regarding their use of work-family policies or their efforts to balance their work and family lives' (Korabik & Warner, 2009). This can manifest itself in co-workers refusing to help them and 'in extreme cases, excluding them from informal gatherings, withholding work-related information or blaming them for problems that occur in their absence' (Kossek & Van Dyne, 2008: 318). In terms of negative outcomes for organisations, responses range from formal steps such as complaints to HR (Flynn, 1996) to informal behavioural change – such as a reduction in organisational citizenship behaviour (Kossek & Van Dyne, 2008).

The focus here has been primarily on the needs based DJR versus the equality-based DJR. It is important to also consider the equity-based DJR, which is complex when it comes to considering the fairness of work-life balance support. The equity-based DJR derives from Adams' (1963) Equity Theory, where an individual is said to make a calculation when deciding whether their situation is fair or not, by comparing their ratio of 'inputs' to 'outputs' in a particular context with those of a comparator. According to Martin & Harder (1994: 243), inputs tend to relate to either performance (including ability, effort, and productivity); status; or length of service. In terms of the consequences of such calculations, Greenberg (1990: 400) comments: 'We feel guilty if we feel overpaid, angry if we feel underpaid, and satisfied if we feel fairly paid' in comparison with another.

It has been noted that the equity-based rule is dominant in the work context, and many studies that use distributive justice to explore the fairness of resource allocations in the workplace focus on equity – such as Folger & Konovsky (1989) on pay; Greenberg & Ornstein (1983) on job title; and Brockner & Greenberg (1990) on layoffs. This flows on from Deutsch's (1975) assertion that economically-oriented groups (considered to be dominant in the modern employment sphere) will tend to use the principle of equity, whilst solidarity-oriented groups use the principle of equality, and caring-oriented groups use the principle of need. The proposition is that economically-oriented groups are likely to desire an allocation system that recognises different levels of contribution, so that the more effort an individual personally expends, or the greater their merit, the greater their reward. Solidarity-oriented groups are more likely to want to ensure that every member of the group is treated equally, to maximise the feeling that they are all in something together. Caring-oriented groups are likely to want to ensure that no individual unduly suffers, and so want resources to go to the most needy.

Whilst the equity-based DJR seems popular when considering resource allocation in the employment sphere, it is important to note that the situation might well be different when it

comes to the issue of work-life balance support in the UK. In one study, Martin & Harder (2004) found that whilst financially-based rewards in organisations were indeed most often distributed on the basis of contribution, and therefore equity, socio-emotional rewards (they mention help for an employee's spouse and friendliness) were more often allocated on the basis of equality among individuals, equality across groups, and personal need. Furthermore, work-life balance policies in organisations in the UK might very well be influenced by the national legislative framework around the issue – much of which is based on family-based need. Many work-life balance related legislative provisions are available only to employees who are either parents or carers (maternity leave, paternity leave, parental leave, time off for dependents, the right to request flexible working (prior to 2014)) – because of the very real need to balance employment with caring for dependents. Lewis & Hass (2003: 5) make an important comment:

‘Although perceptions of justice are subjective, they are developed within national contexts where norms about what is fair and just may be incorporated into social policy... government policies can influence beliefs about what is fair and just, by putting pressure on employers to consider work and family needs of men and women in their organisations’.

It is also important to acknowledge that the equity-based DJR is more problematic to apply to the distribution of support for work-life balance than it is for outcomes such as pay. The inputs that are traditionally used in equity based assessments – such as performance, status and length of service – are less suited to calculate how much someone deserves work-life balance. The highest performers for example might perform highly because they dedicate a lot of time to their work. It is not clear what sort of inputs would be considered in relation to the distribution of support for work-life balance. Also, would other outcomes be considered in the calculation, so that individuals who were remunerated well and given opportunities for progression would deserve less support for work-life balance?

There are few studies that I am aware of that have used distributive justice theory to explore employee perceptions of fairness when it comes to work-life balance provisions in organisations. Grover (1991) investigated the perceived fairness of parental leave policies, and attributed employee differences in perception to individual factors (age, whether they had children, and attitudes towards women). Young (1999) extended research on the issue by considering the different DJRs that employees employ when considering ‘what’s fair’ when it comes to work-life balance support in their organisations. She found that:

'different employees apply different principles to assess fairness, each principle having different implications for their assessment of work-life practices; the same individual may invoke more than one fairness principle; and the same principle may be subject to different interpretations' (Young, 1999: 42).

She also made brief reference to how participants' personal DJRs can interact with those of their organisation, setting out an example of a participant who disagreed with his organisation's needs-based approach to work-life balance support, suggesting instead that an equity-based approach should be in place (Young, 1999: 42). What that study did not do however, was explore the contextual factors that might inform the approach taken by the organisations, participants' likelihood to share the DJR taken by their organisations, or employee reactions when organisational approaches differ to their own. Furthermore, both of these studies were conducted in America, meaning that little is known about the DJRs used in UK organisations and by UK employees when it comes to work-life balance.

At this point in the chapter, the focus turns to literature on constraints to work-life balance. Three issues are discussed that have relevance to all employees, including those that live alone – working hours, work intensification and boundary blurring.

2.2.4. Working hours, work intensification and boundary blurring

When it comes to challenges to work-life balance, one of the main issues discussed in the literature is long working hours. Just over one fifth of people in employment in the UK work over 45 hours per week (ONS, 2006), and whilst long working hours have been curtailed somewhat in recent years due to employer cost-cutting measures in the face of recession (CIPD, 2010), the long term trend has been for a steady increase in working hours for those at the upper end of the earning spectrum. The CIPD's 2003 *Living to Work* report argued that the number of people working over 48 hours a week had more than doubled since 1998, and that those working over 60 hours had risen by a third.

The phenomenon is particularly pronounced for managerial and professional workers. In the Third Work-Life Balance Employee Survey (Hooker et al. 2007), managers and professionals was the occupational group most likely to be working above their contractual hours (60 per cent of whom did this). Similarly, while 15 per cent of all respondents regularly worked over the Working Time Regulation limit of 48 hours, this rose to 25 per cent of professional and

managerial staff. This group was also the most likely to work more than ten hours per week unpaid overtime, and had a higher mean number of unpaid hours than any other occupational group (Hooker et al. 2007: 22-25). The main reason cited for such long hours was that individuals simply 'have too much work to finish in [their] normal working hours' (2007: 2). An employee survey on behalf of the Work Foundation revealed similar results, with respondents in high-level professional work being the most likely to feel that they lacked time for evening classes or similar activities, and young, single, high-level professional people without children the most likely to neglect nutrition (Jones, 2006).

Millican & Dunn-Jensen (2005: 46) believe that the work-life balance problem for managerial and professional workers extends beyond just longer working hours, suggesting that individuals are experiencing three types of time pressure in the modern workplace:

'The pressure to get tasks done faster; the pressure to work longer hours; and the pressure to work 24/7, or anywhere and anytime, which has been created by the widespread availability and use of cell phone, email, voice mail and fax machines'.

The first time pressure noted – 'to get tasks done faster' refers to the growing requirement for 'intensive' as well as 'extensive' (in terms of longer hours) effort. Much research has been conducted into work intensification. A report commissioned by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation over 10 years ago cited a steady rise in work intensification alongside rising job insecurity in the UK over the previous 30 years (Burchell et al. 1999). The authors attributed the continuation of the trend in the late 1990s (beyond the period of major blue-collar redundancies in the late 1970s/early 1980s) to efficiency drives in relation to the white-collar workforce – with professional staff being the most affected at this time. The researchers found that more than 60 per cent of respondents claimed that the pace of their work and the effort required had increased over the previous five years, and that fear of redundancy was not the only aspect of job insecurity – with the potential loss of valued job features such as status and progression opportunities being a major concern. Considering the recent economic downturn and resulting employer efficiency drives, it may be that work intensification and job insecurity are even more prevalent for the white-collar workforce today than they were at the time of Burchell et al.'s (1999) study.

It seems that a number of factors can be linked to work intensification. Green (2001) used National longitudinal survey data to track trends in the perceptions of UK employees regarding pressure to work hard. Over the 10 years studied, increases in pressure were reported in relation to most of the issues included in the survey – client/customer demands; supervisor

expectations; pay incentives; appraisal systems; and most notably colleague demands – reported by 57 per cent of respondents in 1997, up from 28 per cent in 1986. Gambles et al.'s (2006: 48) international research attributed increases in work intensification in all seven countries they studied to developments in technology, employer downsizing and new management practices such as 'high performance working' – which refers to a set of complementary work practices designed to increase employee productivity, via increased involvement; sophisticated human resource practices, and various reward and commitment activities (Sung & Ashton, 2005).

The third time pressure cited by Millican & Dunn-Jensen (2005: 46) is also a concern – as it refers to two of the mechanisms that are often associated with effective work-life balance – schedule flexibility and new technology. The suggestion above is that rather than facilitating work-life balance they actually hinder it – blurring the boundaries between the two domains. Boundary-blurring is seen to occur when 'no distinction exists between what belongs to 'home' or 'work' and when and where they are engaged' (Nippert-Eng, 1996: 567). As noted in the quote, the issue is often linked to developments in information and communication technology (Brannen, 2005; Chesley, 2005; Sullivan & Lewis, 2001), which means that employees are contactable outside standard working hours. The concern is echoed in the comment of one of the British participants in Gambles et al.'s (2006: 48) research:

'New ways of working are being vaulted onto the old ways of working, rather than replacing them. People e-mail from home, work across time zones, use laptops, but most people still go to work at 8 o'clock every morning and work a 12-hour day'.

Whilst the specifics of this participant's argument are questionable – it cannot be said that most people work full-time (and certainly not working 12-hour days), or that most people have jobs that require such use of technology – that this individual identified a shift in work expectations is important to acknowledge. In certain types of work, technology can actually increase the demands on employee time (Boswell & Olson-Buchanan, 2007; Foegen, 1993; Hill et al. 1996).

All of these factors suggest that long working hours, work intensification and boundary blurring are the result of structural factors. Another way of interpreting such issues however is linked to individual agency and attitudes towards the work and non-work domains.

Long hours of work and the blurring of boundaries could be an active choice if people enjoy their work. Despite being potentially time-consuming and stressful, managerial and

professional work is often very fulfilling, including high-level problem solving, allowing social interaction, and providing autonomy over how work is completed (Exworthy & Halford, 1999). Individuals in such roles are also likely to receive respect from those around them. Several theorists suggest that the work domain may be more attractive than other domains for some employees. Kofodimos (1990) talks about the 'spiralling cycle of imbalance' in the modern world, referring to a situation where an individual's passion for their work can create a dynamic where they become more committed to and competent at work at the expense of the ability to experience intimacy at home. Gunnell (2000: 11) suggests that a requirement to work long hours may be welcome, being seen 'not as drudgery, but proof that one is needed and valued'. This is mirrored in Hochschild's (1997b: 80) research, where she notes that:

'The more women and men do what they do in exchange for money and the more their work in the public realm is valued or honoured, the more, almost by definition, private life is devalued and its boundaries shrink... People naturally have the urge to spend more time on what they value most and what they are most valued for'

Such thoughts do appear to have some merit. When Judge et al. (1994) asked male executives to indicate the most important aspects of their lives by assigning 100 points to five life domains (work, family, religion, leisure, and community), significantly more points were assigned to work than to any other domain. Furthermore, despite working the longest hours, managers and professionals were the least likely group in the Third Work-Life-Balance Survey to say that they would like to work fewer hours (Hooker et al. 2007: 30).

It is possible that the phenomenon explored in these studies could be particularly significant for solo-living workers. As the non-work responsibilities are likely to be less visible and pressing for this group, the temptation to devote more time to work may be greater. And the more they do this, the weaker their non-work connections are likely to become, as friends outside of work become more distant. Unfortunately, none of the previous studies allow this to be explored. Kofodimos (1990) and Judge et al. (1994) both focus on male executives only, and fail to mention participant household structure in their research, and Hochschild (1997a, 1997b) focuses only on working parents. For Hochschild's working parents, the work domain was seen to provide more achievement and fulfilment for high-status staff than home because their spouses and children were often critical of their career orientation (alluding to 'failure' in the home domain). In the case of solo-living workers, the silence of the empty home may be even more disheartening, and the lack of dependents may itself be felt as a form of 'failure' (failure to find a partner and become a parent) – making achievement in the work sphere arguably more important. One interesting finding from the Third Work-Life Balance Survey

was that whilst most workers did take all of their annual leave in the year, 72 per cent of those who did not had no dependent children. Whilst the most common reason cited for not taking the full entitlement was having too much work (26 per cent), a significant 18 per cent stated that they simply did not want to (Hooker et al. 2007: 28). This could indicate that workers without family commitments at home actually prefer to spend their time in the workplace.

When it comes to incorporating attitudes into work-life balance conceptualisation, Elloy & Smith (2003) and Wickam & Fishwick (2008) both call for a 'career-life approach' to the issue, which takes account of how each individual conceptualises their whole career when considering the issue of balance, rather than just considering the accommodations required for immediate issues and job tasks. This is echoed by Gambles et al. (2006:35), who argue that the idea that it is possible to get the right balance between paid work and other parts of life overlooks the shifting nature of people's work and non-work involvements, and the meanings given to these activities across the life-course.

Sturges (2008) found that graduates and young professionals were often willing to work long hours at the 'getting established' stage of their careers, when they felt the need to validate themselves in the workplace, but that they expected this to be a temporary phase, leading to more reasonable working hours in the long run. Long working hours in the early career are justified on the grounds of a need to show commitment to the firm, and are also linked to the need to spend time establishing networking relationships, perhaps volunteering for additional experiences and/or undertaking additional study. Unfortunately, Sturges suggested that the perceived short-term nature of this work pattern may be misplaced, with individuals actually being faced with an either/or choice for their career moving forwards – to either 'get ahead' (continuing to work long hours and striving for continued promotions) or 'get balanced' (accommodating a life outside of work).

When drawing together the issues above – workplace requirements that necessitate long working hours versus personal choice to spend time in the work domain because it is preferred – I am speaking clearly to one of the dominant debates in sociological enquiry: the relative primacy of structure/culture and agency when it comes to shaping human behaviour. This debate will form the heart of the next chapter, the second part of the literature review.

3. Literature Review (part two): The influence of structure, culture and agency on solo-living employee work-life balance

The last chapter analysed the state of knowledge on the two concepts at the heart of this thesis: solo-living and work-life balance. In this chapter, the focus turns to how we can theorise the relationship between the two concepts sociologically, utilising the structure, culture, agency debate. The chapter sets out and critically analyses the different stances that have been taken in the debate, and identifies an approach that seems the most suitable for the phenomenon under investigation – analytical dualism. Following on from the Introduction, the chapter also discusses the utility of Individualisation theory for understanding the work-life experiences of solo-living employees. Different conceptualisations of the theory are reviewed, and justification made for the focus on Beck (1992) and Beck & Beck-Gernsheim's (2002) conceptualisation for the current research project. The chapter concludes with the research questions that this thesis seeks to explore.

When it comes to understanding a range of different sociological phenomena, many scholars have engaged with issues of structure, culture and agency. It was noted in the introduction that a simple understanding of the concepts in the social science context is that 'agency' refers to the capacity of individuals to make their own independent choices, whilst 'structure' and 'culture' (which are distinct concepts, as discussed later) refer to the recurrent patterned arrangements in society that have the potential to enable and/or constrain this choice. There have however been myriad conceptualisations of each of the terms in the literature.

In terms of agency or 'action', one debate in the literature concerns intentionality. Giddens (1984: 8) notes that in some conceptualisations, for an item of behaviour to count as agency/action, whoever perpetrates it must intend to do so, or else the behaviour in question is just a reactive response. For others however, it is only necessary for the perpetrator to intend to do something, even if the consequences are not as intended. Giddens' (1984: 10) belief is that 'agency refers not to the intentions that people have in doing things but to their capacity of doing things in the first place', he therefore argues that agency implies power. Archer (2000: 308) suggests that the main causal powers of agency are the powers which ultimately enable people to reflect upon their social context, and to act reflexively towards it, either individually or collectively.

A detailed conceptual analysis into the question of 'What is agency?' was carried out by Emirbayer & Mische (1998) when they acknowledged the confusion surrounding the term:

'The concept of agency has become a source of increasing strain and confusion in social thought. Variants of action theory, normative theory, and political-institutional analysis have defended, attacked, buried, and resuscitated the concept in often contradictory and overlapping ways. At the centre of the debate, the term *agency* itself has maintained an elusive, albeit resonant, vagueness' (1998: 962)

They note that different theorists have emphasised either routine, purpose, or judgment, when in fact, all three need to be considered at once – with the dynamic interplay of these dimensions within different contexts of action being key (1998: 963). They therefore propose a reconceptualization of human agency as 'a temporally embedded process of social engagement' (1998: 962), informed not only by the past (in its habitual aspect), but also by considerations of the future and the present:

'The ways in which people understand their own relationship to the past, future, and present *make a difference* to their actions; changing conceptions of agentic possibility in relation to structural contexts profoundly influence how actors in different periods and places see their worlds as more or less responsive to human imagination, purpose, and effort' (1998: 973).

This conceptualisation of agency seems attractive, especially if reflexivity as well as habit is acknowledged when considering the influence of the past on individual action. When an individual acts in relation to their work-life situation, I believe that they are likely to be influenced by habit (the working patterns they have had in the past); reflection on previous experience; possible alternative futures; and the consideration of the past and future in the light of the structural and cultural contingencies of the present.

Structures and cultures refer to the elements of the external environment that provide individuals with rules and resources (Giddens, 1984). They are sometimes discussed as one category, with Barnett & Caspar (2001) for example concerning themselves with the 'individual-social environment' debate. Here, the social environment is described as 'the immediate physical surroundings, social relationships, and cultural milieus within which defined groups of people function and interact' (Barnett & Casper, 2001: 465). Components include:

'built infrastructure; industrial and occupational structure; labour markets; social and economic processes; wealth; social, human and health services; power relations; government; race relations; social inequality; cultural practices, the arts; religious institutions and practices; and beliefs about place and community... Embedded within contemporary social environments are historical social and power relations that have become institutionalised over time (Barnett & Casper, 2001: 465).

Structure can also be used as an overarching concept to cover both structural and cultural issues. Tomlinson et al. (2013:248) note that Giddens (1984) emphasises the power of 'internal structures', referring to normative constraints that individuals place upon themselves and others in terms of cultural and social expectations; whilst others (Crompton & Harris, 1999; McRae, 2003; Wilkins & Gulati, 1996), emphasise 'external structures' associated with "class', 'status' and 'power'" (Archer, 2007: 13).

For the purpose of this research, the two categories will be kept separate. 'Structure' will be used to refer to factors including education; organisational hierarchies; organisational policies; national legislation and job roles (pay, hours, autonomy, flexibility). 'Culture' will refer to organisational cultures; conceptualisations of commitment; gender constructs; and discourses on work-life balance – the things that can have a constraining or enabling influence on individual sense of entitlement to different things and individuals' 'ideational projects': 'the beliefs they seek to uphold, the theories they wish to vindicate, the propositions they want to be able to deem true' (Archer, 2005:25).

At the base of the agency, structure, culture debate is the fundamental normative question: are we free to act as we please, or are we shaped and governed by the structures and cultures around us? Hay (1995: 189) sums up the importance of the issue for social science in general with his comment that 'every time we construct, however tentatively, a notion of social, political or economic causality we appeal, whether explicitly or (more likely) implicitly, to ideas about structure and agency'.

When it comes to the current research project into the work-life balance of solo-living managers and professionals, a key concern is the extent to which things like working hours, working patterns, and activities outside of work are the product of individual choice, the product of the demands of the modern workplace and other structures/cultures, or some combination of the two. The debate is also relevant when it comes to considering the solo-living domestic situation itself. As Lewis (2005: 5) notes, whilst 'there is plenty of quantitative

data mapping the rise in numbers of people living alone, where they live and who they are... we know much less about why people live alone, the extent to which this is a choice or a reaction to circumstance' – perhaps including work-related circumstance.

The relationship between structure/culture and agency can be conceptualised in different ways. When seeking to explain human behaviour and experiences, it is possible to look to either structure/culture *or* individual agency as the primary influencing factor; or to look to the two factors together having explanatory value. In the next section of the review, the focus will be on scholars who have heavily emphasised either structure/culture or agency in their work – suggesting either that what we know as our social existence is determined mainly by the overall structure of society, and that what individuals do is the product of the structural/cultural influences acting on them; or that it is determined mainly by the capacity of individual agents to construct and reconstruct their world.

3.1. Structure/culture and agency seen as a dualism

In terms of the work-life-balance literature, a focus on structural/cultural factors has a strong grounding. Numerous studies have placed the blame for things like excessive working hours and reduced fulfilment in the home domain firmly at the door of organisations, their structures and cultures. A well-known account in the UK context is Madeline Bunting's (2003) *Willing Slaves*, which is written as a scathing expose of the 'overwork culture', inspired by the 'volume and emotion' (2003: xiii) of responses that the author received from the general public to her column in *The Guardian* on the topic, and supported by secondary research data and primary interviews with a range of UK workers. Bunting suggested that many organisations at the time were forcing their employees to work long hours against their will (and health and happiness) via factors such as work intensification, a target culture, frequent restructuring and demands for personal flexibility. She also suggested that organisations were exerting covert pressures on employees, by extending the brand concept to the employment relationship, so that individuals became enslaved 'willingly' and did not challenge the regime. Whilst the term 'willing' slavery could suggest an element of agency – individuals choosing to invest their time and energy in such organisations – the main emphasis here is the power of organisational culture to influence employee behaviour.

Ezzy (2001: 633) used the term 'engineered cultures' in his theoretical piece to refer to the more normative forms of control in the modern workplace. He cited a range of tools that are

used by organisations to make employees identify with the company, including ‘foundational myths’ and distinctive corporate language, designed to create a culture where workers associate their self-development and identity with working for the company. He also noted the use of ‘the structures and rhetoric of family and team’ (Ezzy, 2001: 634) by organisations, which can further manipulate the worker by suggesting a company concern for their emotional and relational life. It is possible that such messages could be particularly emotive for solo-living employees, who may not have as much support and kinship in other domains.

Workplace cultures can also affect work-life balance by suggesting the kind of behaviour that is expected in order to be successful. Much attention has been given in the literature to the way that ‘commitment’ is conceptualised in organisations, and notions of the ‘ideal worker’ (Acker, 1990) – often linked to presence at work or ‘face time’ (Walsh, 2005) and resulting in ‘competitive presenteeism’ (Simpson, 1998). As noted by Jones et al. (2007: 1): ‘we may have managers who are more diverse in gender, age and skills, but all too often they still seem to default to the old work equation of long hours = commitment = success’. This idea of the ideal worker being one who is always visible at work has led to a widespread belief amongst employees that the ‘work-life’ issue is an either/or choice. The Second DTI employee work-life balance survey reported that 50 per cent of employees believed that working reduced hours would negatively affect their career advancement, and 43 per cent believed it would harm their job security. Furthermore, 42 per cent thought that not working beyond their contracted hours would damage their career prospects (Stevens et al. 2004). This issue has thus been linked to the so-called ‘take-up gap’ regarding work-life balance initiatives. In the IES Report on ‘Work-life Balance: Beyond the Rhetoric’, Harper et al. (2002) noted a discrepancy between the level of demand and interest expressed in the options, and their actual take-up, which they attributed to ubiquitous cultures of long hours and constant availability, with all participants believing that the most common deal on offer by their employers was an either/or choice – trading a successful career off against work-life balance.

Bunting explicitly addressed the culture versus agency debate in her account. In defending her emphasis on cultures, she acknowledged the common counter-argument – that people make their own decisions – but dismissed this as ‘a powerful rubric’ that has acted to quash any collective consensus about the need for change. Her own view on the subject of agency is that:

‘Some people don’t have any choice... [and that whilst] for the vast majority there is a degree of choice ... the choices we make are not made in isolation: they are the *product* of the particular organisational culture of our workplace’ (Bunting, 2003: xxiii. My emphasis)

It is important to note that whilst Bunting emphasised organisational cultures and also structures in her account, she acknowledged that ‘the crisis cannot entirely be placed at the door of work’ (Bunting, 2003: xxii), with macro-level factors such as government policies, culture change (consumerism) and technological change also being seen to have an influence. Indeed, many other authors cite a range of different structural and cultural factors in their explanations of social phenomena. In *The Overworked American*, for example, Schor (1992) identified economic trends, the decline of trade unions, and a consumer-oriented society alongside employer practices when seeking to explain the shifting balance between work and leisure time reported for the typical American over the previous twenty years. Furthermore, many cross-national studies have been conducted which link differences in work-life experiences to differences in national level structures – such as social, political and economic environments (Reynolds, 2004).

In terms of the prevalence of solo-living for the working-age population, an argument of structure/culture over agency would mean that the living arrangement is a by-product of external influences, for example ‘greedy institutions’ (Coser, 1974) that expect so much from their staff in terms of time, energy and even geographical flexibility, that individuals have little opportunity of building and sustaining relationships outside of work.

In the studies mentioned so far, the potential for worker agency takes a secondary place to the influence of structures and cultures. The opposing argument therefore is that it is actually individual agency that is driving trends. One of the most notable studies from this perspective is Catherine Hakim’s (2000, 2006) work on Preference Theory. While Bunting focused her discussion on the overwork culture, Hakim considered differences in involvement in the home (seen as family) and work domains. In her 2006 article she stated that much policy and practice in the area of work-life balance and workplace equality had focussed on structural factors because of the dominant ‘feminist ideological position’ (Hakim, 2006: 280) that attributes labour market outcome differences between men and women to sex discrimination. She suggested that such differences between the genders, and indeed differences between groups within each gender, could be better understood in terms of individual work orientations and preferences.

Hakim situated her research in a so-called 'new scenario'. She cited five separate historical changes in society and the labour market, which started in the late 20th Century, that she suggested had resulted in a qualitatively different context for women, giving them a lot more choice over the areas of their lives that they wish to emphasise. These changes were the contraceptive revolution; the equal opportunities revolution; the expansion of white-collar occupations; the creation of jobs for secondary earners; and the increasing importance of attitudes, values and personal preferences in lifestyle choices in affluent societies.

When it came to the work-life preferences of women in this new scenario, she suggested that modern women would occupy one of three 'ideal-types': either being 'home-centred'; 'career-centred'; or 'adaptive women'. She added that whilst the majority of men are work-centred (showing a consistent commitment to this life goal), when genuine choice is open to women, only a minority would be work-centred, even those women in professional occupations. She said that the majority of women (about 70 per cent) would be classed as 'adaptive' – possibly working full-time throughout their lives and achieving high-level career success, but having a lack of commitment to a career 'from the start' (Hakim, 2000: 166) and considering family roles as equally important.

She asserted that in the modern world, where individualism is the driving force, 'agency becomes more important than the social structure as a determinant of behaviour' (Hakim, 2006: 286), and therefore that any research into the relationships between individuals and organisations should focus on micro-level, person-centred analysis, rather than macro-level statistical data. This is somewhat incongruous considering her research was mainly based on national surveys.

In relation to work-life balance issues, the agency over structure argument is that individuals choose their particular working patterns, even when they seem problematic from the outside. For example, as discussed above, there is the view that individuals are spending more time in the workplace because they simply prefer it to other domains. In a *New Statesman* article on the nature of leisure and work, Gunnell (2000: 11) argues that whilst leisure has become more like work ('a series of tasks to be completed'), work is increasingly seen as leisure: no longer a 'boring necessity that interferes with home life and home-based social life' but a 'place of friendships and life support, the only place, indeed, where [people] have such relationships'. This sentiment is echoed in the following comment made by one of the professional workers in Gambles et al.'s (2006: 51) UK study:

'For more people, work has got a lot better... a third of us meet our friends through work, half of us meet our partners through work... A lot of the things we used to call leisure, such as talking to others, creating things, writing, reading, etc., well that's the stuff of a lot of peoples jobs now. Is it any wonder that white collar workers are working such long hours?'

Research can also be cited to support the view that solo-living could be a product of individual choice, rather than the by-product of 'greedy institutions'. In research into the experiences and attitudes of one rapidly growing subset of solo-livers – 'female, metropolitan, managerial/professional, educated and mobile' (Hall et al. 1999), Lewis (2005) found that the women drew significant satisfaction and pride from living alone, seeing it as a positive statement of emotional, financial and domestic independence. Similarly, when investigating the attitudes of 22 individuals in LAT relationships, Roseneil (2006) found that whilst only three could be referred to as 'regretfully apart' (wishing to live with their partner but having decided not to, mainly for career reasons), eight could be said to be 'gladly apart' – their narratives expressing a strong sense of individual agency and a determination to be in control of their own lives.

There is also an argument being made by individualisation theorists such as Giddens (1992) and Beck-gernsheim (2002) that in the modern world, individuals are choosing their own mixture of interpersonal relationships, prioritising the sort of relationship that suits their own needs. There is a suggestion that friendships are becoming more important, and for some can even be seen to represent the new family. Duncan & Philips (2008: 2) summarise the argument of such authors:

'We no longer need, or expect, to get engaged and marry as young adults, to acquire a given set of relatives, to have children and live together till death do us part. Of course, we still search for love and intimacy, and still need to give and receive care, but now this search is seen to lead to 'families of choice'... At the same time, the significance of romantic coupling is lessened and friendships become more important'.

In the light of the current research, if individuals were seen to choose to prioritise friendship, then individuals without cohabiting spouse/partner may not suffer any negative consequences in terms of interpersonal interaction and support. It is important to note that this position is heavily criticised however. After summarising the argument, Duncan & Philips (2008) note the lack of empirical evidence to support such shifts in the nature of relationships, and offer alternative explanations for trends.

In a similar vein, in their article on 'extending or decentring family relationships', Jamieson et al. (2006) note how different ways of living and relationships forms are often linked by some to significant attitude changes (akin to individualisation theory), but that they can also be understood in terms of an evolution of family relations: suggesting 'that a change of form masks continuity of function' (2006:2.4).

Structure and/or culture on the one hand, and agency on the other, are thus the foundations of two opposing views on the nature of society. For many scholars however, such an either/or dualism is problematic. Many find it hard to limit themselves to 'systems without actors' or 'actors without systems' because as Archer (1996: xii) states:

'It is part and parcel of daily experience to feel both free and enchained, capable of shaping our own future and yet confronted by towering, seemingly impersonal constraints'

It is not surprising therefore that there have been a number of challenges to one-sided accounts of the structure-culture-agency relationship. This will be the focus of the next section.

3.2. Challenging the either/or view on structure, culture and agency

A number of scholars have suggested that one-sided accounts of structure and/or culture over agency or vice versa fail to do justice to the complexity of social phenomena. Tomlinson (2006) sought to explore the claims of Hakim (2000, 2006) by investigating the actual career experiences of women following maternity. She argued that choices regarding work and home are not as simple as Hakim suggested, with factors like care networks, employment status, and national welfare policy all having an influence on work arrangements, in addition to work-life balance preferences. She suggested that it was the intersection of these four dimensions that resulted in women making 'strategic', 'reactive' or 'compromised choice' transitions, each involving different degrees of agency and constraint. Hantrais & Ackers (2005) also explored Hakim's theory, in relation to the choices women make in different European countries. Their research supported Hakim's assertion that most women were 'adaptive' as opposed to being either home or work-centric, but they found that 'economic opportunities, national policy provisions and culture strongly shaped the choices that women are able to make' (2005: 210). A few years later, Nolan (2009) used the theory to investigate men's work orientations in the context of job insecurity. She concluded that Hakim's theory is useful in terms of the concepts

generated, but that there is need for far greater understanding of the heterogeneity of work orientations; acknowledgement of the fact that structural demands often limit preferences; and that preferences change as a reaction to circumstances – ‘such as job insecurity, organisational culture, personal and professional relationships, and the expectations of other family members’ (2009: 194).

Hakim seemed to anticipate challenges to her work, and included an early response in her 2000 book. She attacked the emphasis in sociology on critiques of theory rather than on devising new ways forward, suggesting that at the extreme, all theories can be shown to be wrong, incomplete, to be not supported by some pieces of evidence, or internally inconsistent or undefined. She stated:

‘It may be that social scientists have to make do with broad and inexact theories which actually work in the real world instead of seeking to produce precise... theories which bear no relation to real people and to social life as we know it’ (Hakim, 2000:25-6).

When we consider the nature of the criticisms levelled at her theory however, this defence seems somewhat insufficient. Critics of preference theory do not point to minor inconsistencies or definitional issues, they relate to major theoretical aspects of the work – such as the denial of the power of structures and her view of agents as being in possession of all the facts relating to their options and being able to make free choices.

More complex interrelations between structure, culture and agency can also be seen in relation to the trends associated with work-life balance problems. In terms of long working hours, Lewis (2003) investigated one group of autonomous workers (accountants), for whom long-hours are often considered to be voluntary. She found that in the specific occupational context, ‘where recognition and self-esteem are mainly derived from occupational achievements, where occupational or professional skills and competencies are constructed in terms of constant availability to clients or others, and where non work activities are undervalued, active choice is constrained’ (Lewis, 2003: 350). In other words, working minimal hours would not be seen as commensurate with career success in the industry, meaning any sense of ‘choice’ over working hours is misguided. Van Wanrooy & Wilson (2006) noted the influence of the specific National ‘working time regime’ on work-hour choices in a specific country. They argued that the specific regulatory and social context of Australia (a ‘liberal working time regime’) accounted for data from the Australian Survey of Social Attitudes 2003, which showed that whilst those working the longest hours (over 45 hours per week) were the group most likely to dislike their working hours, desire shorter hours, and consider long-hours

working to be a general social problem, they were no less likely than other workers to consider long hours working to be the product of personal choice (Van Wanrooy & Wilson, 2006: 358). They attribute this to the fact that the institutional environment sanctions unlimited hours and encourages long hours' employment paths, so that working hours are seen to be not mandatory, but determined by individual commitment to work (Van Wanrooy & Wilson, 2006: 364) and therefore agency.

There are three further studies worth citing here which demonstrate a complicated interplay between structure, culture and agency in relation to work-life balance issues: Donnelly (2006); Guillaume & Pochic (2009); and Tomlinson et al. (2013). Donnelly (2006) investigated the relationship between structure/culture, agency and power in a study into how 'free' knowledge workers in one consultancy firm were to control their own working hours and location. The authors wanted to test the theory that knowledge workers were 'the vanguards of a new employment relationship based on greater employee-employer interdependency' (Donnelly, 2006: 78) – in other words that they had more agency than the traditional worker because they had greater power in the employment relationship. The study involved interviewing knowledge workers in the firm shortly after the introduction of two new policies – offering flexitime and home-working. The results showed that despite the opportunity for more freedom, most respondents believed that they would continue to work long hours and from the office, due to a number of structural and cultural constraints: the needs of the employers; client demands; perceptions of 'professionalism'; network relations and personal career ambitions (Donnelly, 2006: 78). Whilst they had the capacity to choose the working pattern they wanted, they were aware of the clear constraints and consequences linked to the choices available.

Still with Donnelly (2006), an important finding concerned the relationship between power and agency. The authors noted that those consultants with the most bargaining power over their employers in terms of remuneration (the more qualified, experienced, network-central employees who bring in clients and whose services are in demand), actually had the least autonomy over their workloads and working patterns (and therefore less agency), because of their centrality and importance (especially to clients). For the less powerful organisation members, whilst being better able logistically to operate flexibly (having a less demanding workload and less client contact), there were different constraints in operation, with individuals feeling the need to work long hours in order to gain experience, build contacts and gain promotion. The authors noted that 'as they progress and attain importance to networks, clients and their firm, [employees were] less able to work flexibly – thus entailing a self-

perpetuating ethos of long-hard work' (Donnelly, 2006: 92). Thus structural constraints (especially for the more senior members) and cultural constraints (especially for the more junior) were seen to limit the agency that was facilitated via the two work-life policies.

The other two studies show how agency in the face of constraining structures/cultures can vary within a sample of similarly placed individuals. Guillaume & Pochic (2009) investigated the work-life balance implications of access to top management positions in a French utility company. The authors were interested in the organisation norms that were required for accessing top management positions (the culture), and their effects on work-life balance; and the strategies that were invented (agency) by men and women managers to conform to the prevailing career model or to promote alternative patterns (Guillaume & Pochic, 2009: 15). The authors found that a mixture of factors affected actual career outcomes for women and men, including structural factors (at both the organisational and family level), cultural factors, and agency factors. They also found variety in the strategies taken, and were particularly interested in the strategies of the women who faced constraining organisational norms when it came to balancing work with children – geographical flexibility and time availability.

Whilst most of the women chose a strategy that reinforced the structural/cultural environment – postponing family life in order to pursue management careers, or opting for less demanding organisational positions to accommodate family demands – a number were seen to challenge it. It was noted that some women sought to combine career and family by promoting 'flexible availability' – a very efficient organisation of their working time focused on performance and results, but which challenged the norms relating to sociability and networking in the company. Unfortunately, the authors did not state the percentages of participants adopting each strategy, or point out any specific personal factors (such as age or length of service), meaning it is not possible to identify the extent to which the system was being challenged as opposed to reinforced. Having said this, the authors noted that this way of working is likely to appeal 'to more and more men who are now in a situation of dual-career couples' (Guillaume & Pochic, 2009: 31), and so it may in time subvert the norms.

A similar finding was presented by Tomlinson et al. (2013) in their research on the career strategies of women and minority ethnic individuals in the legal profession. They found that in dealing with structural and cultural constraints to career progression on the basis of their sex and/or ethnicity, most of the individuals acted in a way that reinforced the existing environment – adopting a strategy of 'assimilation', 'compromise', 'playing the game', 'location/relocation' or 'withdrawal'. There was evidence of some participants challenging the

existing framework however – ‘reforming the system’ – a strategy that emphasised agency over structure/culture. The researchers found that temporality was an important issue in understanding the situation, with the reforming approach being prevalent in participants who were in the later stages of their careers, when certain resources had been accumulated.

Moving on to the issue of solo-living, explanations for the prevalence can again be attributed to a combination of structure and agency rather than one influence only. In response to arguments that living alone is an active choice for many, Lewis (2005) noted how different insights emerged at different stages of her mixed methods research project into the causes and reality of solo-living. While 84 per cent of survey respondents stated that they had chosen to live alone, she noted that in subsequent focus groups it became clear that for many it was not necessarily a real choice:

‘For those in their thirties and forties particularly, most of whose friends are living with partners, the only options following relationship breakdown or a move for work may be to live with strangers in a shared house or to live alone’ (Lewis, 2005: 15)

In the light of such research findings, it is important to discuss theories that seek to incorporate both structure/culture and agency when it comes to explaining social phenomena.

One of the most well-known alternatives to the problematic ‘either/or’ dualism of structure/culture and agency is Giddens’ (1984) Structuration Theory, which reframes the terms into a ‘both/and’ duality. With his ‘duality of structure’, Giddens presents structure as both the medium and the outcome of social action. Structure only exists through the action of individuals, but this action is constrained by the structural ‘rules and resources’ available to them. Furthermore, in action, individuals often confirm the structure, which will in turn affect future action. The two concepts are thus seen to be mutually reinforcing and recursive. In terms of social analysis, Giddens states that action and structure cannot be analysed separately, as structures are created, maintained and changed through actions, while actions are given meaningful form only through the background of the structure: the line of causality runs in both directions making it impossible to determine what is changing what. The focus for study is therefore ‘social practices ordered across time and space’ (Giddens, 1984: 2)

Giddens does not provide a recipe for research using structuration theory, as his focus is on the ontological concerns of social theory, not epistemology or methodology. Nevertheless, several authors have made explicit use of structuration theory in empirical research. It is worth noting that Golden et al. (2006) suggested that the theory offers a particularly useful

lens through which to view the day-to-day interactions that shape employees' experience of work/life balance, and a number of studies have successfully done so, such as Hoffman & Cowan (2010) and Kirby & Krone (2002).

While structuration theory has thus proved popular in offering an alternative to the agency-structure dualism and could be seen to be a useful approach for the current research, it was noted that the theory had not gone without criticism. Challenges to Giddens' theory have been based on the conceptualisation of structure (Mouzelis, 1989, 1995; Tomlinson et al. 2013; Whittington, 1992), the conceptualisation of agency (Emirbayer & Mische, 1998), and most notably the way that the two are related (Archer, 1996).

In terms of structure, Tomlinson et al. (2013) argued that Giddens' internal focus is problematic, as their own research on the career strategies of women and ethnic minority law professionals found that even among a population of highly skilled, knowledgeable agents, 'structures were not merely internal, fluidly made and remade, but were 'what they confront – and have to grapple with' (Archer, 1982: 463)' (Tomlinson et al. 2013: 265) – such as biased opportunity structures. Another issue is that in making structures both enabling and constraining, they become 'so vaporous that it is next to impossible to get a grip on them' (Healy, 1998: 510). This means that important distinctions between them, systems and agents are not made – with all seeming to collapse into one another. This then causes problems when attempting to identify differing degrees of constraint, consider issues of temporality, or speak of cause and effect (Archer, 1996).

In terms of agency, several authors have taken issue with Giddens' focus on habit – illustrated in his description of routinisation as the 'master key' and 'vital to the theory of structuration' (Giddens, 1984: 60). Mouzelis (1989, 1995) argued that actors relate to rules not only in terms of duality (following them in a taken-for-granted manner and thereby reinforcing them) as suggested by Giddens, but also in terms of dualism – standing back from them, analysing them, changing them or defending the status quo. He went on to provide what Healy (1998: 514) termed 'an altogether stronger concept of social structure', based on a fourfold analytic table that allows for the conceptualisation of agency-structure as both a dualism and a duality. Similarly, Emirbayer & Mische (1998) considered it too narrow to focus only on the 'habitual, repetitive and taken for granted' (1998: 963) when conceptualising agency, at the expense of considerations of purpose and judgement. They suggested that routine is only one element of agency, and that agency is always informed by the past (the routine or 'iterative' element); the future (through 'projectivity', the imagining of alternative future possibilities); and the present

(through 'practical evaluation', where past habits and future projects are contextualised in the contingencies of the present) – with one of the temporal frames being prioritised in any one action.

Perhaps the most vociferous critic of structuration theory however is Margaret Archer. Archer is a strong believer that any kind of conflationary theory is inappropriate when considering the relationship between structure and agency. She therefore opposes approaches that consider only individual agency and are therefore guilty of upward conflation (ignoring the power of structure); social constructionism which is guilty of downward conflation (ignoring the power of agents); and structuration theory which is guilty of 'central conflation' – where the binding together of structure and agency denies either state relative autonomy. With the latter, she actually noted 'three forms of conflationary theorising' (Archer, 1996: 690), noting, alongside the central conflation, the flawed idea that 'recursiveness and change occur simultaneously... [when] what most of us seek instead are theoretical propositions about when and where reproduction rather than transformation, or vice versa, will prevail', and the idea that structure and agency, as two sides of the same coin, must co-exist in time – meaning that '*temporal relations between institutional structure and strategic action logically cannot be examined*' (Archer, 1996: 690, emphasis in original). She advocates instead a view of structure and agency made possible via critical realism.

For critical realists such as Archer, we have a stratified reality, with different properties existing at different levels. From this perspective, structure and agency can both have an influence on social phenomena, without being conflated into one another, because they are seen to exist at different levels of this stratified reality, and often phased over different tracts of time. The methodological technique of 'analytic dualism' is advocated in order to investigate the interplay between the two – an approach that maintains a clear distinction between them for analysis, but acknowledges that they are mutually influencing and should be fused into a single research paradigm. The advantage with this according to Archer (1996: 693) is that the researcher has an ontology that allows for talk of 'pre-existence', 'relative autonomy', and 'causal influence' in relation to these two strata'. Archer proposed the Morphogenetic Cycle (Archer, 1995: 157) as a framework for understanding the on-going reciprocal influence of structures and agency. She suggested that social structures exist in reality, and necessarily precede human agency – conditioning individuals to act in a certain way – but yet also rely on this agency in order to continue (structural reproduction) or evolve (structural elaboration). It is the critical realist approach to the dynamics of structure, culture

and agency which is believed to be the most suitable for the current research project, which will be elaborated in the methodology chapter (chapter four).

At this point in the discussion, I would like to turn the focus onto a specific sociological theory that has been linked to changes in demographic and social trends (including increased solo-living), and that also resonates with debates about structure, culture and agency. Elaborated at length in the next section, the basic theory of individualisation is that individuals in late modernity no longer have their life course mapped out by the dominant social institutions of simple modernity, and instead have the freedom/burden of determining their own path in life. Some conceptualisations (Beck, 1992; Beck & Beck-Gernsheim, 2002) suggest that such dis-embedding from traditional social institutions is accompanied by a re-embedding in the newly significant social institution of the labour market, which acts to limit their freedom. This resonates with the structure, culture, agency debate, because it is a matter of the relationship between social institutions and human action (agency), with social institutions being defined as ‘the more enduring features of social life’ (Giddens, 1984: 24) or ‘a complex of positions, roles, norms and values lodged in particular types of social structures and organising relatively stable patterns of human activity’ (Turner, 1997: 6).

3.3. Individualisation

In the 1980s and 1990s, a number of sociologists and social theorists from Germany and the UK, including Ulrich Beck; Elizabeth Beck-Gernsheim; Anthony Giddens; Scott Lash and Zigmund Bauman, were articulating a range of theories concerning a move from industrial or ‘simple’ modernity (which had followed on from Feudal or ‘pre-modern’ society), to conditions of ‘second’, ‘late’ or ‘reflexive’ modernity. Three factors identified by the authors as contributors to the move were the demise of social class divisions and distinctions; women’s liberation from traditional gender roles (perceptions of greater gender equality); and changes in the nature of work (Skelton, 2006). All of these factors, along with the individualisation concept itself, have provoked considerable academic debate, and the central authors themselves differ in terms of the specifics of the transition, and the proposed consequences (positive or negative). This section of the literature review aims to review different conceptualisations, and assess the potential of the individualisation concept for understanding the work and non-work experiences of contemporary solo-living employees. It will start by elaborating the concept of individualisation, and also the associated concept of ‘risk’, in late modernity, and acknowledging the main critiques.

3.3.1. *Individualisation and risk*

The central tenet of the 'mid-range theory' (Beck-Gernsheim, 2002) of individualisation is that individuals are no longer governed by the range of social institutions of simple modernity – including the nation state, class, ethnicity, religion and the nuclear family (Beck, 1992) – which would have defined their place in society and determined their life-course, but are instead free to make their own way in life, which can bring both benefits and challenges. Gender, class and ethnicity are seen to be nothing but 'zombie categories' – husk labels for groups that no longer have any real influence over experience (Beck & Beck-Gernsheim, 2002:27).

Dawson (2012) identifies Beck, Giddens and Bauman as the theorists who have contributed most centrally to a theoretical conception of individualisation, albeit from different perspectives. Beck has been the most systematic in outlining a theory of individualisation, in both his co-authored book of the same name (Beck & Beck-Gernsheim, 2002) and his earlier *Risk Society* (1992). Beck's theory stems from his experience as a sociologist of institutions, and will be the most fully discussed in this thesis as it can be seen to represent a rather balanced account of the opportunities and threats that the new social state brings for individuals. Giddens (1990, 1991), whilst rarely speaking of individualisation directly, has developed a particularly optimistic reading of the process, stemming from his downplaying of the influence of external structures in prior work, and desire to emphasise the importance of agency (Giddens, 1984). Finally, Bauman (2000) provides the most pessimistic account, viewing individualisation – or what he terms the 'society of fluid modernity' (2000: 23) – as a political act which condemns individuals to 'mental torments and the agony of indecision... a paralysing fear of risk and failure without the right to appeal' (2000: 19).

An often cited quote to sum up the state of individualisation is provided by Beck and Beck-Gernsheim (2002: 22-3). In a society in which the traditional institutions of simple modernity have receded in importance:

'The ethic of individual self-fulfilment and achievement [becomes] the most powerful current in modern society. The choosing, deciding, shaping human being who aspires to be the author of his or her own life, the creator of an individual identity, is the central character of our time'.

This can be seen to link to the notion of the 'second demographic revolution' (Lesthaeghe & vande Kaa, 1986) that was cited above, where there is a new focus on the higher levels of Maslow's (1954) hierarchy of needs, and a commensurate shift in the value structure – where tolerance for diversity and respect for individual choices has replaced solidarity and social group cohesion as prime values (Lesthaeghe, 2010:3). In the light of such statements, it is perhaps unsurprising that individualisation is often equated with the idea of freedom and choice – as 'a theory of the ever-increasing powers of social actors, or 'agency' in regard to structure' (Lash, 1994: 111).

This would be an unattractive theory bearing in mind the discussion of the relationships between structure, culture and agency presented above. This is not the only perspective on individualisation however. Dawson (2012: 313) suggests it is possible to distinguish between an embedded and a dis-embedded perspective. The latter reflects the agency viewpoint noted in the above paragraph, which he agreed presents sociology with some grave problems, suggesting that any inequality in society is the result of the choices that dis-embedded individuals make as opposed to existing prior to these choices. He believes an embedded individualisation position on the other hand is more fruitful. This focuses on the privatisation of collective concerns, suggesting that the diminishing influence of structural institutions means that individuals become responsible for their own path in life as opposed to having this mapped out for them, but that this does not mean that the opportunities available to individuals are universally available. Dawson (2012) suggests that far from being zombie categories, 'continual forms of stratification are important, and instead of being displaced by individualisation can actually extenuate it' (2102: 313), and also '*situate* individualisation' (2012: 313).

Another perspective that places limits on the potential agency of individuals in situations of individualisation comes from Beck (1992), who suggests that individuals in late modernity are not only dis-embedded from the social institutions of simple modernity, but are simultaneously re-embedded in another social intuition – that of the labour market. Beck makes it clear that his usage of the term in its German sociological sense is very different from the common usage of the term in English-speaking countries which equates it with the 'neoliberal idea of the free-market individual' (Beck & Beck-Gernsheim, 2002: xxi). Throughout his work therefore, individualisation is not equated with emancipation, or 'the beginning of the self-creation of the world by the resurrected individual' (Beck, 1992: 90), but is instead comprised of this dual motion. Individuals are freed from old structures, but are simultaneously subjected to new tendencies towards institutionalisation based on the

principles of the market: notably education; the labour market; mobility; competition; and consumption (Beck, 1992: 93-4). This is emphasised in an alternative name for the process posed by Beck & Beck-Gernsheim (2002: xxi): 'institutionalised individualism'. Individualisation is seen to represent a triple process of first 'liberation'/'dis-embedding' (the removal from historically prescribed roles); then 'disenchantment' (the loss of traditional security via guiding norms); and finally 'reintegration'/'re-embedding' on the basis of labour market requirements (Beck, 1992: 128).

Bearing in mind the discussion about the relationships between structure, culture and agency presented above, and the alignment with the critical realist approach, it is this conceptualisation of individualisation that is considered appropriate for understanding the work-life experiences of solo-living young managers and professionals in the 21st century UK. The view is especially prominent because of the focus of labour market and workplace issues in this thesis as a whole.

Another position which is somewhat aligned to Beck's focus on dis-embedding but also re-embedding individualisation is 'structured individualisation' (Roberts et al. 1994). With this theory, it is argued that the individual is responsible for their own biography (as they are free from the constraints of simple modern institutions), but that this biography is a social biography – influenced by the social context. The approach therefore suggests that there will be structural (relating to resources) and cultural (gender, ethnicity, cultural background, etc.) variations in the individualisation process.

The nature of the labour market is seen to be somewhat different in late modernity. Whilst work has always been recognised as an important institution in society, individualisation theory suggests that in simple modernity, other institutions would be equally dominant, and would influence an individual's positioning within the labour market – with an individual's opportunities being linked to their gender, their class, the nation state, and the norms of their local community. Also, the nature of work was seen to be stable – long-term, full-time employment in a single industry, often with a single employer. This necessitated little active decision making when it came to career management on the part of the individual. In late modernity, by contrast, individuals are seen to be dis-embedded from the institutions of the nuclear family and associated gender roles, class, nation state and religion. The labour market becomes the dominant social institution, but it is a different type of labour market to that of the past:

'Whereas in the post-war period a stable working life was the rule, the period since the late 1970s has seen a growing erosion of the 'normal work situation' (that is, long-term full-time employment protected by social and labour legislation). By virtue of deregulation and flexibilisation in the labour market, more varied and unstable forms of employment have come to the fore' (Beck-Gernsheim, 2002: 30)

The validity of this statement can be called into question, both in terms of the stability of pre-1970s employment, and also the instability of 'late modern' jobs (Neumark, 2000). It is also questionable how applicable this statement is to the more socio-economically advantaged sections of the workforce – including managers and professionals. The main point being made however is that the labour market in late modernity requires much more active navigation on the part of individual workers. Two requirements are seen to be involved in successful navigation of the labour market in late modernity – engagement with education and also mobility (Beck, 1992: 93-4). Where the labour market is the only embedding social institution, work becomes not only a source of income in order to support a comfortable lifestyle, but quite often the only source of identity.

Another point worth discussing is the nature of personal relationships in conditions of individualisation. As gender inequalities have reduced in education and employment, relationships in late modernity are seen to be fundamentally different from those in simple modernity. In simple modernity, the dominant relationship formations were marriage and the nuclear family unit. These formations were vital for the functioning of the society as a whole, which was based on two processes – production and reproduction (Mulinari & Sandell, 2009). The labour market was structured to require the full-time lifelong employment of men (production) who were supported by their wives in the home domain, whose responsibility was to ensure reproduction. Marriage was equated to financial and practical support as much as, or perhaps even more than, romantic love. In late modernity however, intimate relationships are seen to be based on different principles. Instead of being founded on mutual need, people are seen to enter partnerships for the fulfilment of emotional needs. Giddens (1992) proposed the term 'pure relationship' to signify a new social norm, based on a combination of confluent love (a love that is mutual, unconditional and active) and plastic sexuality (an open sexuality disengaged from reproduction). Beck & Beck-Gernsheim (2002) note that such relationships are 'even more vulnerable and prone to breakdown' than traditional relationships, and that 'if life together cannot satisfy what is expected of it, the logical conclusion is to live alone' (2002: 72).

A key issue flagged in Beck's (1992) conceptualisation of individualisation is that freedom from the range of traditional social institutions brings individuals new dangers. He notes that whilst individuals may be free to make their own decisions, we must be aware that sometimes 'the word 'decisions' is too grandiose, because neither consciousness nor alternatives are present' (Beck, 1992: 135). This relates to the debates over the conceptualisation of agency cited in the last section – suggesting a view of agency based on a capacity to act, but not necessarily linked to reflexivity, intentionality or power. He also suggests that either way, there is a new problem for individuals in late modernity – they have to live with the consequences of the decisions they make, with no one to blame but themselves. This brings us to the second central issue in theories of late modernity – the notion of living in a new 'risk society':

'The system of coordinates in which life and thinking are fastened in industrial modernity – the axes of gender, family and occupation, the belief in science and progress – begins to shake, and a new twilight of opportunities and hazards comes into existence – the contours of the risk society' (Beck, 1992: 15)

The concept of risk recurs in different works on late modernity and in different ways. In the seminal work entitled *Risk Society*, Beck (1992) discusses two different risk elements: firstly global risk situations that are brought about by new ways of life; and secondly, the problematic consequences of these ways of life for individuals – in terms of social, cultural, and biographical insecurities. Giddens (1991) discusses 'fateful moments', where an individual stands at a crossroads and has a decision to make. He asserts that whilst experts can be consulted to advise on such decisions, the individual nature of fateful moments means that advice is rarely clear-cut and it thus remains 'the individual concerned who has to run the risks in question' (1991: 113). Beck and Giddens are not saying that late modernity is the only society in which problems/hazards are faced. They are instead differentiating between the terms 'dangers', which have always been a feature of the broader environment (in terms of macro-level factors and natural disaster), and 'risks', which are not linked to 'fate'/'acts of God' or collectively experienced, but are instead bound up with personal reflexivity, with decision making, and therefore with individual responsibility.

So what types of 'risk' are we talking about? Just as the central features of individualisation relate to the dis-embedding of individuals from traditional structures (family, neighbourhood) and their re-embedding in new ones (education, labour markets, consumption), these are also the central causes of risk. When individuals are increasingly dependent on labour markets and increasing wages to fuel consumption, and don't have traditional support networks to fall back on, any employment problems can mean that individuals 'are suddenly confronting an abyss'

(Beck: 1992: 93). Even where problems are linked to macro-level factors that are out of the individuals' control (such as an economy in recession), the 'individualisation of social risks' means that these are 'increasingly perceived in terms of psychological dispositions: as personal inadequacies, guilt feelings, anxieties, conflicts, and neuroses' (Beck, 1992: 100). As such, social problems are internalised as individual ones.

Furthermore, whilst dangers for previous generations could be understood as discrete events, risks are seen to be endemic in late modernity. This is attributed to a change from a 'logic of structures' (fixed and predictable situations), to a 'logic of flows' (Lash, 2002: viii), where society is continually in motion, and thus any position within it is continually precarious. The only power that individuals can be seen to have in such circumstances is to try to think ahead and prepare for possible changes – which has implications for the dominant temporal perspective. This is summarised by Beck (1992: 34):

'In the risk society, the past loses the power to determine the present. Its place is taken by the future, thus, something non-existent, invented, fictive as the 'cause' of current experience and action. We become active today in order to prevent, alleviate, or take precautions against the problems and crises of tomorrow and the day after tomorrow – or not to do so'.

Whilst Beck and Beck & Beck-Gernsheim reject the central influence of categories such as class, ethnicity and gender on individual experience, they do note that not all individuals have the same opportunities in society, or are equally equipped to deal with risks. Cote (2000) notes that whilst the individualised society is seen to supersede the class society, the central authors do acknowledge that individualisation 'can be tremendously liberating—or terrifically burdensome—depending on the resources at the person's disposal' (Cote, 2000: 11). The issue is that these resources are not necessarily bound up with traditional social categories, but more about engagement with education and mobility.

3.3.2. Critiques

The concept of individualisation has proved extremely controversial. Criticisms made against the body of work as a whole refer to both methodological and epistemological foundations. In relation to the first of these, concerns have been raised about the lack of empirical engagement by the founding authors. As primarily concerned with theory development, none of the central texts are grounded in a systematic investigation of changes in key issues over

time. Whilst Beck (Beck & Lau, 2005) and Giddens (1991) forcefully assert that the theory should become a key concept for empirical research, none of the main theorists cite robust empirical data or a systematic analysis of the data. Giddens (1992) cites self-help manuals and Bauman (2003) newspapers as evidence of their claims; and neither Beck (1992), Beck & Beck-Gernsheim (2002) nor Beck-Gernsheim (2002) present any original empirical research. This criticism can be addressed by more empirical research projects engaging with the theory.

In terms of epistemological challenge, one concerns the emphasis on, and conceptualisation of 'agency'. Brannen & Nilsen (2005) believe that individualisation theorists overplay agency and underplay structure. Duncan (2011) disputes the conscious and reflexive emphasis in individualisation theory, saying that it 'misrepresents and romanticises the nature of agency', arguing instead that individuals 'usually make decisions about their personal lives pragmatically, bounded by circumstances and in connection with other people, not only relationally but also institutionally' (2011: 13). Furthermore Cote (2000) states that there are a variety of ways to conceptualise agency, and that the idea of individuals simply having a series of 'multiple choices' of what to consume 'may not constitute any sort of agency worthy of the concept' (2000: 118). It is important to recall here however that individualisation as conceptualised by Beck (1992) and Beck & Beck-Gernsheim (2002) does not refer to a situation where people freely choose their paths in life, but instead refers to one where paths are still influenced by the environment, but just by a different set of social institutions to simple modernity.

Another epistemological challenge concerns the revolutionary claims at the heart of the 'late modernity' theories, with it being questioned whether traditional/industrial societies were so very different. One argument is that the nuclear family only really became a norm in Western countries in the 1950s, and that the strict division of labour that Beck and Giddens ascribe to simple modernity was more ideology than everyday practice (Mulinari & Sandell, 2009: 489). In a similar way, Dawson (2012) noted that modernists have suggested there has always been an element of the individual construction of identity, and that the importance of social factors such as gender and economic privilege continue to influence many people to this day. He also noted that criticisms have been made concerning the 'broadly liberal, middle-class values' (2012: 309) of the individualisation authors, such as Poortman & Liefbroer (2010) and the selective presentation of evidence – 'choosing supporting examples and ignoring dissenting ones (Gilding, 2010)' (Dawson, 2012: 309). Some authors have added strength to the critiques by basing their arguments on solid empirical investigation. Duncan (2011) used national survey data to compare the social and domestic situations of those in the 1940s-early 50s with

those in the 2000s. Rather than tradition being dominant in the earlier cohort and individualisation in the latter, he found that 'the bulk of both samples were 'pragmatists', holding practical views of what was reasonably proper and possible in adapting to, and improvising around, their circumstances' (2011: 242).

In fairness, it should be noted that there are caveats to the claims upon which these counter-claims rest. It has been said that the argument of individualisation theorists is not that deviations from the norm were absent in earlier times, but that in those times deviations would have been *marginalised*, whereas today they are '*institutionally normalised and recognised*' – both in society as well as in law (Beck & Lau, 2005: 530). In terms of this research, the purpose is not to argue that a different attitude towards solo-living is evident today than in earlier generations, as this is beyond the scope of this project; rather the purpose is to see whether young managers and professionals who are living alone at the current time discuss issues that echo individualisation as conceptualised by Beck (1992) and Beck & Beck-Gernsheim (2002) – so a distance from certain institutions; an emphasis on the importance of education and mobility; a perception of risk. I am inclined to agree with Dawson's (2012: 309) view of individualisation as 'a subjective phenomenon driven by perceptions and individual awareness'.

Other criticisms relate to more specific elements of the individualisation concept in the various works, such as the downplaying of the power of the collective; the conceptualisation of the family and relationships; and the stance taken on the issue of gender. In relation to the first of these, interactionists refute the image of the lonely, reflexive individual because this would overlook the way in which reflexivity is 'socially situated' and therefore 'culturally embedded... and temporally dependent, with contingent conclusions' (Dawson, 2012: 310). Instead, they present reflexivity as a relational process, where individuals consider not only their own situation, but also the ways in which other people provide them with information on what forms of behaviour are considered legitimate or 'authentic' (Mendez, 2008). This thus introduces the question of relational or collective identification to individualisation, which can occur across many fields, and thus link individualisation to stratification (generally along the lines of traditional 'zombie categories'), where some groups 'are accorded either more reflexivity, or the ability to act out their reflexivity more fully (Nollmann & Strasser, 2007)' (Dawson, 2012: 311) than others.

Of particular relevance to this investigation are critiques grounded in the proposed state of the family and relationships in late modernity. Firstly, whilst individualisation theorists state that

relational ties have become loose, and the new ethic is for individual self-fulfilment and achievement, a range of authors have argued that there is an on-going 'moral economy' (Irwin & Bottero, 2000: 271) based on care for others, in which the specific formations may have changed (from nuclear to more varied forms of family), but the underlying principles have not. The CAVA (ESRC Research Group for the study of Care, Values and the Future of Welfare) studies for example were based on 'a grounded, sociological development, and normative elucidation, of the concept of an ethics of care, which holds as axiomatic the fundamentally relational, interdependent nature of human existence' (Roseneil, 2004b: 414). The empirical studies explored variations in practices of partnership, parenting and friendship and as a whole concluded that people were:

'energetic moral actors, embedded in webs of valued personal relationships, working to sustain the commitments that matter to them, [who]... when faced with dilemmas... draw on repertoires of values about care and commitment in order to work out what, in practice, would be the 'proper thing to do' (Williams, 2004: 41-42).

Importantly, all of these studies were exploring relationships – be these different forms of relationship from the norm. The situation might be different for individuals living alone, especially if the living situation is a conscious choice, selected to be responsive to the needs of the labour market for mobility. Chandler et al. (2004) noted that the rise of solo living has frequently been seen as an indicator of growing 'individualisation' in society, and Beck (1992: 122) said that 'the basic figure of *fully developed* modernity is the *single person*' – presumably one who lives alone, and does not have to care for cohabiting children or elders, etc. It could be that solo-living represents a more individualised experience than some of the other non-normative arrangements because there is not necessarily any requirement for care for others, and therefore more 'control [over] one's own money, time, living space and body' (Beck, 1992: 92) – factors seen to be at the heart of the individualised lifestyle. It has been argued that whilst in the 1950s and 1960s, the main goals in people's lives were considered to be a 'happy' family home, and material assets, they are today 'self-discovery... self-assertion and... the fuller life' (Beck & Beck-Gernsheim, 2002: 38) – all of which are easier to attain if individuals live on their own and have nobody else to consult when considering how and where to live.

Another important critique to bear in mind is that just because late modernity can be seen to have increased the number of options open to individuals, people could well select the more traditional option. In Duncan & Edwards (1999) research on single mothers, it was the women with the greater access to resources (education and money), and arguably the most choice who tended to confirm to 'traditional' gender norms. Whilst they might be expected to

choose to go out to work, and pay for child care, many actually chose to stay at home to raise their children. In his 2011 article, Duncan suggests that 'individualisation theorists confuse what people can potentially do (create individual self-projects) with what they actually do (relate to others in more taken for granted 'traditional' ways)' (2011: 2.7). It could be that some, or even most, solo-living managers and professionals are trying to find ways to move into a more traditional household situation.

The final critique discussed here concerns the way gender is presented in works on individualisation. In the classic individualisation texts, it seems that gender is presented in a rather contradictory manner. On the one hand, gender, alongside class, ethnicity and the nuclear family, is seen as a 'zombie category' – a categorisation that has lost its influence in terms of prescribing the life course (Beck & Beck-Gernsheim, 2002: 27). There are still acknowledged differences in the opportunities available to, and the experiences of, different individuals, but these are related to 'the resources at the person's disposal' (Cote, 2000: 11) rather than because of their gender, class or ethnicity. The relevance of gender is seen to be limited to elected gender ascriptions, meaning that to behave in a traditionally feminine way remains, but only as one option amongst others. About women in late modernity, Beck (1992: 105) states: 'The law that comes over them is 'I am I' and then I am a woman... Worlds gape in this distance between 'I' and the expected woman'. In other words, a female in late modernity is seen to consider herself first and foremost as an individual, whereas in the past, she would have considered herself as a woman, which would have shaped her thoughts about the options available. As Giddens (1991: 217) summarised, 'what gender identity is, and how it should be expressed, has become itself a matter of multiple options'. As women were considered to be fairly powerless in industrial society (relying on marriage for financial security), they were seen to be the greatest beneficiaries of individualisation (Beck & Beck-Gernsheim, 2002; Giddens, 1991: 228–230) – being released from the norms and burdens of domestic life, being educated, and being free to enter the labour market and secure their own financial situation.

On the other hand, gender is still seen to have an influence over experience, with women said to be stuck between the 'no longer' and the 'not yet' (Beck & Beck-Gernsheim, 2002: 54) in late modernity – 'no longer' limited in their life trajectories to the role of wife and mother; but 'not yet' in an equal position to men in terms of the opportunities of the labour market. This suggests that gender is less influential on experience than it was in simple modernity, but still has significance. The 'not yet' for women here relates to two different issues – one in the sphere of work, the other at home. In relation to the former, whilst women were seen to have

gained certain opportunities via changes to the education system, to the nature of industry, and the labour market, many 'women's jobs' were said to remain inferior to men's jobs: 'in content, organisation and pay' (Beck & Beck-Gernsheim, 2002: 66-7), more likely to be short-term, under-rewarded, and unfulfilling. In relation to the domestic realm, whilst more freedom had been given to women via divorce laws, women were still seen to carry the burden in terms of children (pregnancy, birth and most care) and other domestic work. As a result, Beck (1992: 111-2) said that 'the lives of women are pulled back and forth by this contradiction between the liberation from and reconnection to the old ascribed roles'.

The contradictions concerning gender are difficult to grasp. Beck's position on gender does not seem to have changed over time, from him seeing it as merely a 'zombie category' in earlier works, to acknowledging the constraints on female liberation over time, as the latter argument is evident in both *Risk Society* (1992) and also in his co-authored texts in 1995 and 2002 (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 1995; Beck and Beck & Beck-Gernsheim, 2002). The treatment of gender in Beck's work has been the subject of critique by others, mainly feminist researchers. Adkins (1998), for example, supported Beck's suggestion that many social categories were losing their relevance in the modern world, but did not believe that gender fell into this. McNay (1999) indicated that the process of individualisation actually makes life more difficult for women, as they have the desire to 'live a life of their own' whilst there remains an expectation of them 'being there for others'. Such contradictions are not present when considering the male role, as noted by Beck himself:

'Men's situations are quite different. While women have to loosen their old ascribed roles... for men, making a living *independently* and the *old* role identity *coincide*... The joys and duties of fatherhood could always be enjoyed *in small doses*. ...In other words, all the factors that dislodge women from their traditional roles are missing on the male side... This means that individualization (in the sense of making a living through the mediation of the market) *strengthens* masculine role behaviour' (Beck, 1992: 112. Emphasis in original)

It seems that for solo-living young managers and professionals who do not have the role of wife and mother to accommodate, gender may not be a significant issue in the experiences of participants, with the logic of female solo-livers being 'I am I' – with the same options as anyone else, male or female. From the discussion above, the conclusion reached is that individualisation – as conceptualised by Beck (1992) and Beck & Beck-Gernsheim (2002) – is a useful theory to use as a frame of reference for understanding the work and life experiences of solo-living managers and professionals. The intention is not to prove or disprove the theory of

individualisation, but to see if certain tenets of the theory help us understand the attitudes and experiences of a group of managers and professionals living alone in the 21st Century. In the next section, the appeal of the theory for this group of individuals is summarised.

3.3.3. *Individualisation and solo-living employees*

Whilst the section above shows that there are lots of nuances to be addressed when seeking to utilise the theory of individualisation in empirical research, this section sets out why it is considered to be fruitful for the current research project on solo-living managers and professionals. Firstly, the group to be studied seem to match Beck's (1992: 122) vision of 'the basic figure of *fully developed* modernity', which he says is 'the *single person*', who presumably lives alone, and does not have to care for cohabiting children or elders. Individualisation theory has already been cited in studies on a range of social/domestic trends that are often listed alongside solo-living in commentaries on social change – including the rise in cohabitation (Syltevik, 2010), single motherhood and employment (Duncan & Edwards, 1999), living-apart-together couples (Duncan & Phillips, 2010; Roseneil, 2006), single-sex coupledness (Heaphy, 2009), post-divorce coupledness (Smart, 2004), friendships (Roseneil, 2004a, 2004b) and 'families of choice' (Duncan & Phillips, 2008). Whilst most of these reject elements of the theory related to an 'ethic of the self' in favour of an on-going 'ethic of care', these studies are all exploring new forms of relationship, and it will be interesting to explore the situation for individuals who live alone.

Secondly, solo-living is more prevalent amongst those in higher socio-economic groups (Hall et al. 1999), and it is these individuals who are seen to be the most suited to the individualised society – having the economic and social capital required to navigate the labour market successfully. As Cote (2000: 11) observes, individualisation 'can be tremendously liberating—or terrifically burdensome—depending on the resources at the person's disposal'. Relevant resources here would relate to education and earning capacity. Solo-living might also be linked to individualisation because it is more amenable to a lifestyle in which frequent mobility is required.

A key issue in my opinion is how solo-living is actually perceived by individuals. Whilst addressing singleness as opposed to solo-living (which it was noted above should not be conflated), a useful discussion was presented by Poortman & Liefbroer (2010) on whether being single could be seen to be a manifestation of individualisation. They noted that whether

individualisation be understood in either of the dominant ways: '(1) as an increased freedom of choice in how to shape one's life, or (2) as implying more individualistic attitudes that favour less commitment toward others' (2010: 938), the attitude of a single person to singleness would be positive. They noted that whilst the second notion 'almost certainly implies positive attitudes toward singlehood' (2010: 938), the first notion should too, as the single state would likely be the single person's own choice. In their research project however, they went on to note that many of the subjects were quite negative about their situation, and would rather have been partnered – which they used to suggest that individualisation was not evident in the sample. An interesting issue for the current research project is therefore whether individualisation – although individualisation as conceptualised by Beck (1992) and Beck & Beck-Gernsheim (2002), which is different to that set out by Poortman & Liefbroer (2010) – is evident in how solo-living is actually perceived and discussed by participants.

An issue to explore alongside this is whether each individual perceives solo-living to be a relatively permanent state, one stage amongst many, or an aberration. Either of the first two perceptions could support individualisation. A belief that solo-living is long-term might suggest that the state had been chosen, in line with the 'choice' perspective on individualisation. A varied housing trajectory could also align with individualisation as, according to Beck (1992), in a society where traditional life trajectories are no longer enforced, and relationships are more fluid, more and more people 'choose' a domestic trajectory that avoids the extremes of family (the traditional model) or no family (the ideal form for the market society). He terms this model a '*pluralistic overall biography in transition*', comprised of 'alternation between families, mixed with and interrupted by other forms of living together or alone' (Beck, 1992: 115, emphasis in original). As well as helping to understand the extent and nature of individualisation, how solo-living is perceived by employees is also important for understanding participant attitudes towards their current work-life balance and the provisions that their employers offer. For example, if solo-living is seen to be a temporary stage before marriage and children, then individuals might be more tolerant of poor work-life balance and non-access to work-life balance provisions at the time of interview, because they expect a better balance and more access in the future.

It is also interesting to consider how solo-living relates to the concept of risk. Having identified the 'unencumbered worker' as the model employee in conditions of late modernity, Beck (1992) acknowledged the vulnerabilities of this position, such as the requirement for frequent mobility and the limited influence of traditional support structures. He suggested that 'precautions are necessary to protect this way of living against its built-in hazards' (1992: 122),

such as the development of various circles of contact, which 'presumes as secure a professional position as possible – as an income source, self-confirmation and social experience' (1992: 122). There is a need for research to explore exactly which risks are perceived by solo-living employees – in both the work and non-work domains – and what actions/precautions these individuals are taking.

Finally, solo-living childless employees are an interesting group when considering the issue of gender in late modernity. As noted above, the controversy over whether women are 'not yet' quite as individualised as men is attributed to their position in the labour market (women's jobs being seen to be less secure, less well paid, and less fulfilling than men's) and their position in the household when it comes to reproduction. It is intimated that gender would be a complete 'zombie category' if labour markets were gender-neutral and the issue of childbearing and caring was removed from the equation. If Beck & Beck-Gernsheim's (2002) understanding of the nature of male and female jobs at the time of their book was correct (itself a contested issue), the situation may no longer be the same today, over ten years' later – especially for women who have no 'second shift' (Hochschild, 1989) of childcare in the home domain that might limit their employment options. A relevant question to for this research is how solo-living men and women without children experience late modernity, and whether there are any differences related to gender.

When exploring the salience of Beck (1992) and Beck & Beck-Gernsheim's (2002) concept of individualisation for the work-life experiences of solo-living employees, a number of questions are therefore raised: Which institutions are dominant in the lives of participants? Is a 'duty to oneself' the dominant concern, over caring for others? What evidence is there of risk in the interviews? How do participants narrate their work-life trajectory and discuss their current living situation? Does gender have an influence on experience? This research aims to answer these questions, alongside the broader exploration of participant work-life balance experience and attitude.

3.4. Conclusion and research questions

These literature review chapters have set out the concepts at the heart of this research project. The last chapter focused on the key topics under investigation: work-life balance and solo-living, bringing in the concept of distributive justice. This chapter has considered these concepts in the light of sociological theory, establishing the utility of exploring the issues in

relation to the structure, culture and agency debate. It has also highlighted the possible utility of the individualisation theory for understanding the work-life experience of individuals in this specific demographic. All that remains for this chapter is to set out the key gaps in knowledge identified in this review, and the research questions that ensue – forming the foundations for this research project.

A key issue identified is that whilst there is a body of literature on the topic of work-life balance, including specific research on the experiences of managers and professionals, most studies have tended to conflate 'life' with 'family', and have largely focused on those with family responsibilities. Despite the calls for a broader conceptualisation of work-life balance from the British authors Kamenou (2008) and Ransome (2007), there is a limited body of knowledge in the UK on how work-life integration for different groups is actually experienced and understood. More significantly, there appears to be a gap in the literature in terms of consideration of the work-life experiences and attitudes of employees who live alone, despite more workers living in this arrangement than ever before. The nearest we get to this is the limited research on the work-life balance experiences of single people in America. The current research project focuses on people who live alone (which as noted earlier is not the same as being single) in the UK context – where the institutional framework is different to that of America in many ways, including legislation, the nature of employment, and employment benefits. The first question for this research project is therefore a general, exploratory question, which aims to uncover the work-life experience for managers and professionals that live alone:

Research Question 1: What work-life balance issues are reported by a sample of solo-living managers and professionals aged 24-44 who do not have children?

Aligned to this point, as there has been little research into the work-life balance experiences and attitudes of solo-living employees in the UK, we know very little about the attitudes of such individuals towards the work-life balance policies and provisions in place in their organisations. Whilst there is an argument – predominantly in the US media – of a growing 'backlash' (Korabik & Warner, 2009) from single employees against organisational policies that are seen to favour married employees and those with children, there is little empirical evidence to support the position, especially in the UK context. Distributive justice theory has been identified as useful analytic framework for addressing questions of the perceived fairness of organisational work-life balance provisions. The second exploratory question for the project is therefore:

Research Question 2: How fair are organisational work-life balance policies and provisions considered to be, based on participant distributive justice assessments?

It has been noted that a number of different factors are likely to have an impact on participant work-life balance experiences and attitudes towards things like fairness – organisational structural and cultural factors; legislation; social norms; the work-life trajectory to the point of interview (including the reason for living alone); gender; and personal attitudes and priorities when it comes to work, life outside work, and the interrelation between the two. As such, it is likely that there will be a degree of variety in participant experience and attitude. The third question aims to address this issue, focusing on the interaction of structure, culture and agency:

Research Question 3: To what extent is the sample heterogeneous when it comes to work-life balance experience and attitudes? How does difference link to structure, culture, and agency?

The final research question incorporates the range of sub-questions posed at the end of the last section of the literature review. These were the questions about the utility of individualisation theory for understanding the experience and attitudes of solo-living young managers and professionals – concerning the social institutions that are dominant in participant lives; whether there is a ‘duty to oneself’ or others; how participant’s discuss their experiences; how participants perceive risk; and whether gender is a salient issue:

Research Question 4: To what extent is individualisation a useful concept for understanding the experience of participants when it comes to work and life outside of work?

The next chapter will set out the research approach and methodology used in this research project to address these research questions.

4. Methodology

This chapter presents the methodological decisions taken in this research project. It begins by setting out the critical realist stance taken in this thesis, which was considered appropriate for addressing the research questions established at the close of the last chapter. The discussion goes on to consider the specific research methods used; the sample and sampling strategy; the data analysis approach selected; and the ethical implications of the research project.

4.1. Philosophical position

At the outset of the research, an interpretivist or social constructionist position was assumed. This was because the overall research project was an exploratory study into a phenomena about which little was known. Furthermore, as work-life balance is not a concrete entity, but rather a concept which has different meanings to different people, the position seemed appropriate. Indeed, much of the focus in the first part of the literature review was on the 'conceptualisation' of work-life balance, and how a dominant view/discourse has been constructed via governmental, organisational and media presentation which seems to equate 'work-life' with 'work-family'.

It was acknowledged however that there were problems with such a stance. Taken to an extreme, the perspective suggests that social and cultural phenomena are all a matter of perspective rather than being objective obstacles/resources that individuals are required to navigate. Upon researching the different perspectives on the structure, culture and agency debate (see chapter three), the critical realist stance was seen to be more appropriate for this research. Margaret Archer's analytic dualism was seen to be a persuasive mechanism for exploring the interaction of structure, culture and agency – and this is embedded in critical realism.

In terms of critical realist ontology, there is a reality that exists 'out there' independent of the individual, but it is made up of three different domains, only the final of which is directly accessible to researchers. The three domains are the real (underlying mechanisms that may have an influence on events), the actual (events that may or may not be experienced), and the empirical (actual experienced events) (Bhaskar, 1978). This final domain contains our 'facts', which are always theory-laden, mediated by our theoretical conceptions. In terms of epistemology, critical realism posits that there are two distinct types knowledge – *intransitive*

knowledge (referring to knowledge of things which exist and act independently of human activity) and *transitive knowledge* – referring to knowledge about the world that is constructed by human social activity – the only knowledge that we have access to in empirical study.

This philosophy had an intuitive appeal when it came to the research project at hand. The issue of trying to negotiate and balance the demands of two different domains (work and a life outside of work) is a real issue for workers, irrespective of the theories and concepts that are in vogue. It involves the navigation of systems and structures in the social environment – which itself has been conceptualised as belonging to the intransitive realm (Sayer, 2000). At the same time however, the term ‘work-life balance’ – which is clearly a humanly constructed, time and context-specific concept – itself has an influence on individual experience – by impacting on how policy-makers frame their interventions and how both individual workers and other social actors view their entitlements.

It should be noted that the critical realist approach is a broad one, and researchers can align themselves to specific positions as suited to the phenomenon under investigation. In the light of the discussion above, this research is informed by the more social constructionist side of critical realism (Elder Vass, 2012). It is believed that the solo-living employees’ perceptions of key issues will represent their reality and thus inform their attitudes/actions, but that these perceptions are influenced by real structures and cultures to which they are exposed. Participant perceptions therefore need to form the empirical level (hence the need for a method to access this), with the goal of the research being to uncover the generative mechanisms at the real level.

In terms of the theoretical and practical requirements of a critical realist research project, there does seem to be some congruence with the objectives of this study. Whilst positivist researchers use the logic of deduction, and interpretivists favour induction, critical realists are said to favour abduction and retroduction. According to Blaikie (2000), abduction is useful for addressing ‘what’ research questions (identifying what is happening in a situation and noting regularities), and for understanding things based on the reasons stated by social actors; whilst retroduction is useful for providing explanation – in terms of establishing the factors/mechanisms behind phenomena – including the factors behind social constructions (Elder Vass, 2012: 10). These logics seem well suited to addressing the research questions of this project.

Critical realists also assert that society is an open system, meaning that it is composed of a range of mechanisms, each of which can have an influence on the other mechanisms (producing countervailing/complementary effects). This means that it is impossible in critical realist enquiry to ever conclusively predict the outcome of an event. Rather, mechanisms can be seen to produce tendencies. A concrete occurrence and what comes next cannot be seen as a simple linear process (a matter of cause and effect), but a complex process whereby a number of possibilities exist, depending on what *enabling* or *constraining* causal mechanisms are present (Bhaskar, 1993).

A neat summary of critical realism is proposed by Archer et al. (1998: xi), in that it can be seen to 'combine and reconcile ontological realism, epistemological relativism and judgemental rationality'. Thus, there exists a reality out there, which is stratified, differentiated, structured and changing; our knowledge of this reality is always fallible; but there are some theoretical and methodological tools we can use in order to discriminate among theories regarding their ability to inform us about the external reality (Danermark et al. 2001: 10). In terms of research aims, there is a desire to preserve a 'scientific' attitude towards social analysis at the same time as recognising and incorporating actors' meanings.

4.2. Methodology

Methodologically, critical realists avoid rigidly ascribing the methods that are legitimate epistemologically for their philosophy (Sayer, 2000), instead suggesting that no methods (qualitative, quantitative or mixed) are intrinsically good or bad, but that methods should be selected according to their practical value in addressing the specific research questions of the project. The only real restriction is that methods necessitating a 'closed' as opposed to an 'open' system are considered inappropriate for social science. If anything, there is a general push towards intensive (qualitative) over extensive (quantitative) methods, and the use of 'an interpretive or hermeneutic element' because 'meaning has to be understood, it cannot be measured or counted' (Sayer, 2000: 17).

When considering what methodology would be suitable for the current research, it was useful to look over the approach taken in previous studies into the work-life balance issue. Much research in the field has been quantitative in nature. When Eby et al. (2005) carried out a content analysis of 20-years' worth of academic studies into work-life balance in the field of organisation behaviour, they found that 89 per cent of studies were based on predicting

specific relationships between variables as opposed to posing exploratory research questions. They noted that most of the research favoured the survey method – a tradition which has extended beyond the academic world, being the primary method of choice for many government and industry studies into employee hours of work and work-life balance. This quantitative bias was confirmed in a later study by Chang et al. (2010), which extended the methodological review by three years, and included the whole range of academic disciplines rather than just organisational behaviour. In this review, 78 per cent of all work-life balance studies were found to be quantitative in nature (2010: 2386). With such research studies, the logic has tended to be deductive, with key concerns including objectivity, validity and generalisability.

Such an approach would be problematic for the current research project, which aims to address exploratory research questions as opposed to testing specific hypotheses. I also believe that it is problematic to treat the conceptual construct work-life balance like a concrete entity to be measured quantitatively – a point that Parasuraman & Greenhaus (2002: 300) believe could have contributed to the ‘discrepant results reported [from positivist research, and thus] the incomplete knowledge of work-family connections’. A number of work-life balance research studies have found a qualitative approach to be fruitful, using methods such as in-depth qualitative interviews (Montgomery et al. 2005), auto-ethnographic conversations (Cohen et al. 2009), diary methods (Montgomery et al. 2009), and workplace ethnographies (Hodson, 2004) to explore the meanings ascribed by the individuals under investigation. A qualitative methodology was therefore selected – which had the solo-living employee as the unit of analysis.

4.3. Research method: An adaptation of the Biographical Narrative Interpretative Method (BNIM)

When it came to selecting an appropriate research method, two different requirements were identified. The first was that there should be scope for each individual participant to express their views in a relatively open way, using their own frame of reference. The second however was that the method should enable the collection of information on the structural and cultural environment in which each individual was situated, and also their capacity for agency (in terms of actions and interactions with others regarding work-life balance). It was also deemed advantageous to include a temporal perspective, to suit a critical realist lens.

A socio-biographical approach for the study was selected – something that can usefully incorporate individual level factors (such as values and emotions), which are traditionally seen to be psychological concepts, into sociological enquiry. In discussing ‘sociology of youth’ research, for example, Thompson et al. (2002) noted that there is an ‘increased interest in the diversity of experience... the centrality of identity and the subtle interplay of individual agency, circumstance and social structure’ – all of which can be explored by life history research. They believe that sociological biography, in exploring how social and economic environments frame personal resources, is able to ‘demonstrate the centrality of identity and subjectivity to understanding... without reducing the analysis to individual psychology’ (Thompson et al. 2002: 351). Similarly, Gardiner et al. (2009) found that the collection of individual biographies in their study of redundancy reactions was a useful mechanism for the exploration of both individual and context – as the narratives elicited in their study illuminated structural factors, cultural context, biographical experience and temporal perspectives.

Biographical or ‘life history’ methods have a long history in sociological enquiry (Chamberlayne et al. 2000). They originated in the Chicago School in the 1920s, where the focus tended to be on cultural meanings and the adaptation of groups to new social environments (i.e. migration research). A series of evaluations of the method occurred in the 1940s and 50s however, resulting in a turn to statistical techniques and ‘macro’ theory. It was not until the 1960s and 70s that the dominance of the functionalist approach to the ‘society-individual relation’ was challenged by a range of ‘micro-sociologies’ (including interactionism, ethno-methodology, and phenomenology), all of which sought to shift the emphasis of analysis back towards subjective reality and the meaning of personal life (Chamberlayne et al. 2000). At this time, the biographical method was readopted by European, and particularly German, sociologists, with Fritz Schütze being a particularly significant figure. His ‘model for an open narrative form of interviewing and a procedure for analysing narrative texts within the area of sociolinguistic theory (Schütze 1977) was developed into the central interpretative research approach in biographical analysis by the 1990s’ (Apitzsch & Siouti, 2007: 4).

Biographical narrative approaches are still popular today. Interestingly, one reason for the growing appreciation of biography in recent year relates to concerns about modernity and increasing ‘individualisation’ – a key concept in this research project. When society is stripped of many of the stable factors that previously structured individual lives (the nuclear/extended family, jobs for life, local community solidarity), the argument is that individuals turn to ‘biographical work’ to provide them with a sense of stability, continuity and identity:

'We may not know who we are and what is happening to us, but if we are able to narrate how we became who we are, then we can integrate ourselves, because we can present ourselves as both consistent and contingent. Even if I have gone through many contradictory phases in my life, the story I can tell presents me as myself... The 'mini-narrative' of oneself replaces those 'grand narratives' that were the previously pivotal ways of coping with a contingent world' (Fischer-Rosenthal, 2000: 115-6)

On the back of this, Fischer-Rosenthal argues that in the contemporary world, 'modernisation has and will lead – both on the part of the individual actor and on the part of the researcher attempting to understand the individual actor – to a biographical approach' (in Chamberlayne et al. 2000: 7).

It is worth noting that whilst biographical research has been used in a range of different academic disciplines and has had many influences on its conduct and concerns, a number of common aspects can be seen. Roberts (2002: 168) cites the dominant commonalities to be 'a concern with the complete individual life (or a major part of it) of the researched'; 'a commitment to methods which are processual – since the individual is to be related to time or past/present/future rather than just a 'present orientation''; and a commitment to replace the notion of the isolated individual with a figure within social relations (of the family and institutions).

Biographical data can be collected in a number of different ways. Whilst verbal accounts collected via interview are the most common method used, a distinction can be made between those prompted via fairly open and non-directed interview questioning (which give considerable license to the subject in the framing of the biography) and those generated via more theory-driven semi-structured interview methods. There are also methods that utilise written accounts in the form of diaries or documentary evidence. There is also a great deal of variety when it comes to the analysis of biographical data. Analysis of interview data alone provides a number of options, including analysis based on the themes arising in the transcript; discourse analysis; and narrative analysis.

The data collection and analysis method that was considered of interest for the current investigation was the Biographical Narrative Interpretive Method (BNIM), attributed in the UK to Tom Wengraf. With BNIM, interviews begin in a very non-directive manner, encouraging participants to tell their personal story of their life or a particular part, eliciting narratives that can then be analysed in two different ways – firstly looking at the events described (the 'lived

life'), and then looking at how they are described (the 'told story'). The method was appealing as it has the potential to inform us about important work and non-work experiences of each participant (including their family background and various transitions in work and living arrangement over time), and also how each individual interprets these events – including whether they are seen to be linked to personal choice or to external factors – which can be ascertained by their tone, locus of control, the things that are foreground/underplayed and the general gestalt.

As BNIM is based on narrative and biography, and traditional BNIM analysis is based largely on grounded theory principles (insights emerging from the data), the method is likely to be most associated with interpretivist and social constructionist approaches. However, Tom Wengraf, the leading scholar in BNIM in the UK says the tool is useable by people with 'a wide range of ontologies and epistemologies. It has no special exclusive valency for any one of a great number of (often very competitive) schools of thought' (Wengraf, 2011: 765). Wengraf himself has acknowledged the compatibility of the approach with critical realism, adding an appendix (E.4) to his 2011 revision of his *Detailed Guide* on the method entitled 'Critical Realism and biographical research'. Furthermore, an empirical research study has been conducted which explicitly combines BNIM with critical realism – Amanda Neilson's 2009 PhD thesis on chronic pain.

I further believe that biographical methods in general are appropriate for critical realist research, especially that based on analytical dualism. In the introduction to Chamberlayne et al.'s (2000) book *The turn to biographical methods in social science*, the authors discussion of the need for biographical methods can be seen to mirror the justifications offered by many critical realists for a 'turn' to their methods – this being a dissatisfaction with both positivist and social constructionist methods; a need for a new way to combine structure and agency; and a need for reflexivity:

The books title makes reference to a shift, which amounts to a paradigm change (Kuhn, 1960) which is characterised as a 'cultural' or 'subjective' turn in which personal and social meanings, as bases of action, gain prominence. Liked to 'a wide recognition that social science, in its *longues durees* of positivism, determinism and social constructionism, has become detached from lived realities'. Also because 'debates about the relative effects of structure and agency, which have been vigorous, have remained abstract (Giddens 1990; Mouzelis 1995; Archer 1995)' (Chamberlayne et al. 2000: 1)

The methodology used in the current research project is best described as ‘BNIM-inspired’, as it deviated from a ‘pure’ approach in several ways. Before the adapted method that was used in the current study is set out and justified, it is important to quickly outline the main features of BNIM and evaluate the suitability for the current project.

4.3.1. *Evaluating ‘pure’ BNIM*

BNIM is currently associated with Tom Wengraf in the UK, but has developed from the interactionist and phenomenological research traditions of Gabriele Rosenthal and Wolfram Fischer-Rosenthal at the Berlin-based QUATEX Institute for qualitative social research. BNIM allows the researcher to combine socio-biographical study with narrative accounts, and is considered especially suited to the study of ‘situated subjectivity’, which considers both the individual and their context:

‘Assuming that ‘narrative expression’ is expressive both of conscious concerns and also of unconscious cultural, societal and individual presuppositions and processes, BNIM supports research into the lived experience of individuals and collectives. It facilitates understanding both the ‘inner’ and the ‘outer’ worlds of ‘historically-evolving persons-in-historically-evolving situations’, and particularly the *interactivity* of inner and outer world dynamics’ (Wengraf, 2011: 1)

BNIM has clear guidelines for researchers in terms of both data collection and data analysis procedures. Data collection is via one long non-directional interview (which is divided into two sub-sessions) that is focused exclusively on eliciting narrative from the subject. There is then an optional semi-structured second interview, in which the researcher can ask both narrative and non-narrative questions as appropriate for their specific study.

The first sub-session of the main interview contains just one question – a Single Question aimed at Inducing Narrative (SQUIN). In contrast to the traditional ‘interventionist’ method, where the interviewer interrupts and cross-examines the subject, disrupting the ‘flow’ of the subject and imposing their own agenda, the biographic-narrative-interpretive method tries to let the subject organise the material according to their own system of relevancy. The open and non-directive format, with only limited reference being made to the topic of the research, has clear advantage when the aim is to ascertain what things mean to individuals, and/or how important they are. As summarised by Breckner & Rupp (2002: 293):

‘The variety of meanings of a specific life situation [or issue] cannot be known in advance of the research. If it could, we would not need to do empirical investigation. Nor is it fully accessible to the consciousness of those concerned. Consequently, we need research methods [like BNIM] that allow for the discovery and emergence of the complexity of situations and trajectories in which an actual issue is embedded’

During this initial narrative, the researcher makes brief notes on key phrases/topics in the subject’s narrative, some of which will be followed up on in the second sub-session – where the focus is on ‘pushing for particular-incident narratives’ (PINs), in other words getting more story on each particular topic. ‘Pushing’ on each topic is continued until an account is presented where it seems that the subject is ‘back in the moment’ – which will reveal new insights.

In terms of data analysis, pure BNIM is again very prescriptive. In contrast to the common ‘thematic interpretation’ of interview transcripts, where an entire transcript is treated as if it emerged as a ‘single expressive act’, the BNIM approach keeps in mind the sequence in which the information has been presented, and considers two different things – how the subject lived their life (over a period of many years) and how they told the story of their life (over the course of the two-three hour interview). Interpretation is facilitated by the use of panels of individuals.

Wengraf has observed the growing popularity of the method, and its use in a diverse range of theoretical and applied, collective and individual research studies (including doctoral studies) in a range of countries. Having said this, the extensive nineteen-page bibliography to his combined ‘BNIM Short Guide and Detailed Manual’ (Wengraf, 2011), which is regularly updated with all known publications, reveals no research into the experiences of solo-living workers, or indeed research which has work-life balance as the main focus.

As noted above, whilst the principles of BNIM were considered suitable for this research project, several amendments were made. The data collection stage in its traditional format would have required considerable investment from each research participant. The main interview would be both long (usually two-three hours) and demanding – requiring a lot of narrative from the subject, and involving repeated ‘pushing for PINs’ on subjects that they may be uncomfortable discussing. There would then also be the possibility of a second interview several weeks later, if issues of interest had not been covered in the first. As the sample

selected for this research (as elaborated below) are managers and professionals who may well be limited on time, it seemed incongruent to use such a demanding method.

A further concern, somewhat related to the first, was the potential for subjects to drop-out of the study after the first interview, thus preventing data collection in the second. It was likely that a second interview would have been important in this research – as it is the only session where non-narrative questions on specific topics of interest could be asked. This would be questions relating to a number of key structural and cultural factors that may well not have been spontaneously covered in the respondents life-history narrative, as well as questions on their current attitudes towards work-life balance, their views on the work-life balance support offered by their employers, their experience of living alone, and any specific actions they had taken to improve their situation.

There were also ethical concerns related to the ‘pushing for PINs’ in the second sub-session. The aim of this practice is to take the individual back to the moment of something that they may only have mentioned in passing in their initial narrative. If the subject appears reluctant to provide more information, the researcher would be required to continue to push. Neilson (2009: 97) observed that in her BNIM study into chronic pain, ‘the researcher felt that pursuing information on a specific experience raised in the first sub-session was overly intrusive if the participant did not appear inclined to expand on the topic after a follow-up question in the second sub-session’. She reflected that the depth of information that pushing for PINs was designed to elicit was not really necessary in the context of her study, and said that ‘in any subsequent research of this nature, the researcher would retain the unstructured narrative aspect of the first sub-session, but would not include a second sub-session in the first interview’ (Neilson, 2009: 97). She is not the only researcher to express concern about this element of the method. When discussing a BNIM Review Day held in England in 2006, Wengraf noted that it was clear that ‘pushing for PINs’ was not always done in BNIM research, and that a number of people expressed concern about ‘pushing’ more than once (Wengraf, 2011). Whilst questions about work-life balance and living situation might not be considered as intrusive as those on chronic pain, it is not known what topics might arise (potentially loneliness; concerns about finding a partner and having children; job insecurity) or the level of participant sensitivity.

The time demands involved in BNIM data analysis was also deemed problematic. The complexity of full BNIM analysis means that the recommended number of participants for a time-bound, single-researcher PhD project is just four individuals (Wengraf, 2011). As one of

the aims of the current research project is to explore whether there are variations in solo-living employee work-life experience and attitude, such a sample size would be too small. The next section sets out the data collection and analysis process utilised.

4.3.2. *The BNIM-inspired method*

When it came to data collection for the current research, in contrast to the three sub-session structure of traditional BNIM interviewing, a decision was made to limit the data collection to just one interview per participant, which would last one-two hours and would contain both narrative and topical interviewing sections. This is reminiscent of the problem-centred interview (PCI) that is currently popular in the German-language social scientific community (Scheibelhofer, 2008).

Each interview opened with the participant being asked to read and sign a consent form. They were sent information on the nature of the project prior to the meeting (see Appendix 1), and the consent form was signed as a record of their permission for the interview to take place, and to be tape recorded (see Appendix 2). Each participant was also asked to provide a pseudonym for the research write up (in connection with preserving their anonymity) and given the opportunity to ask any questions before the interview commenced. The interview proper then began with the tape recorder being switched on and the BNIM-based Single Question designed to Induce Narrative (SQUIN) being posed. The question was:

As you know, I'm interested in how people reconcile their work and their lives outside of work. Can you please tell me your life story, all of the events and experiences you feel have been important to you personally. Start wherever you like and please take all the time you need. I'll just listen first and won't interrupt, I'll just take some notes for if I have any questions for after you have finished telling me about it all.

As noted above, the SQUIN was designed to provide participants with freedom in their original narratives, and allow insight into their personal meanings around the central issues of work, life outside work, and work-life balance. Whilst one might assume that living alone and working long hours would equate to a poor work-life balance, which would be perceived as problematic by an individual, they may not see it this way. Similarly, the issue of work-life reconciliation may not be important for an individual, meaning that work-life issues are largely omitted from their accounts, despite being referenced in the opening question.

Whilst the participant responded to the SQUIN, the researcher made notes of the key words and issues emerging. At the end of the participant's response, a short break from the interview was taken and the tape recorder switched off. During this break, the participant completed a Participant Data Sheet (see Appendix 3), whilst the researcher was able to reflect on the participant's life story and identify key points on which to 'push for PINs' (as in BNIM subsession two) after the break. These were points which appeared specifically relevant to the participant when telling their story, or points that especially resonated with the research questions.

When the interview recommenced, 'pushing for PINs' did take place, but often only one or two 'pushes' were made in relation to each issue, as this seemed to provide the most natural conversational flow, and allowed adequate time for a further semi-structured section of interviewing. When in-depth pushing for PINs was attempted in the first pilot interview, the session became rather fractured and the participant seemed a bit frustrated – apparently perceiving that they had answered the question posed, and being confused as to why the question was being rephrased. It is acknowledged that this discomfort could well be the result of the researcher's unfamiliarity with the new methodology, and that the atmosphere might have improved in subsequent interviews, but considering the fact that the pilot also took over 2.5 hours, the more succinct pushing for PINs was considered adequate for the purposes of this specific study – which is interested primarily in the current work-life experience of each participant as opposed to the details of the work-life-course to the point of interview.

Immediately after the second part of the interview came the final section – which comprised of pre-prepared questions derived from the research questions and salient issues in the literature. The full interview schedule for this part of the interview can be found in Appendix 4. The questions focused on a range of issues including those relating to the participant's general attitudes towards work, life outside of work, and the term 'work-life balance'; and those related to their perceptions of their employer when it comes to work-life balance policies and provisions. There were also questions designed to ascertain information on the influence of structure, culture and agency.

When it comes to structural and cultural factors, questions addressed issues at a number of different levels – national, industry, organisation, and work-group. The latter was included because it has been noted that despite a growing body of research on notions of work-family conflict and work-life balance, 'one area that has received little attention is the role of an individual's immediate work context – the work group' (Bhave et al. 2010: 145) on their work-

life experiences. Bhavé et al. think this strange considering the fact that most organisations make use of some form of work group. A work group can be considered to be a formal, relatively permanent composition of individuals that work together in an organisation (Fry & Slocum, 1984). The level is also important as Nippert-Eng (1996) observe that if organisational norms concerning work-family issues and policies are 'silent, vague, or negotiable, the work group is where they are most likely interpreted... work groups let us know if we actually have flexible working hours and places' (1996: 188). This sentiment is also echoed by Kirby and Krone (2002: 55), when they observe:

'The way organisational members talk about work-family programs helps to construct reality as to the 'meaning' of such programs in the organisation, which in turn shapes the attitudes and behaviours of organisational members. Thus, discourse surrounding work-family policies may serve to reinforce or undermine the policies as written'.

Whilst Kirby and Krone (2002) do not specify immediate work-groups, it is likely that 'talk' in the individual's immediate work vicinity will be quite influential. Bearing in mind the issue of distributive justice, it was thought that attitudes towards the work-group might be an interesting issue. If colleagues are seen to adopt a needs-based DJR, this might be seen as a barrier to personal work-life balance (colleagues being seen to add pressure to the taking on of extra work); whereas if they are seen to adopt an equality-based DJRs, this might be seen as an enabler to personal work-life balance.

All of the questions on the schedule were put to each participant, but they were informed at the start of the section that if they felt that they had already covered a topic adequately, or a question was not relevant to them, they should say. Following the principle of BNIM, where possible the questions were linked to the logic of the respondent's initial narrative (i.e. framing questions as 'you said earlier..., this brings me to ask...'), with the intention being to remain within the thematic reach of the communicative situation (Scheibelhofer, 2008). This was designed to minimise any disorientation experienced by the participant as a result of the change of interview style – from narrative to traditional semi-structured.

A useful parallel can be drawn between the interview method developed and that used by the EU-funded FEMAGE project on female immigrants and their integration into ageing societies – a method that Wengraf (2011) cites in his 'Variations of the method' section of the *Detailed Manual*. The FEMAGE project data collection method was as follows:

'The interviews combined narrative and structured elements... [in] three parts. The first was a narrative part specifically asking about migration histories. In the second part, certain follow-up questions were asked on six major topics. The last part, containing more than 180 closed and open questions, was taken in order to have specific information with regard to the relevant topics and for the sake of counterbalancing the narrative parts' (FEMAGE, 2008: 8 in Wengraf, 2011: 781).

Wengraf notes that the second part was more akin to the BNIM sub-session three than sub-session two, as there was one standard pre-set open-narrative question for six pre-defined topics, and no 'internal follow-up questions'. After citing other adaptations of the BNIM interview method, Wengraf concludes this section of his manual with the following comment:

'The minimum of 'using BNIM' appears to be an uninterrupted first interview session based on a narrative question, with the interviewer not asking any further questions. Nearly always, but not always, this is followed by a second sub-session based on the first, with usually all or mostly further narrative questions. How closely the sub-session two questions stick to BNIM rules seems surprisingly varied. Sub-session three is quite frequent, occasionally displacing or getting confused with what BNIM calls sub-session two' (Wengraf, 2011: 784).

From this, it seems that the current data collection method is sufficiently in tune with the central tenets of BNIM to be classed as BNIM-inspired. The focus will now turn to the selection of research participants.

4.4. Sample

As stated in the literature review, due to the heterogeneous nature of 'solo-living employees', the focus for the current project was quite specific: professional or managerial employees, aged 24-44, who are currently living alone and have yet to have children. The rationale for this is as follows. Within the working age population, solo-living has been seen to be most prevalent for those aged 24-44 (Lewis, 2005). As stated in chapter two, there are three main categories of single-person household. As the reasons for solo-living are self-explanatory and involuntary for widow/ers, a decision was made to focus on those that had moved out of a cohabiting relationship to living alone or had yet to cohabit. Childless employees were

selected to avoid a focus on work-family balance, as this issue was prominent in the literature already.

Managers and professionals were selected because solo-living in the working-age population is prevalent in higher socio-economic groups (Hall et al. 1999), and because much of the research on work-life balance problems, such as long working hours (see chapter two), suggests that managers and professionals are particularly vulnerable. Another reason is that many managerial and professional roles are amenable to some degree of flexibility and autonomy over working patterns. Whilst some work-life balance initiatives explicitly target those with families, most of the ones that could be of use to all staff – including solo-livers – concern having some variation over where and when work is completed – home working, flexi-time, compressed working week and changing shift patterns (Nadeem & Metcalf, 2007). According to the 2004 Workplace Employment Relations Survey, professional and highly educated respondents were more likely than other respondents to perceive the four work-life balance options cited above to be available should they want them (Nadeem & Metcalf, 2007). It is possible therefore that attitudes towards and take-up of such work-life balance initiatives by managers and professionals would be based more on personal perceptions and organisation cultures than more practical factors/barriers.

It is acknowledged that managers and professionals are two distinct categories of employees, with the distinction being a long-standing issue in sociology (Burrage & Torstendahl, 1990). A profession is conventionally associated with providing services based upon a specific body of expert knowledge, regulated by the relevant professional organisation. In contrast, managerial work is not similarly formally codified, can encompass a range of disciplinary areas, and is responsible to the employing organisation. A nice distinction made by Exworthy & Halford (1999) is that professionals are dependent on 'culture assets' derived from education and embodied in specialist knowledge of a given area of practice, whilst managers are dependent on 'organisational assets' derived from organisational experience and from their position in the organisational hierarchy. Despite this distinction, there is logic behind including both together for the current research project. There is some cross-over between the two categories in practice, with many professionals working in specific organisations in business and industry, and occupying high-level managerial positions — for example the company Finance Manager. Also, the categories are often classified together in industry survey reports and research on work-life balance (i.e. Hayward et al. 2007; Hooker et al. 2007; Roberts, 2007).

In gaining access to participants, rather than approach individuals via their organisations, and perhaps have the research associated with their employers, it was deemed appropriate to make contact with potential participants outside of the work context. The researcher was aware of a social and activity club based in Didsbury – a residential area that is popular with ‘young professionals’ in the South Manchester area. The club has over 1000 members, and it was considered likely that many of these would fit the profile required for participating in this research. The club’s website stated that the majority of the members were in their twenties to late forties, and some of the ‘reasons for joining’ listed seemed conducive to solo living, for example: having recently ‘moved to the area for work’; being ‘single with friends all partnered off’; and/or are being ‘busy professionals who don’t have time to meet people’ (Social Circle website).

In a meeting with the Managing Director of Social Circle, permission was granted for the researcher to attend a number of the club gatherings and mention the research to club members. At such events, only brief information on the project was given, in terms of the topic of interest, the type of participant desired, and the nature of participant involvement – an in-depth interview at a time and place of their choice. Where a club member expressed an interest in taking part, they were given the researcher’s contact details and asked to establish e-mail contact. The Participant Information Sheet was then sent to each volunteer prior to the arrangement of a specific interview time.

Whilst the use of an activity and social club for gaining access to participants had certain advantages for the sampling, including a range of occupational groups and removing any association with the workplace, it also has its drawbacks. It could be that certain ‘types’ of individual are attracted to such a group – such as especially social individuals who make a conscious effort to make time for themselves outside of work. Another possibility is that the individuals who are most struggling with their work-life balance would not have the time to belong to such a group, and so would be omitted from the sample. In order to minimise the likelihood of such distortions, Social Circle was not the only means of gaining participants for the research – personal contacts of the researcher and snowball sampling from both these and the Social Circle members was also used.

Another sampling issue that had to be acknowledged in the research was self-selection bias in research participation. This problem was acknowledged by Russo & Waters (2006) in their study into ‘workaholic types’ in the Australian legal profession, in terms of the fact that ‘individuals may have opted in or out, based on perceived personal relevance of the study

topic or other idiosyncratic characteristics' (2006: 435). In relation to the current study, it may have been that certain individuals (such as those who feel a significant conflict between their 'work' and 'life') were more likely to volunteer to take part than others (such as those who are satisfied with their situation, even where this amounts to all work and no 'life'). It was hoped that the snowball sampling addition would also mitigate this possibility – meaning that at least some of the individuals would have been approached due to referral from a friend/colleague, rather than by self-selection at an open event.

A final sampling issue was that individuals struggling to reconcile their work and non-work lives at the time of the research might be unable to spare the time to participate. It was hoped that the single-interview format, as outlined above, would help to mitigate this problem. In addition, the researcher offered to be as flexible as possible – allowing each participant to choose the time and place for the interview that was most convenient for them. As each interview was still anticipated to be quite lengthy however (potentially up to two hours), the researcher also offered to split the session into two shorter interviews if this made it easier for a participant to schedule. None of the participants requested this.

The aim was to secure around thirty subjects for the study, including both men and women, and employees from a mixture of industries/occupations. A fairly even gender split was desired because women have more often been the focus of research into work-life balance, and much of the research on the general experiences of single and solo-living people have similarly focused on women (e.g. Lewis & Borders, 1995; Loewenstein et al. 1981; Macvarish, 2006). The latter is especially problematic as young men are twice as likely to live alone than young women according to Smith et al. (2005). The desired mix of gender and occupation was achieved in the final sample of 36 respondents. In practice, most of the interviews lasted between 60 and 90 minutes, and most participants opted to have the interview in their own home, with the remainder choosing either their workplace or a public venue (usually a café). A full profile of research participants is presented in Appendix 5, with key characteristics of the sample presented in Table 1 overleaf.

Table 1: Summary of research sample

Characteristic		Number	% of Sample	Characteristic		Number	% of sample
Gender	Male	18	50%	Living arrangement	Live alone	24	67%
	Female	18	50%		House-share	12	33%
Age	24-29	9	25%	Length of time solo-living	<2 years	6	17%
	30-34	13	36%		2 – 4 years	11	30%
	35-39	10	28%		4 – 6 years	13	36%
	40-44	4	11%		>6 years	6	17%
Sector	Public	16	44%	Relationship status	Single	31	86%
	Private	20	56%		Partnered	5	14%
Job role	Manager	17	47%	Member of a professional association?	Yes	33	92%
	Professional	19	53%		No	3	8%
Level of Education (equivalent)	Postgrad	16	44%	Salary	£50k plus	10	28%
	Undergrad	17	47%		£40-49k	4	11%
	A Level	2	6%		£30-39k	8	22%
	GCSE	1	3%		£20-29k	10	28%
	None	0			Not stated	4	11%

4.5. Data analysis

When it comes to data analysis, a four-stage system was decided upon. Whilst elements of the BNIM approach were utilised, the method was simpler and less time consuming, being informed by more traditional interpretive research data analysis approaches. The researcher believed it possible to mix different analysis methods without compromising the project, agreeing with Coffey & Atkinson's (1996: 14) comment that:

‘We can use different analytic strategies in order to explore different facets of our data, explore different kinds of order in them, and construct different versions of the social world... The more we examine our data from different viewpoints, the more we may reveal... their complexity’

As a first stage of analysis, following the recommendations of BNIM, the researcher carried out an immediate self-debriefing following each interview, and made use of memos (Wengraf, 2011: 209) whilst transcribing each interview recording. The first process involved reflection upon the ‘feel’ of the interview; any observations about the setting, participant’s body language, etc.; and reflexivity concerning the impressions that the encounter had on the

researcher, and how the researcher's own values and reactions could have influenced the dialogue. The second process required the noting down of any immediate impressions and thematic issues that arose from the typing and first review of the taped transcript. This process has been reported as fruitful for 'establish[ing] familiarity with the phenomenological perspective of each participant prior to engaging in [further] interpretive analy[sis]' (Neilson, 2009: 90), and echoes the first element of the framework followed by Sturges (2008: 122), itself derived from Ritchie & Spencer (1994): '*familiarisation with the data*'.

The second stage of the approach concerned coding. According to Seidel & Kelle (1995: 55-6), the role of coding is to undertake three kinds of operations: (a) notice relevant phenomena, (b) collect examples of those phenomena, and (c) analyse those phenomena in order to find commonalities, differences, patterns, and structures. This stage actually echoed the next few elements of Sturges' framework: '*identifying a thematic framework or index; indexing (or coding); charting, [and] building up a picture of the data as a whole with reference to the coding system*' (Sturges, 2008: 122, emphasis in original). As with Sturges (2008), the initial coding framework was derived from the literature review and research questions, but was supplemented with themes emerging from the data itself, due to the largely exploratory aim of the project. A list of codes was produced at this stage, which can be found in Appendix 6.

Once a feel of the key themes from the interviews as a whole had been identified, the third stage of the approach concerned a focus on each individual participant. This follows the BNIM focus on individual life histories and stories – and the development of case accounts. Such individual case analysis has proved productive in prior research that involves life-histories, and the rationale is expressed well in the Final Report of the SOSTRIS project on social exclusion in Europe:

'The most important findings of the socio-biographic phase of the project were obtained from detailed analysis of particular life-histories, not from aggregating or averaging the findings from each of them' (SOSTRIS Final Report, 1999: 10)

A case account for each individual was produced at this stage – detailing issues of the participant's work-life trajectory to the point of interview (a chronology of events, including information on the circumstances), and noting the interplay of key themes. Each case also included a summary of the participant's opening life-history narrative – detailing the length of the story, the topics covered, the overall tone and the locus of control. This aspect was directly informed by the BNIM data analysis procedure – looking at cases on an individual basis and considering the 'told story' as well as the 'lived life' in order to make comparison between

each. It was however conducted by the researcher alone, as opposed to the panel advocated in pure BNIM. An example of a case account is included in Appendix 7. Once an analysis of each case had been completed, then commonalities and differences between cases were considered as the fourth and final stage of analysis. This was especially useful for addressing the third research question which concerned variations in participant experience and attitude.

It could be argued that some key insights might have been lost by not following the pure BNIM analysis, but the approach adopted was deemed the most suitable for this project. In most existing BNIM-based research studies, the SQUIN had been related specifically to the research of a chronological phenomenon that was the heart of the study – such as the experience of migration (see Apitzsch & Siouti, 2007) or of coming to terms with diagnosis of a medical condition (i.e. Slamm et al. 2008), with the resulting stories providing information on the before, during and after event of the experience. Furthermore, most opening narratives in BNIM studies are reported to last between thirty minutes and an hour (Wengraf, 2011) – providing plenty of data to work with. In the current study, where the interest is mainly on the individual's current work-life experiences and attitudes, and how their previous experiences may have informed this, the 'life history' element did not seem to provide the sort of information really needed to justify (in time and expense) the level of analysis required by BNIM. Whilst the SQUIN was designed to encourage a discussion of work-life experience over time, some of the respondents simply provided a report of their education and work chronology, totally omitting issues of work-life integration. The brief summary of the length, topics, tone and locus of control for each opening narrative for the case account was deemed to be adequate to compare the 'lived life' with the 'told story' for each individual for the purposes of this study.

Furthermore, the average length of the participant story in this study was just seven minutes – providing minimal material to work with in a 'told story' panel. This discrepancy was felt to be linked to the nature of the participant sample, the topic and the structure of the interview as a whole. The participants were all managers and professionals, many of whom had busy schedules and lots of time demands. They also knew the topic was work-life balance, and so might have had time-pressures and work demands playing on their mind at the time of the interview. Furthermore, the respondents were aware that the life-history section was only part of a three-stage interview (including also the completion of a data-sheet and then a semi-structured interview), and so might have assumed that only a basic background was required at this stage before the more relevant questions were asked later.

In omitting the use of panels to interpret the data however, it is acknowledged that the researcher's own interpretation of the data was not set against any alternative readings. It is acknowledged that the act of data interpretation is always value-laden, and that the researcher's own values and interests are likely to have influenced the recognition and categorisation of participant comments throughout the analysis. As the researcher is similar demographically to the participant sample – being in the same age bracket, having no children, and having personally experienced solo-living whilst working in a full-time managerial role – it is acknowledged that certain assumptions of shared beliefs may be made on the basis of similar experience. It is believed however that the similarities between the researcher and the researched were actually beneficial to both data collection and analysis. Respondents seemed to feel able to open up to me in interviews, which might be linked to my similar experiences. In terms of data analysis, the argument has been made by Hungerbuhler et al. (2002: 23) that demographic similarity 'serve[s] an indispensable role in the exploration of the social', as the researcher is thus intimately familiar with the context in which the stories were being told. Having said this, this effect may have been less evident when I, as a female researcher, was interviewing male participants.

The next section considers the ethical considerations that influenced the research design.

4.6. Ethics

There are several ethical issues that need to be considered when undertaking any research involving other people. Easterby-Smith et al. (2008: 134) note the following ethical considerations in management research: ensuring no harm comes to participants; respecting participant dignity; ensuring fully informed consent; protecting participant privacy; ensuring confidentiality; protecting the anonymity of individuals or organisations; avoiding deception about the nature and aims of the research; declaring affiliations or conflicts of interest; honesty and transparency in communication; and the avoidance of any misleading reporting of the findings.

Taking the issue of 'harm', this is not as clear-cut as it may first seem. While there was no possibility of physical harm to participants in the proposed research, it was important to consider whether any psychological harm could possibly arise. This research project involved asking individuals to reflect on and discuss their work and life history, which might have touched on some very personal and emotive subjects. Gambles et al. (2006: 64) noted that

even the topic of friendship could be difficult to research, it proving a ‘surprisingly sensitive topic’ in their interviews, with conversations often turning to the issue of loneliness. The current research project had the potential to touch on friendships and dating/partnership, and also required consideration of work-life reconciliation at length – a topic that participants may not have actually contemplated before. It was possible that individuals would become aware that their current situation was not what they wanted it to be, or that other groups in their organisation were being treated more advantageously in this respect.

Bearing these things in mind, several steps were taken to mitigate discomfort as far as possible. In line with the guidelines of the British Sociological Association, all participants were fully informed of the purpose of the study; of how data would be collected, used and stored; and had a choice of whether or not to take part. Those that consented were also informed that they were free not to answer any specific question(s), and/or to terminate the interview at any time. In addition, the early part of the BNIM-inspired interview was considered more ethical than some other interviewing styles, because the interviewee was in full control over what was talked about, in what way, to what extent, and in what terms.

As the participants were invited to take part in the research via a voluntary social club or referral from a friend, and their identity protected via the use of pseudonyms (for both the individuals and their organisations), it was hoped that the respondents would not have any concerns about their participation/comments being known by their employers – but assurance of confidentiality was further made on the consent form, and at the start of each interview. It is also worth noting that participants were offered the opportunity to read through their interview transcripts for accuracy before they were analysed, and care was taken to report all findings honestly. Participant data was used and stored in accordance with the University of Leeds policies on data protection.

This chapter now concludes with a brief introduction to what follows in the thesis.

4.7. Outline of results chapters (5, 6 and 7)

The three findings chapters that follow are structured to provide a response to the central research questions. Chapter five begins with a discussion of the work-life issues that were reported by the sample of solo-living managers and professionals, starting with some issues that have been acknowledged in the broader work-life balance literature, but then moving on

to present four issues that appear to be specific to this demographic, connected to their solo-living status. This addresses the first research question. The second research question is then addressed in chapter six, which discusses participant perceptions of the work-life balance provisions available in their organisations – making use of distributive justice theory (Deutsch, 1975) to explore perceptions of fairness. The third research question, concerning variations in participant experience and attitudes, and the question of the interrelation between structure, culture and agency, is touched upon in chapters five and six, but becomes a key issue in chapter seven, which addresses the final research question by exploring the salience of the individualisation thesis for the sample of solo-living managers and professionals.

5. Work-life balance issues experienced by managers and professionals who live alone

As noted earlier in this thesis, the dominant family focus of previous work-life balance research has meant that very little is known about the work-life balance experiences of people who live on their own and do not have children. This first findings chapter will therefore be largely descriptive, attempting to set out the key work-life balance issues that emerged from the interviews with the group of solo-living managers and professionals. The first section discusses issues already cited in the literature, especially for managerial and professional staff, but explores the nuances for these participants. The second section then explores some work-life balance issues that emerged from the data that appear more specific to this cohort as solo-living employees.

Before presenting these preliminary findings, it is useful to revisit the characteristics of the sample, as presented in Table 1 in the last chapter, and to add some additional detail. In terms of demographic characteristics, there was an even mix of males and females in the sample of 36 participants, spread fairly evenly across the different age groups (apart from the 40-44 year age banding, which contained just four participants). The majority of the sample were white, had grown up in upper-working class or middle class families, and had pursued UK university education straight from school or college. There were exceptions to this pattern however: Stacy (Nurse, NHS, 30-34) married young and was not encouraged to attend university and pursue a career in early life due to her strict Jehovah Witness upbringing; Bob (Senior Manager, Drinks Company, 35-39) only pursued higher education and a commercial career after a first career as a Mechanic in the Army (which he joined straight from school); and Patrick (Regional Contract Manager, Recruitment Company, 24-29) grew up with little money in Poland and came to the UK for work at a time when he had no qualifications.

Whilst all managers or professionals, participants were diverse in terms of job role, organisation size, industry and sector. Job roles included: Accountant; Anaesthetist; Business Development Director; Clinical Psychologist; Dentist; Engineer; HR Manager; Journalist; Lecturer; Marketing Manager; Nurse; Pharmacist; Project Manager; Radiographer; Senior Manager, Solicitor and Teacher. Participants were also varied in terms of their level on the career ladder, with some participants still studying for professional qualifications/newly qualified whilst others were working at very senior levels or as specialists. Linked to this, respondent salary levels varied considerably, with a fairly even distribution of salaries across

the various annual salary categories offered on the data sheet (from '£20 – £29k' to 'Over £50k').

Participants were also varied in terms of domestic situation. At the time of interview, 24 of the participants were living alone (some with a mortgage, others renting) and the remaining 12 were in house-shares. Most of the sample described themselves as currently single. In terms of housing history, most of the participants had moved in and out of a range of different living situations since first leaving home, including student house-shares; adult house-shares; living alone; owning a home but renting out a room; returning to live with parents; living with a sibling; and cohabiting with a partner. Six participants had previously been married (one twice).

5.1. Evidence of established work-life balance issues

As mentioned above, the first half of this chapter discusses the issues reported by participants that have previously been acknowledged in work-life balance literature. These issues are long working hours, unpredictable finish times and boundary-blurring. As the consequences of such issues for an individual employee depends very much on their attitude towards work, their attitude to their life outside work, and their conceptualisation of work-life balance, the section concludes with a discussion of attitudinal variations in the sample.

5.1.1. Working hours

In the literature review, a key threat identified in relation to a satisfactory work-life balance was the requirement to work long hours. Long working hours are linked in the literature to time-based work-life conflict (McMillan et al. 2011), where long hours in work mean that individuals are unable to devote enough time to their responsibilities in the non-work domain. Managers and professionals are thought to be especially susceptible, being more likely than other occupational groups to work over 48 hour per week and to work unpaid overtime (Hooker et al. 2007: 22-25).

On the data sheet completed as part of the interview, each participant was asked to provide details of their contractual weekly working hours and also an estimate of their average actual weekly working hours. It was important to acknowledge here possible concerns that an

individual's self-report/estimate of their actual working hours might be somewhat inaccurate (Jacobs, 1998). It could be that individuals with a negative view of work overemphasise the time they spend there, or that different definitions of 'working hours' are used by different participants, with some focusing on time in the workplace, whilst others include things like work done on the train/at home. It is believed that such inaccuracies were minimised in this study because as well as being part of the data sheet, hours of work were discussed in the main interview, with more guidance being provided:

'In a typical week how much of your time would you say is occupied by work, and work related activities? On the data sheet you estimated X hours, does this include work in the broadest sense? So things like checking e-mails from home; attending any networking events, and the like?'

Many of the participants took their time responding here, justifying their estimates with a break-down of time spent on different activities – some revising their data sheet estimate accordingly.

Appendix 8 shows information on each participant's working hours, both contractual and estimated actual. When discussing the estimated actual, participants included a range of activities: staying late at work; time spent working from home; time spent working on the commute to/from work; time spent checking work e-mails when engaged in activities outside of work; corporate entertaining events; networking events; and time spent worrying about work-related issues in private time. The following table includes a summary of this information, showing average data for each of eight participant groups (grouped on the basis of gender and age).

Table 2: Participant contractual and estimated actual weekly working hours

	Average contractual hours (per week)	Average estimated actual hours ¹ (per week)	Extra hours worked ² (per week)
Males aged 24-29 (5 participants)	38.5	47.5	9
Males aged 30-34 (6 participants)	38.5	39.5	1
Males aged 35-39 (5 participants)	37	43.3	6.5
Males aged 40-44 (2 participants)	39	39.5	0.5
Females aged 24-29 (4 participants)	38	46	8
Females aged 30-34 (7 participants)	38	49	11
Females aged 35-39 (5 participants)	37.5	56.5	19
Females aged 40-44 (2 participants)	36	48	12

Eighteen of the 36 participants reported working regularly over – by at least five hours per week – their contractual working hours. From the information provided, whilst the average contractual hours of each group were broadly similar, female participants appeared to be working more additional hours overall, especially in the 35-39 year group. Of the males, the youngest group (24-29 years) appeared to work the most additional hours. Gender and age issues will be explored further in chapter seven, but for now, I would like to focus on working hours in general.

The main reason stated for additional working hours was the demands of the job. This had different forms, but all had grounding in previous research observations. For some participants, it was linked to structural factors. There was evidence of work intensification (Green, 2001; Lewis & Smithson, 2006), meaning that there was simply too much to do each

¹ Where participant estimates differed between the data sheet and the interview, the latter was prioritised. Where a vague estimate was made, such as '40-50 hours', a middle figure was used (in this case '45 hours'). Where no response was given to the question, the individual was removed from the calculation for finding the average for the group.

² The difference between the average contractual hours, and the average estimated actual hours for the group, suggesting how many extra hours were typically worked per person

day for it to remain within their contractual working hours. Charlie (female Training and Development Manager, NHS, 40-44) commented: 'I think it's the nature of the NHS, but because we're so few people, and we're losing people that aren't being replaced, the resource is contracting'. This meant she rarely got a lunch break, usually worked 45-50 hours a week, and sometimes had to take work home. Samantha (Regulatory Project Manager, Pharmaceutical Company, 35-39) talked about a previous job where she felt that she was 'constantly fire-fighting', and that because she was a team Manager, she had to help her team in addition to completing her own workload: 'you've got people banging on your door to get stuff done. And you know you're accountable for what your team's delivering, and it's all key issues so it's not an option to just not do it'.

For some, frequent travel demands added to work-related time demands. Louise (Marketing Manager, Shopping Centre Company, 24-29) for example said that 'a lot of time is spent in London, and it's a 7am train down to London. If it's just the day, we get back into Stockport at 9.15 at night, if it's a stop-over, then it's that time the following night or two days later'. For others, long or unsocial working hours were the norm because of the nature of the industry and/or the centrality of customer/client expectations (Anderson-Gough et al. 2000; Lewis, 2003; Lewis, 2007). Patrick (Regional Contract Manager, Recruitment Company, 24-29) for example said:

'Being employed in an Industry like recruitment, well you're basically down to the customer's wish, you know, that site where I was based for the four years, that's a 24-hour, seven-days-a-week operation, so you know weekends, late evenings, that was a normal thing to do... I don't think that throughout the four years I was working for the company I was able to do anything else in terms of a private life – I was required and that was it'

For some participants there were cultural influences, where long hours were seen to be the norm in the organisation, with 'face time' being prioritised over work output as a demonstration of commitment (Walsh, 2005; Jones et al. 2007). Suzanne (Corporate HR Manager, Restaurant Chain, 35-39) said that 'there is a bit of a culture I guess – people work long hours, there are some teams where everyone's at their desks by 7.30, and if someone gets up to go at 5.30 there's a jokey 'oh, having a half-day are you?'; and Fred (Senior Manager, Insolvency Practitioners, 35-39) said:

'I work in an industry where it is perceived as cool to work, work, work. And to work long hours, and to work weekends, and that's not to say that in my firm is staunchly like that, and that's not to say it's what I always experience, but it's always in the background that if I was to come in at eight o'clock in the morning, and not leave until ten o'clock at night, and then come in and do the same at the weekends, that would be rewarded – very much so'

For a subset of the sample, long hours were seen to be necessary at the current/early stage of their career, with the expectation that this would be a temporary phase, and that promotion would bring them a more balanced lifestyle in the future. James (Business Management Graduate Scheme, Mutual business, 24-29) commented:

'I'm just at the stage in my career... I kind of think you're somebody else's dogsbody for about seven years, that's my own kind of golden rule on it...my boss, being a Director, is frequently in meetings, so whenever I do get to catch him it might be towards the end of the day, and that session requires an hour, so I have to be willing to give that hour'.

Similarly, Ann (Anaesthetist, NHS, 30-34) was working hard to make Consultant grade, and said: 'As a Consultant your hours are less, and more structured... I'm hoping that the evening commitments drop down a little bit, so I won't be on call as much as I am, but in terms of the amount of things I have to do outside of work will also reduce'.

This links to the research by Sturges (2008), who found that graduates and young professionals were often willing to work long hours at the 'getting established' stage of their careers, when they felt the need to validate themselves in the workplace, but that they expected this to be a temporary phase, leading to more reasonable working hours in the long run. In Sturges' research, such expectations were often later disappointed, with individuals finding the need to decide from between two mutually exclusive options: to either 'get ahead' or 'get balanced'. Some of the participants in the current study were aware that their expectations might not be realistic, but remained hopeful. After the comment about hours being less demanding for Consultants, Ann added: 'I don't know whether that's true, I might be kidding myself, but I'm kind of hoping that's what will happen'.

Whilst issues around long-working hours are acknowledged in the work-life balance literature, the specific problems that they cause for this study's participants appear somewhat different to those experienced by other employee groups. In the literature, the focus is often on

working parents, with the problem being work-family conflict – derived from inter-role conflict and role theory (Katz & Kahn, 1978: 204). Long hours in the work role are seen to be incompatible with the time requirements of the family role. Where organisations see the ‘ideal worker’ (Acker, 1990) as someone able to ‘go the extra mile... for example by working more than full-time and/or by taking on extra responsibilities and tasks’ (Mescher et al. 2010: 24), then working parents are unable to meet the requirements, and so often suffer negative career consequences. For the participants in this study, there were no immediate family (as in spouse and children) commitments to clash with work demands, and many were actually embodying these ‘ideal worker’ characteristics, but this came with different work-life balance problems – including losing touch with the world outside of work. These issues will be explored further in the second section of the chapter, but an illustrative quote comes again from Ann (Anaesthetist, NHS, 30-34):

‘It was lots of very long shifts and a lot of them, so you’d do like a week of nights a month, kind of eight until eight, or the following month you’d do like ten until eight in the morning. Anyway, so really quite disruptive... and I lived on my own at the time and yeah I found that really quite, quite difficult I suppose, because you know you’re either at work, or you’re at home, and you don’t see anybody, don’t speak to anybody’

Whilst the main type of time-based work-life conflict is somewhat differently experienced by this sample, a different type – as noted by McMillan et al. (2011) – is evident and experienced in the same way by participants in this sample as by other employees. This type of conflict is where an individual reports being mentally preoccupied with one domain when they are physically present in another domain – meaning that they are unable to function in/devote their time properly to the domain that they are physically in. This was noted by four participants in this research, often when referring to time with friends. Suzanne (Corporate HR Manager, Restaurant Chain, 35-39), for example said:

‘I’m often not mentally, at the moment I’m not mentally there with people – so you know you’re sitting and having dinner with your friends, and you’re talking and asking questions, but you’re not, I’m not there in the moment because I’m worrying about, just stewing about things or worrying about things’

A final issue relating to working hours that can be seen in the data concerned unpredictable finish times/employer demands for employee personal flexibility (Bunting, 2003) – another structural constraint to work-life balance. Nineteen participants said that they often did not know in advance what time they would be able to leave work each day. For some participants,

this was very much due to the demands of the job. Florence (Solicitor, Corporate Law Firm, 30-34) says:

‘The problem with my work is it’s very unpredictable, because all your deadlines are not set by yourself, they’re set by your clients, so you could like go in one day and think you have nothing to do and then at six o’clock you’re told ‘oh by the way, we’ve been instructed on this deal, we have to get it done by next Tuesday’ so you could be in all night doing it. So it’s really variable’

For these participants, the unpredictable finish times were seen to limit their agency because they interfered with, or prevented the making of, personal plans. Suzanne (Corporate HR Manager, Restaurant Chain, 35-39) said: ‘I don’t like making social commitments because I know that usually something will go wrong and it’ll be difficult for me to leave – even if I’ve made the arrangement to meet in Town at 7.30’. Others talked of how it influenced the sort of people that they would socialise with. Isla (Solicitor, Law Firm, 30-34) noted that most of her friends were Lawyers, because ‘they’re the only ones who really get the fact that you might have to cancel’, and Ed (Business Development Director, Bank, 24-29) explained how one ex-girlfriend didn’t really understand:

‘I was only dating her for a few months, but she was a nurse, and although you work some unusual hours in nursing, if you finish at five then you finish at five... Whereas it’s a completely different world when you’re in an office and whoopee-do if you’ve done your hours for the day, but if the work hasn’t been done then you haven’t done it. She didn’t get it’

That friendships and relationships were influenced by work demands proved to be a key work-life issue for many study participants, and these issues will be explored further in the second section of this chapter.

For some employees, the unpredictable finish times, whilst being linked to the demands of the job, were exacerbated by their own actions – often informed by their solo-living situation. Leah (HR Manager, Law Firm, 24-29) for example provided two different comments on the subject of unpredictable finishing times at different points in her interview. When asked what would constitute her ideal work-life balance, she provided the following reply, which seems to mirror the comments above:

'I'd like... just some protected time, I don't really mind if it's not very much as long as I know that I'm kind of guaranteed it every week. So for example, when I first started here I was going swimming once a week with one of my friends, and it was kind of a regular thing – every Tuesday we'd go, and her as well, we both ended up cancelling every week because work would just creep and creep and creep, to the point where we just couldn't fit it in at all. And I think it would be really nice if it was just kind of guaranteed, every Tuesday night or whatever it is, I know that that is my protected time, and I can leave on time'

Whilst this quote emphasises the demands of the job, she elsewhere provided a contrasting perspective. Later in the interview she compared her recent experience – where she often stayed late because 'nobody leaves at five o'clock, people wander into your office at six, seven o'clock at night and come down for a talk, and they'll e-mail you and expect a reply, and all those kind of things' – with her previous experience when cohabiting with a partner:

'...where he worked, and where I worked, he could drop me off and pick me up every day as well. So work-life balance was actually fantastic, because it gave me a fixed start and finish time really. And that seems to have waned a bit since I've been living on my own, because there's not really you know a scheduled time to leave the office. But yeah, he was fantastic, he was really, really helpful. And it just kind of forced you to have a bit of home time as well – you have certain obligations to go and see parents-in-law and all that kind of thing, so you do have to leave'

This quote suggests that there was an element of personal agency over the finishing time, with her seeming to find it harder to be assertive in leaving the office on time when there was no other fixed commitment to use as a rationale. Taken alongside the earlier comment about cancelling her swimming classes recently, it suggests that perhaps obligations relating to partnering – which is linked to the socially sanctioned structure of the family – were seen to be more legitimate than other commitments concerning friends and personal health. Again, this issue will be explored further in the second part of the chapter.

5.1.2. Boundary blurring

The other issue that appeared to be quite prevalent in the data was boundary-blurring. When considering the integration of the work and non-work domains, one key theory concerns the management of the boundary (physical, temporal and/or behavioural) between the two.

Boundary-blurring is seen to occur when 'no distinction exists between what belongs to 'home' or 'work' and when and where they are engaged' (Nippert-Eng, 1996: 567). Whilst this can be a sign of individual agency – an intentional 'integration' strategy being employed to better manage the two domains – it can also be a product of the structural environment/a requirement of the job role (Kossek et al. 2005:254). The issue is often linked to developments in information and communication technology (Brannen, 2005; Chesley, 2005; Sullivan & Lewis, 2001), which mean that employees are contactable outside of standard working hours. Six participants discussed the issue of ICT and boundary-blurring in their interviews, including Leah (HR Manager, Law Firm, 24-29):

'we've got kind of work iphones... which means that we've got work email pinging ALL the time, even at eleven o'clock at night, and you do sometimes feel that you need to respond – you don't have to obviously, no one's going to sack you for not responding at eleven o'clock at night, but it's the feeling that you need to check. And because it's so accessible and it's right by your bed'

This quote illustrates a complex interplay of structure, culture and agency. Leah felt that she did have some agency – as she didn't 'have to' respond to emails, but there was clearly a culture where sending work e-mails at eleven o'clock at night was the norm, and a structure that reinforced this (staff being given technological equipment to facilitate work outside of office hours) – all of which she felt limited her agency. Roo (female Finance Manager, Bank, 40-44) discussed the issues posed by working from home with access to technology (see Allen et al. 2003). As her role required contact with individuals working in different time zones, she said it was not unusual for her to have to interrupt her evening with a conference call to America. Ed (Business Development Director, Bank, 24-29) discussed the blurred lines between work and social life, as well as the issues posed by technology:

'I have a blackberry which goes almost everywhere with me, including holidays. It's just easier, if you leave it while you're on holiday you just end up with a nightmare when you get back. And I do have a lot of socials, so like tonight I really don't want to go, but I have got to go to this social with a law firm, which will be until late. Or like on a Saturday, we get things like tickets for Man Utd for client entertaining... and it's a good thing to go to, but sometimes you don't, and it's not the same as when you're going with your mates, you've got to watch what you're saying still... And actually there are some people in other firms, like Accountancy firms and Lawyer firms that, because I've known them for a number of years now, although we are there in work mode, you're almost more like mates'

This quote links boundary blurring to the working hours issue noted above, but also brings in another consequence – that of role confusion (Ashforth et al. 2000). The individual talked of being in settings in which he would usually relax (a football match), but still had to maintain a work persona, and at other times being in the work setting but with colleagues who felt more like friends.

It is important to be aware that the work-life issues discussed so far were not experienced by all participants. Half of the sample (18 of 36) did not report working extra hours on a regular basis, many knew when they would be finishing each shift, and many had clear boundaries between their work and non-work lives. Some participants attributed such outcomes to the nature of their jobs – here enabling structures (Giddens, 1984) when it came to work-life balance. A few examples include Alan (Dentist, NHS, 30-34), Sebastian (Pharmacist, NHS, 30-34), Lou (male Engineer, Engineering Firm, 40-44) and Stacy (Nurse, NHS, 30-34), who all said that their working hours were limited due to fixed shifts and the need to use specific equipment, meaning that they couldn't take work home even if they wanted to. Another example was Trent (Central Government Officer, 30-34) who attributed it to company policy and culture:

‘The nature of most jobs in the revenue is that they're quite self-contained – if they start letting people check e-mails from home it's a bit of a security risk, so usually you go in, put your work head on, you take it off when you leave’.

Other participants felt that such outcomes were the result of individual agency however – their personal management of the work-life situation by controlling their working hours and/or keeping the work and non-work domains clearly segmented (Lambert, 1990). This will be elaborated upon further in chapter seven.

At this point, it is useful to summarise the findings so far. Despite living on their own, many participants still experienced some of the work-life balance problems noted in the wider literature. They felt the need to spend long hours in the work domain for a number of reasons (including the demands of the job, travel requirements, and long hours cultures), were inconvenienced by unpredictable finish times, and often felt a blurring of the work-home boundaries. The consequences of such problems were slightly different to those seen for working parents however. Where working parents might feel unable to meet the requirements of the 'ideal worker' (Acker, 1990), and fear negative consequences in terms of career development, many of these participants were living this ideal, but experienced different negative consequences – here relating to other areas of their lives, such as

friendships, relationships, and health and fitness. It is important to note here however, that issues such as long working hours and boundary blurring were not considered to be negative by all participants experiencing them, which brings me on to the next section of the chapter, which considers participant attitudes and conceptualisations when it comes to the work and life domains, and the integration of the two.

5.1.3. *Work-life balance conceptualisation*

'I think work-life balance is like having your heart tick over properly, if it's working fine, you don't even think about it, it doesn't even occur to you, it's only when it's going wrong that you'll ever pay any attention to such a concept' (Vincent, Accountant, Engineering Firm, 30-34)

This quote provides a nice introduction to the discussion in this section of the chapter. In the literature review, attention was paid to the fact that work-life balance can mean different things to different people. The issues discussed above – long working hours, unpredictable finish times, boundary blurring – were presented as largely problematic for participant work-life balance. It is important to be aware however, that for some participants, such things were not considered problematic at all – because of their attitude towards work and the non-work domain; and because of how they conceptualised work-life balance.

Six of the 18 participants that reported regularly working additional hours said that they did so quite happily. Gerard (Auditor, Accountancy Firm, 24-29) explained how work provided him with a sense of purpose and fulfilment, and Max (Analyst, Accountancy Firm, 30-34) called it 'the main source of satisfaction' in his life. Courtney (female Project Manager, Local Government, 30-34) said: 'I love my job – I love it so much it's not even a problem that I work all these hours'; and Judith (Academic, University, 30-34) that she often actively took on additional work 'because basically I love it, I'm interested in it, or I think it's important'. This is reminiscent of Hochschild (1997), Lewis (2003) and Bunting's (2003) work on 'willing slaves', where certain employees were seen to prefer spending time in the work than the home domain due to the rewards it offers. It also resonates with the findings of the Third Work-Life-Balance Survey, where despite working the longest hours, managers and professionals were the least likely group to say that they would like to work fewer hours (Hooker et al. 2007:30). These previous studies did not focus on solo-living employees specifically, so it is interesting to note how these individuals also discuss the non-work domain. Many of these participants

suggested they did not feel the need for much personal time, and had modest requirements of the non-work domain. When asked what the term work-life balance meant to him, Gerard (Auditor, Accountancy Firm, 24-29) replied:

'I think just fitting in something during the day that gives you the opportunity to take something... to take your mind away from work – at some point during that day. So whether its watching a programme for an hour or a film, or reading a book, or going to the gym for some exercise – that's pretty much what it is. I wouldn't expect to do much in a week-day apart from my day job, and then come home and then do something that kind of takes my mind off that. That's what I'd say work-life balance is during the week'

He seemed to be suggesting that his needs for non-work time during the week are minimal, and simply around recovery. Such participants seemed to be engaging in working patterns iteratively (see Emirbayer and Mische, 1998), and were not considering alternative working patterns. For example, when Gerard was asked what his ideal work-life balance would be, he replied: 'probably what it is now' – despite regularly working ten hours over his contractual hours.

From this, it could be suggested that for some of the participants, long hours working were actually chosen. It is important to remember here however that such apparent 'choice' has come under scrutiny in the literature (Lewis, 2003; Lewis et al. 2007). It is said that the prioritising of work should not be seen as a choice when the industry context is such that there is little option to choose otherwise, because 'occupational or professional skills and competencies are constructed in terms of constant availability... and where non work activities are undervalued' (Lewis, 2003: 350). I will argue later in this chapter that some of the specific experiences of participants as solo-living employees – in terms of how non-work activities are valued (or not) – may well validate this position.

Conceptualisation of work-life balance is also linked to participant orientations, in terms of whether individuals are work-centric, home-centric, or oriented to both in different ways (e.g. Crompton & Harris, 1998; Hakim, 2000, 2006; Tomlinson, 2006). Participant orientations were explored chiefly through responses to some of the general opening questions in the semi-structured part of the interview: 'What things would you say are most important to you in life?' and 'What is your attitude towards your work, what does work mean to you?' Insight was also derived from broader comments made by participants throughout their interview, including the opening narrative about their work-life story to the time of interview.

In this research, the majority of the participants (22 of the 36) appeared to be work-centric, which is perhaps to be expected considering the characteristics of the participants – relatively young, highly qualified, unmarried and childless individuals. Work-centric does not refer only to those (mentioned above) who seemed to actively prefer work to life outside of work, but also to those who prioritised work because of their ambitions or for the benefits that work brings. These individuals did not see work-life balance as a priority, and many said they had not really considered the issue prior to the interview – as illustrated by Vincent’s quote at the start of the section. Whilst some studies have suggested that a home-centric or ‘lifestyle anchor’ is becoming dominant amongst young workers today (Schein, 1996), this work-centric prevalence has been seen in other studies, especially amongst more educated young workers, such as Sturges & Guest (2004).

Having said this, there was evidence in the sample of some individuals having changed their orientations over time – saying that whilst work had been their main priority in the past, this was changing at the time of interview, or had changed in recent years. Gemma (Clinical Psychologist, NHS, 35-39) for example, commented:

‘I’ve always been striving you know – with the forensic job it was striving to keep my head above water and get chartered, then the Masters it was striving to get chartered and striving to get a job... so just constant striving, and that just became the whole focus of my life so I just really needed to shift it’

That participants were assessing their orientations can be seen to link to Archer’s (2000: 297) concept of reflexivity, where an individual is ‘constantly considering whether what it once devoted itself to as its ultimate concerns are still worthy of this devotion, and whether the price which was once paid for subordinating and accommodating other concerns is still one with which the subject can live’. This acknowledgement of the costs versus benefits associated with an orientation is evident in the following comment from Jenny (Marketing Manager, Food Company, 35-39) when she talked about shifting her priorities:

‘When I look back at over the last ten years it just feels like it’s all been work and not necessarily been rewarded as it should have been... and it does get me quite down, because you know the weeks go by and you realise that you’ve hardly seen anybody and you don’t get to see your friends.... And I mean I’m nearly 40 and single as well, you know it’d be nice to be going out a bit more to meet somebody as well’.

This quote also shows evidence of projectivity and practical evaluation (see Emirbayer and Mische, 1998) – the considering of alternative future possibilities, and how these relate to the contingencies of the present.

Several studies have identified gender differences in work-life orientations and experiences over time (Fels, 2004; Gersick & Kram, 2002; Mainiero & Sullivan, 2005). The consensus is that whilst both men and women are likely to start out with a career orientation, women are more likely than men to change their focus as they approach mid-life – to prioritise either home or balance. There is some evidence of this pattern in the current data: six of the eight who have changed their orientations being female. This is interesting because in the studies cited above, gender differences were often explained by family roles. Mainiero & Sullivan (2005) suggested that the change in orientation for women occurs at the ‘pragmatic endurance phase’ of a woman’s life (typically aged 36-45) for two main reasons: the questioning of the centrality of work in their lives, as family roles become more demanding; and a disillusionment with the workplace, which is linked to a stalling of career development linked to maternity and motherhood. The appeal of family roles for the women in my sample, and their satisfaction with the employment experience will be explored in chapter seven.

Whilst such change in orientation refers to fundamental shifts in life priorities, and the importance of having a work-life balance, it is important to note that other things can influence the conceptualisation of work-life balance for an individual. Vincent (Accountant, Engineering Company, 30-34) discussed how work-life balance has meant different things to him over time due to context:

‘Work-life balance... for me it doesn’t really mean anything special, or anything hallowed, it’s just a very functional description. With other jobs that I’ve not liked, it’s been quite important for me to be able to say ‘look, I’ve done my day’s work, I’m now going home’. That was my work, this is my life, and the two aren’t meeting, it’s a split. And it’s very important that you don’t just live to work, you work to live. Now it’s kind of different, because I don’t have set working hours, I can work whatever hours I want and I really enjoy my job, so I don’t mind doing a bit of work’

This echoes the work of Gambles et al. (2006:35), who argue that the idea that it is possible to get the right balance between paid work and other parts of life overlooks the shifting nature of people’s work and non-work involvements, and the meanings given to these activities across the life-course. The quote by Vincent also illustrates the final issue that I would like to discuss here when it comes to participant conceptualisation of work-life balance – the issue of

perceived control. Some participants did not express any dissatisfaction with their work-life balance, even when hours were long or there were unpredictable time commitments, because they felt they had some autonomy over their situation overall. An example comes from the interview with Fred (Senior Manager, Insolvency Practitioners, 35-39), when he discusses an earlier period of consultancy work:

‘There was an expectation that you should be arriving down in London or overseas on the Sunday night, so if you were getting flights on the Sunday afternoon, which I was when I was working in Milan, then travelling back on Friday afternoon, of course that’s going to eat into your personal time... So what I started doing, and I got the agreement of the client to do this, is to say I would, quote, work from home on a Friday, so then I would actually spend the Thursday evening travelling back, I’d leave the client about six o’clock and I’d spend the evening getting home, which might be three hours or whatever. And then I would work from home on the Friday, which would usually be checking e-mails, take a few phone calls, maybe do the odd, finish a report off. But effectively an easy day, and finish at a reasonable time’.

This issue of perceived control has been identified in the literature (Hill et al. 2001; Tausig & Fenwick, 2001) and is indeed at the heart of the definition of work-life balance that was selected as appropriate for this project: for ‘an individual to have sufficient control and autonomy over where, when and how they work to enable them to fulfil their responsibilities both inside and outside paid work’ (Visser & Williams, 2006: 14). This issue of perceived control – especially in relation to the sample being solo-livers – will be explored further in chapter seven, which looks at the salience of the individualisation concept for understanding the experiences and attitudes of the participants.

In summary, this section has revealed that the perceptions of participants towards long working hours, unpredictable finish times and boundary blurring, depends very much on their conceptualisations of work, of home, and of the integration of the two. Whilst some of the participants found such issues problematic, others did not – because they enjoyed their work; because they had chosen to prioritise work at this stage in their lives; or because they felt an element of control over the situation. Many of the participants could be seen to be work-centric, but there was evidence of a shift over time, especially for female participants, with work becoming less of a priority. Whilst this trend has been noted in previous studies, it is interesting to see in this sample because other studies have linked the shift to the presence of a parenting role that requires an input of time and effort in the non-work domain, and crucially provides an alternative source of self-fulfilment. The issues around this phenomenon will be

explored further. Now that we have addressed the prevalence in the data of issues that were discussed in the literature review, the focus will turn to work-life balance issues that appear specific to this sample as solo-living employees.

5.2. Emerging work-life balance issues

Four broad themes emerged from the data during the analysis process, concerning the work-life interface. These were perceptions about non-work time; concerns about support; a sense of heightened vulnerability; and perceptions about legitimacy. In this section of the chapter, each of these work-life issues will be discussed in turn.

5.2.1. Perceptions about non-work time

The first work-life balance issue that emerged from the data for this solo-living sample concerned non-work time – a contradiction appearing between participants' perceptions about the assumptions of others about their personal time, and their own lived experience. Participants believed that several assumptions were held in general (by their employers and colleagues) about personal time when it came to solo-living employees. The first assumption was that all their non-work time was for fun/leisure, because they do not have any spousal or parental responsibilities. The second, related assumption, was that they automatically required less non-work time than employees who had cohabiting family. The third assumption was that unlike those with children, they did not need any flexibility in order to accommodate non-work activities. This links to cultural perceptions of the 'young, free and single' lifestyle. The participants thought that such assumptions affected the expectations that employers and work colleagues had of them, for example expecting them to be able to stay late at short notice.

Whilst such assumptions seemed to match the experiences of a portion of the participants (those with a particular conceptualisation of the work-life interface, commonly in the younger age brackets), many of the participants felt this was a gross misrepresentation. In relation to the first assumption, they felt that they actually had less time for fun/leisure than employees with cohabiting or married partners because they had no one at home to share the domestic workload. This problem was articulated by Charlie (female T&D Manager, NHS, 40-44):

'The weekends then, you end up doing the things that you have to do... shopping, cleaning the car, the house, the washing, you know all that kind of thing – where you've got nobody else to do it. Which I'm not moaning about, it's not necessarily a bad thing living on your own, but I think people assume that you've got a wad of time – that because you live on your own you've got loads of time – when you haven't'

In relation to the second assumption, many participants felt they actually required more non-work time than those who were cohabiting – for a number of different reasons. The cultivating of friendships was one important issue. Friendships were repeatedly cited as being very important to participants, as can be seen in the following extracts from the interviews with Sebastian (Pharmacist, NHS, 30-34) and Fred (Senior Manager, Insolvency Practitioners, 35-39):

Int: What things would you say are most important to you in life?

Seb: I don't want to say socialising, because that just sounds like drinking, but having a sort of social network is most important to me. I think it's taken a long time to work out what I need from friends and what friends I need, but I've made friends, or got to know friends, especially in the last few years, a lot better and I really enjoy spending time with them and being able to do stuff with them... all these things now that I didn't have before. And I think I've discovered that's more what I need.

Int: What are your intentions for the future? Where do you see yourself in five-ten years?

Fred: To continue to develop relationships – I'm conscious that friendships particularly, just to strengthen those as time goes by, and I like the idea of turning round when I'm fifty and have had relationships which have lasted twenty-five years, just really solid friendships

Furthermore, friendships were seen to be significantly more important during periods of solo-living (especially when combined with singleness) than during times of cohabitation. This resonates with the suggestions of sociological articles in relation to individualisation (which will be discussed more in chapter seven) and the 'decentring of the family' (Budgeon & Roseneil, 2002; Jamieson et al. 2006; Spencer & Pahl, 2006). Participants cited several time issues at play in relation to friendships. They said that when solo-living, there was more need to arrange time with friends in order to have some interpersonal contact and emotional support – as these would not be available in the home domain. Added to this, social events were said to require more active planning, as when cohabiting, the partner would take on

some of the burden of scheduling events, and as one respondent stated ‘things just evolve’ for couples, such as visits to the in-laws, meals with the partner’s friends, etc.

A big issue for several participants was that whilst they were living alone, many of their friends were settling down and having children. This caused two different issues in terms of their own time investment in friendship. The first concerned the efforts required in maintaining friendships when the other party had shifted their priorities. As Grace (Solicitor, Law Firm, 30-34) said: ‘I don’t think you realise when you’re in a couple how time-consuming it is for single people just to, just to you know get your married friends out even just to do lunch’. The second time investment concerned making new friends to fill the gap, which was considered difficult, as Grace again explained:

‘it’s the thought process...of actually thinking of things where you might meet people who have got a common interest – because people work long hours, and especially in your thirties... you’ve got to really think about where am I going to meet these people that I’m going to really like, and really focus down on your hobbies and that type of thing. And really put a lot of energy into those people when you actually meet them... I mean in the time that I’ve been single, or the two years I’ve been living in this house say, I’ve made a few friends but I had to put a lot... I’ve been to a lot of things with them, and I’ve put a lot of energy in, and suggested a lot of things’

Investments in new friendships were also needed when participants had relocated for work – which was a common experience amongst the sample. Participants talked of moving away from existing support networks, and finding it hard to build new friendships. Paul (Sports Journalist, Media Firm, 40-44) for example talked of a move from Manchester to London at a young age:

‘It took me a long time to make friends, that was the biggest problem really to be honest, it took me getting on for 12 months to really make any friends who I could socialise with at the weekends, I mean the people who I worked with were great, but the problem was, they had families and stuff, you know they tried to integrate me whenever they could, but obviously that wasn’t always possible because they had families’

Another time requirement concerned trying to meet a significant other and develop a relationship. Most of the participants described themselves as ‘single’ when completing the data sheet, but very few wanted to remain so in the long term. A number of time requirements were discussed here – largely in connection with the difficulties posed by their work requirements. There was the need for enough time to actually go out and meet

someone – which was often problematic for those participants who reported regularly working over their contractual hours. There was the need for some degree of control over their work schedule, and predictable finish times, so they could attend agreed dates – which many felt they didn't have (as discussed in the first section above). Assuming they actually got a relationship started, there was the need for enough time to invest in the early stages of the relationship – which many found difficult. Several participants discussed previous relationships that had floundered in the early stages because of their working patterns and/or their commitments to their work. Ann (Anaesthetist, NHS, 30-34) for example discussed the difficulties of trying to balance work, study and relationships, saying how she 'ended up finishing [one] relationship because he would come round just at the point where I was starting revising, and wouldn't understand that I could only see him once, twice a week...other relationships probably didn't really get started properly'. A final issue was a concern about return-on-investment. Some participants noted that they could dedicate a lot of time to trying to meet a partner and develop a relationship, but that there was no guarantee of success, something Charlie laughed off as her 'cynical view of relationships'. This makes the time investment somewhat different to those of cohabiting employees, whose investments in their partner/children are less likely to be 'wasted'.

The final time issue that emerged was a requirement for enough personal time to make the non-work domain meaningful in some way – providing individuals with a sense of achievement and fulfilment. This seems to be connected to the fact that such fulfilment or sense of meaning was not being gained from a cohabiting partnership and/or the rearing of children. Grace (Solicitor, Law Firm, 30-34) articulated this well:

'when I'm single and I'm living in a house-share, my focus is very much on making sure I've got enough going on in my social life – dating, doing lots of different things. I do a lot more... when I was in the [cohabiting] relationship...I didn't feel... It seems an odd thing, but I didn't feel like I had to have a totally rounded life, I supposed I was really settled really with what I was doing. Whereas now I feel like I have to go out of work at five and do lots of other things to have... a fulfilling life'

Other participants similarly emphasised the importance of having a 'full life', a 'fulfilling life', and their need to maximise their time: 'to achieve something with your weekend, and with your holiday, and with your evenings' (Anaesthetist Ann, NHS, 30-34), and 'squeeze everything out of the day' (Accountant Vincent, Engineering Firm, 30-34). It should be acknowledged here that this attitude was very different to that of the work-centric participants who said they

needed very little from life outside of work because work provided their satisfaction and fulfilment.

In relation to the final assumption, participants felt that they required time flexibility just as much as other employees, because if something unexpected occurred in the home domain, the onus was on them alone to deal with it:

‘I live alone, when my heating doesn’t work I have to try to be available for the engineer to come and look at my heating, which actually is quite difficult then. I think there is this expectation that somehow you are all... that people are in partnerships and things get covered. They forget that actually, if something goes wrong for me, I have to be available to fix it, you know, my car or my heating or whatever’

(Gemma, Clinical Psychologist, NHS, 35-39)

This brings me on to the next issue that emerged from the data – participant concerns about the lack of support in the non-work domain – which covers emotional and financial support as well as the practical.

5.2.2. Lack of support

Starting with emotional support, when asked about the disadvantages of living alone, one of the recurring issues cited by participants was the absence of someone in the home domain to help them cope with the stresses of their work, or even to just pull them out of work-mode – someone to actually come home for, or to tell them to turn off the laptop and have some dinner. This was evident even when the respondents were in house-shares with friends – Suzanne (Corporate HR Manager, Restaurant Chain, 35-39) noting that ‘even if you like them and they’re your mates and you go off to the pub together, it just kind of reminds you that it’s not a home, and you don’t have emotional support there’.

The nature of friendship is quite significant here. The importance of friendships to these respondents has already been noted, and yet there was a clear sense that friendships rarely provided the level of support that a cohabiting partner would. Firstly, the dynamics of the relationship were seen to be different, and as Sebastian (Pharmacist, NHS, 30-34) noted, ‘you do feel a bit harder talking to your friends, because it’s not really their responsibility’. Secondly, friends were seen to have other demands on their time – even other solo-living

friends. Charlie (female T&D Manager, NHS, 40-44) spoke emotively about a time when she had an operation and was trying to cope in the recovery period:

‘It was lonely. Like Nic my friend, she’s the only one who hasn’t got a partner and stuff, so she came up as much as she could, but she’s got work and she has to look after her mum and stuff. So it was tough – quite lonely’

Finally, such relationships were seen to be more tenuous than familial ones. Many respondents spoke of having made considerable investment in friendships, only for the friend to move on – either moving away for work, or more notably starting families and thus becoming less available due to their new roles and responsibilities. Whilst it is generally recognised that solo-living employees have less responsibilities in the non-work domain, this side of the situation is perhaps less widely acknowledged – that there is no-one with an explicit responsibility for them and their welfare. As well as a lack of someone to listen to them and care for them, two participants went as far as to comment on their fears around being alone if there was a serious problem in the home domain: ‘would anyone notice if I disappeared, like how long would it take for someone to notice?’ (Judith, University Academic, 30-34).

In terms of the absence of practical support in the home domain, we have already made reference to this once – in connection with assumptions about time. For a specific subset of respondents however – all women, mainly in the older age brackets – having sole responsibility for all domestic chores was bound up with a bigger concern. This was a perceived divide between the experiences of men and women at their level in their workplace – which they felt put them at a disadvantage. A number of women reported a gender divide in terms of domestic situation at their own/senior levels of their companies – with most of the women being single and most of the men being married. They referred to traditional gender roles in society, and organisational cultures that meant that in order to succeed at the top, women had to be single (so they weren’t being pulled away from work by domestic requirements), whilst men were able to marry – usually having a less career-minded wife who would take up the domestic burden (see Acker, 1990; Kanter, 1977a). The resulting ‘lack of a wife’ for the women was seen to put them at a disadvantage at work, because they had a ‘second shift’ to undertake that the married men didn’t – not the second shift associated with childcare that is cited in the literature (Hochschild, 1989) but a shift of domestic chores. Some respondents seemed to find it quite hard to articulate their concerns, but clearly felt strongly about this issue:

'...I question whether women tend to live on their own more than men in that environment, or don't succeed as much because they have to do more on their own. The men perhaps have got a wife. Because like the partners, they earn a lot of money, and those wives are sitting at home and like organising their whole lives for them. Whereas you don't really have that as a woman, there isn't that same concept, because if you had a husband you'd probably be supporting him or it would be equal – it wouldn't be the same unequalness' (Florence, Solicitor, Corporate Law Firm, 30-34)

There is some support for this viewpoint in the literature. Wajcman (1996) built on Acker's work on gendered organisations, looking specifically at managerial careers, and found that the domestic arrangements necessary to sustain the life of a senior manager were very different for men and women due to assumptions about support (a wife) in the home domain. Furthermore, more recent studies suggest the issue is still relevant, with Towers & Alkadry (2008) noting a number of 'social costs' for women who opt to pursue an 'organisational woman' path (as opposed to a 'mommy' path) when compared to male colleagues who are likely to have support at home, including delayed marriage or not marrying at all. An interesting observation is that none of the male respondents, despite being similarly solo-living, commented on their 'lack of a wife' or any disadvantage in the workplace in comparison with married colleagues. Gender differences in responses will be explored further in the next two chapters.

The final issue to be discussed here concerns financial support. Having sole responsibility for rent/mortgage payments was a significant concern for most of the respondents, and this had an impact on the work-life interface – making some feel the need to work longer and/or harder, as illustrated by the following quote:

'I think if you are living on your own or you are operating financially on your own, then there's naturally a more personal ethos to motivate yourself to do your job properly, because ultimately, there's not a second wage coming into the household and so you have to be... I think it's just a natural thing, a self-protection thing... Whereas if you're in a stable relationship with two wages coming in you can probably afford to say, you know what, it doesn't matter so much, if I lose my job there's a second wage coming in, and over a period of time I'll get another job. So you can relax a little bit more than if you're living on your own' (Bob, Senior Manager, Drinks Company, 35-39)

Financial concerns were also said to inhibit agency to improve a poor work-life balance situation – individuals feeling they couldn't risk leaving a job or even 'rocking the boat'

(Charlie, female T&D Manager, NHS, 40-44) by discussing dissatisfaction with workloads or management in case they become top of the redundancy list.

As with the issues concerning time requirements, there was a strong feeling from the participants that their financial situation wasn't acknowledged by colleagues and employers, whilst the financial burdens and constraints for other employee groups were:

'I remember a friend of mine who's a scientist, she said that when they were under threats of redundancy a lot of the people were saying 'oh it's all right for you, you're single, you can go anywhere', and she was saying 'yeah, but I'm the only one paying the mortgage, there's no one else there backing me up'. So I remember when I was first single, that was quite a stress for me, being in the house, even though I could easily manage the mortgage, I was very stressed out by it, because there was no safety net' (Grace, Solicitor, Law Firm, 30-34)

This brings me to the next issue, which concerns heightened vulnerability to disappointments in the workplace. Whilst the quote above illustrates the financial vulnerability of solo-living employees when it comes to disappointments in the work domain, the following section refers more to psychological vulnerability.

5.2.3. Heightened vulnerability

The third issue that emerged relates to the centrality of work in many participants' lives. As noted in the first part of the chapter, for most of the participants, work represented a lot more than merely 'earning a living', and was often a central anchor in their lives. Many individuals talked passionately about their love for their work, and the importance of the work domain for their self-esteem – as an avenue for achievement, for gaining respect from others, for on-going development, and for feeling like they were 'making a difference' (see Hochschild, 1997b). Whilst this is unlikely to be unique to solo-living employees – and may be evident in managers and professional employees in general – there was a sense that living alone exacerbated the importance of work for providing meaning, making these individuals somehow more vulnerable to work-based disappointments. Ed (Business Development Director, Bank, 24-29) explained how the negative reputation of his industry had hit him quite hard:

'You put all of your effort into working, I work very hard, and then you're just constantly getting in the media that all bankers are evil people, and you go to...someone at a family function had a bit of a dig at me the other day for being a banker, I've had people meet you at a party and ... so you sort of, you start to resent work a little bit from that point of view... I guess I do get a lot of my kind of status type things from work'

Lewis (Senior Manager, Pensions Company, 35-39) commented on the consequences of negative experiences at work, when there was nothing in the home domain to 'distract' you, and stop you dwelling on it:

'If you get a crap pay review or stuff like that, you find things get a little bit exaggerated in your mind because you go home and you're still thinking about it, there's nothing there to distract you from it. Little things sometimes get a bit exaggerated in your head I think, because you come home to an empty house, and there's no one there to distract you or say 'oh, it's not that bad, it's all right, everyone's getting rubbish pay rises this year, don't take it personally''.

The following quote from Jenny (Marketing Manager, Food Company, 35-39) also illustrates how such vulnerability to disappointments can exacerbate work-life imbalance, by making individuals more prone to over-working:

'my life kind of revolves around work, you know...because I haven't got that many other distractions... you get a lot of criticism if things aren't happening, and for someone like myself, where your job is very important, you feel that criticism quite hard, so you'd rather put in the extra hours to try to avoid it – because you want to feel like you're doing a good job, because if you don't get that kind of sense of achievement from your work then that's quite hard isn't it, when that is such as focus in your life'.

The mention of 'other distractions' – in terms of participant roles and activities outside of the workplace brings me on to the final issue that emerged from the data – concerning the perceived legitimacy of different non-work activities.

5.2.4. *Perceptions about legitimacy*

This issue concerns perceptions about the nature of solo-living employees' non-work activities – specifically, the extent to which these activities were considered to be legitimate reasons for time and energy to be directed away from work. This clearly relates to participant agency – the extent to which they feel able to act. There was evidence in the data that participants thought that whilst activities related to parenting, or even cohabiting partnership, were considered by their organisations and colleagues to be socially sanctioned reasons for work-life balance considerations (a cultural factor), the non-work activities of solo-living employees were not acknowledged. Not only did they feel unable to request much in the way of accommodations from their employer for non-work activities, such as flexibility over their hours (something that could well be related to the lack of a regulatory entitlement to make such requests, unlike other groups), they also felt unable to refuse requests to work over and above their contractual obligations, when other people would have a perceived legitimate priority. An example of this comes from Business Development Director Ed (Bank, 24-29):

‘If you’re double-heading a deal with someone, and something needs to be out that night... and one of you just wants to go home to watch TV and the other one wants to go home to the kids, then the latter is the one who’s going to go home’

To some extent, the legitimacy problem seemed to be linked to the self-oriented nature of most of the non-work activities cited by the sample. Whilst some literature and debate on work-life balance has broadened the definition of non-work to include activities other than caring for cohabiting family, the focus is often still on relational activities with fixed commitments (such as care for other family members such as parents) or altruism in the form of community activity (see Voydanoff 2001; Young, 1996). If these were the non-work activities cited by this study's participants, then legitimacy might not have been felt to be such a problem. On the contrary however, when participants were asked what made up their lives outside of work, 'friendships & socialising' was the most commonly cited non-work activity, followed by sports/fitness and 'chilling out' at home (TV, computer games, internet). Other activities, by frequency of mention, were study/professional development; domestic activities (shopping, cooking, cleaning, sorting bills); dating; spending time with a partner; spending time with family; hobbies; home improvements; and looking after pets. As well as being quite self-oriented, most of these activities carried little in the way of fixed time requirements – which further hindered the extent that they could be used to limit workplace commitments. Thus despite health and wellbeing increasingly being seen to be important pursuits in society in general, Patrick (Regional Contract Manager, Recruitment Firm, 24-29) saw little comparison

between his desire to get to the gym 'which is open 24/7', and a colleague's need to get home 'because they have a living thing to care about' – concluding that 'my excuse wouldn't be as persistent as theirs'.

Whilst the legitimacy issue was a concern for many participants in terms of their perceptions about the assumptions of others (managers and colleagues), there was also evidence that some of the participants personally thought their own non-work activities were not legitimate reasons for any work-life balance consideration from their employers. This issue will be explored further in the next chapter – which centres on participant perceptions of fairness when it comes to work-life balance support in the workplace, and personal sense of entitlement.

5.2.5 Summary

At this point it is useful to summarise the key points from this section, which has focused on the work-life issues that emerged from the data that appear specific to the sample as solo-living employees. Despite the lack of cohabiting partners/family, solo-living participants reported a number of time requirements. Key activities were domestic chores; the development and maintenance of friendships (which were extremely important when solo-living, especially when also single); the development and maintenance of relationships; and personal projects that provided a sense of fulfilment. Participants thought that other people perceived solo-living employees to have little time requirements outside of work, and treated them accordingly (expecting extra effort at work), which they considered to be unfair.

Participants also made reference to a lack of support in the home domain, which they also thought their managers and colleagues overlooked. They mentioned the lack of emotional support, and how friends, despite being hugely important to them, could not take the place of a partner or family member, who had a responsibility for their welfare. They mentioned the lack of practical support, with some females commenting on the knock-on implications that they felt occurred in terms of equality in the workplace, where male colleagues were more likely to have a 'wife' at home to lighten the load. Lastly they mentioned the lack of financial support, and related work domain consequences. This relates to a broader issue of vulnerability to workplace disappointments, which extended to psychological vulnerability when work was the main source of identity for an individual. This could lead to a vicious circle where individuals felt the need to work longer and harder (in order not to make any mistakes)

– which further diminished their involvement in non-work activities – which further reinforced work as the main source of identity.

A final key issue was perceptions about the legitimacy of non-work activities. As noted above, a number of non-work roles/activities were very important to participants, especially friendship. There was a general feeling in the sample however that only partnership and parenting roles/activities were seen to be legitimate reasons for time and energy devoted away from work. This seemed to be linked to the fact that most of the non-work roles/activities reported in interviews were self-oriented, and had little in the way of fixed time commitments.

5.3. Conclusion

This chapter has provided some new insight into the issue of work-life balance. It has been argued that this sample of solo-living managers and professionals experience many of the work-life issues that are acknowledged in the literature, despite the literature tending to overlook them as a research demographic. Whilst some of the work-life issues are the same – including long working hours, unpredictable finish times and boundary blurring – it seems that solo-living can sometimes exacerbate the problem, and that there are different consequences. Whilst organisational demands for the ‘ideal worker’ can be problematic for working parents as they find it hard to conform to organisational expectations, and may lose out on certain opportunities and rewards, for solo-living employees the problems are more associated with being able to conform to the expectations, and perhaps suffering from social isolation as a result.

The chapter also extends previous research about varying orientations to work and conceptualisations of work-life balance to this under-researched sample. Whilst work is the primary orientation of most of the sample, there is evidence of orientations changing over time, especially for female solo-living employees, with work becoming less central in their lives. Whilst this has been acknowledged in previous studies on orientations to work, previous studies have focused on working parents, with a key explanation for the change in priority being the parental role, which can provide an alternative sense of fulfilment. The situation for those without children will be explored further in chapter seven.

The main contribution from this chapter however is the identification of a number of work-life balance issues that appear to be unique to the sample on the basis of their domestic situation as solo-living employees. These relate to perceptions about non-work time; awareness of a lack of support in the non-work domain; a sense of heightened vulnerability to disappointments in the work domain; and concerns about the perceived legitimacy of their non-work activities. The next two findings chapters make use of two different theories to help understand the generative mechanisms behind participant experiences and attitudes, and elucidate the interplay of structure, culture and agency. The next chapter utilises distributive justice theory to explore participant perceptions of fairness when it comes to the work-life balance policies and provisions in their organisations, and their own sense of entitlement for support.

6. Perceptions of fairness in relation to work-life balance policy and practice

The last chapter focused on the conceptualised and described work life balance of the solo-living employees, and reported on the key themes emerging from the issues discussed – some issues already acknowledged in the literature (albeit not for this demographic) and also issues that seem specific to the sample. In this chapter, the focus turns to participant perceptions of the fairness of organisational work-life balance support allocation, and their personal sense of entitlement to support. As many participants reported problems with their work-life balance, it might be expected that they would expect some support from their employer, through work-life balance policies and informal practices that provide flexibility and autonomy. It might also be expected that where work-life balance policies and provisions concern only, or mainly, ‘work-family’ issues, then some form of ‘backlash’ would result (Flynn, 1996; Korabik & Warner, 2009; Kossek & Van Dyne, 2008; Young, 1999). This chapter explores participant perceptions towards the work-life balance supports available in their organisation, and uses the theoretical framework of distributive justice to explain variations in perceptions of fairness.

Several questions are explored in this chapter: What distributive justice rules (DJRs) do participants think their organisations apply when it comes to the allocation of work-life balance support (need, equality or equity)? Do participants think the approaches used by their organisations are fair? What factors seem to influence these fairness assessments? Linked to this, how do participants actually conceptualise each of the principles? With the needs-based DJR, for example, what ‘needs’ are included in fairness judgements when it comes to work-life balance support? With the equity-based DJR, what factors are considered to be relevant ‘inputs’ and ‘outputs’ when it comes to calculations about the fair distribution of work-life balance support?

As there was evidence of all three DJR principles in the data as a whole, albeit to varying degrees, the chapter is structured by taking each principle in turn, starting with need. At the end of the chapter, some of the complexities of participant thinking processes are explored, as well as the variations in participant fairness perceptions; sense of entitlement to support; and reactions when unfairness is perceived.

6.1. Needs-based DJR

Need is the first DJR to be addressed because, as noted above, it can be seen to have informed much of the legislation on the subject of work-life balance in the UK. The principle is also of interest because of the roots of the work-life balance agenda. It was noted in the literature review that the concept evolved from 'work-family' considerations, and that family needs still seem to be at the heart of current conceptualisations, be they on organisation websites (Hoffman & Cowan, 2008), in academic research (Casper et al. 2007a; Eby et al. 2005), or in the media (Reece et al. 2009).

6.1.1. *Perceptions of organisations using a needs-based DJR*

There is evidence in the data that several participants thought their organisations were basing their work-life balance support on a needs-based DJR, with the need in question being childcare. Ann (Anaesthetist, NHS, 30-34) spoke about the domestic situations of people in her department, and how this had an influence on their work patterns:

Ann: There's a couple that have got kids. If you've got kids you can go onto a flexible training contract, so you can be part-time, and most people with kids are on a part-time contract... I couldn't go part-time, even if I was stressed, you know it's not an option, it's not available

Int: Right, just because you've not got kids?

Ann: Yeah

Whilst she did not say that she had ever asked to go part-time, her perception was that in her company, only employees with childcare responsibilities would be considered eligible for flexibility. Whilst Ann works in the NHS, a similar situation was mentioned by a participant in a private sector Law Firm. When Isla (Solicitor, 30-34) was asked if her company had any work life balance policies, she replied: 'There is flexibility for people with children, they'll let them do remote access or let them do compressed hours, it's not great but there is some flexibility'. She did not mention any flexibility for other employees. This stance on work-life balance means that such policies become a structural barrier to work-life balance support for those without children in such organisations. That such a needs-based approach was evident in two very different types of organisation suggests that there might be a broader contextual factor at

play, such as the UK legislative context (a national level structure). At the time in which the interviews were conducted, employees with children had the right to request flexible working, whilst those without caring responsibilities did not. Whilst this right also extended to individuals with broader caring responsibilities at the time, the childcare element might have been picked up more by the employers in their policies and/or the participants in their interpretation of the policies.

This legislation was in fact alluded to by some participants. Ed (Business Development Director, Bank, 30-34) commented: 'If you go to your boss now and say you've got kids so you want to drop down to three days a week they'll find a way to do it, and I'm sure they're contractually obliged to find a way to do it', whilst they wouldn't consider requests from other employees. Despite somewhat misunderstanding the legislation – thinking that employers are 'obliged' to authorise flexible working requests from parents rather than being obliged to consider the request only; and not acknowledging that the legislation covers carers too – he was clearly aware of legislative provisions that cover some employees but not people like him, who live on their own without caring responsibilities.

Flexible working was not the only work-life balance support that was mentioned by participants when they talked about their organisation provisions. Other supports were mentioned that were associated with legislation. When Tony (Solicitor, Law Firm, 25-29) was asked about his Company's approach to work-life balance, he said: 'I think depending on the situation the firm can be quite accommodating', but backed this up by stating legislative provisions only – allowing maternity leave and allowing women to return to work after maternity leave, which he said 'obviously they have to do'. Fred (Senior Manager, Insolvency Practitioners, 35-39) suggested that people with children had more leeway to take days off or work from home at short notice:

'Well I mean in my role I have people asking me for time off and there's another manager who will say to me, 'kid's ill today, I can't come in, I'll work on reports at home', which of course he can't really do much at home, but you can't, you know, you can't argue with that, you can't turn round and say 'No, you're coming in', you just have to go 'Oh, OK then''

The fact that he repeated the word 'can't' suggests a perceived inability to challenge the situation, which might be linked to his perceptions of the legal protections for parents, and the right for emergency time off for dependents. Another participant, Maria (Lecturer, University,

35-39) worked in France for part of her time, and linked French legislation to the allocation of holidays and shifts in French Universities:

‘I’m considered to be more flexible because I don’t have kids. Under French law if you have kids you have a little bit more protection, you get to choose your holidays first, and if you don’t have kids you’re just considered to be cannon fodder, so I get the eight o’clocks because I don’t have kids.’

All of these examples base organisational work-life balance provisions on the ‘need’ of family responsibilities. It is important to note however that some participants discussed other needs that had been accommodated by their employers – notably however still linked to legislative provisions. Jude (HR Manager, Local Council, 24-29) said that a recent partnership deal with a private sector company had changed her organisation’s approach to flexible working. Whilst the company had previously allowed widespread working hour and location flexibility, it now required formal requests and authorisation. She said she had personally made such a request – to continue to work from home three days per week – but had felt the need to base this on a need covered in employment legislation – a disability:

‘Because I’ve got Eczema, the air conditioning was really making it flare up, and then I’m prone to infection and it affects my sleep pattern. And it’s just not very comfortable being sat in an office, trussed up in a suit, when your skin’s like... So anyway, I got referred to Occupational Health and they advised that it was a disability under the Equality Act, and a reasonable adjustment would be to allow me to continue to work from home’

Charlie (female T&D Manager, NHS, 40-44) provided a similar example, saying that her organisation allowed her to leave work early once a week because she had a regular appointment in connection with a certified medical need, whilst on other days she would rarely be able to finish at her contractual end time:

‘the only night I get out of here – and it’s not always – is a Friday – I usually get out on Fridays because I have a back-care class, and the only way I can sort of wangle it is to say ‘I’ve GOT to go because it’s for my back’, and that makes it sort of legitimate’

When Fred (Senior Manager, Insolvency Practitioners, 35-39) spoke of the accommodation of employee childcare needs in his company, he also mentioned the accommodation of two different needs – both of which are recognised as worthy of support at government level – personal ill-health and parent ill-health: ‘But then again, if I was ill, or a parent was ill, then you would be thinking it’s considered quite normal to say ‘I’m going off for the rest of the day’. So

it seems that a range of organisations, both public and private sector, were seen to base their work-life balance provisions on the DJRs of the legislative structure.

Whilst we cannot be sure that the participants were accurate in their perceptions of the work-life balance policies and practices in their organisations (see Budd & Mumford, 2006) due to the data collection method used in this research, it is their perceptions that are significant here – as these are what inform their capacity for making use of the policies (their agency) and also their perceptions of fairness. An interesting finding is that many participants actually seemed to assume that such a needs-based stance was being taken by their company, even where they had taken no steps to become aware of the actual policies and provisions in place. When asked whether their companies had any work-life balance policies, fourteen of the 36 participants said that they either didn't know if their company had a policy, or said that the company did have one, but that they personally didn't know what it covered. An example of the latter comes from Sebastian (Pharmacist, NHS, 30-34):

Int: So moving on to the workplace, are there any work-life balance policies or things like that?

Seb: There are yes, the NHS is obsessed with policies, so there is a work-life balance policy

Int: Do you know much about the policy?

Seb: Not really to be honest, because I haven't... I've glanced at it but not read it properly

Whilst for some of these participants, this was linked to the fact that they were happy with their current work-life situation or that work-life balance was not especially important to them at the time (see last chapter), for many it seemed to be linked to an assumption that the company would apply a family-based needs DJR, and that the policies would therefore not apply to them. An illustrative quote here comes from Ed (Business Development Director, Bank, 24-29):

Int: Does the company have any formal work-life balance policies?

Ed: It will have them, just because it's a PLC, but I don't know what they are

Int: You've never looked into them?

Ed: No

Int: Is there any reason you've never looked into them?

Ed: Well, I think they're designed for... Well no one puts a gun to my head and forces me to work in fairness, I do it because I want to be good, but I also think the work-life stuff

is mainly designed for people with kids. That's what it's targeted around, it's not really relevant

At this point, the focus will move on to participant perceptions of the fairness of organisational needs-based DJRs when it comes to the provision of work-life balance support.

6.1.2. Perceptions of fairness: Needs-based DJR

Taking the childcare-based need as a starting point, there is evidence that several participants agreed that a needs-based DJR was appropriate for the distribution of work-life balance support by organisations. This is because they thought that colleagues with children had a harder time when trying to reconcile their work with their responsibilities at home. Jenny (Marketing Manager, Food Company, 35-39) for example compared her own work-life balance to colleagues with children and considered herself better off:

'you've only got yourself to worry about, so in the morning you've just got to get yourself up and dressed and out the door, whereas I do wonder how other people, you know that have to get children's packed lunches and games kits and homework sorted out and things – yeah absolutely don't know how they do it really, they must be ultra-organised'.

Similarly, when Stacy (Nurse, NHS, 30-34) was asked if there was anything that her company could do to help improve her work-life situation, her reply suggests that she thought that childcare responsibilities would be the main reason for her to have a need:

'I suppose if I had children or other commitments then there might be things that I would make suggestions about, I don't know, but for me, because it's just me, I don't really have any issues that I would want changing to make any suggestions, if that makes sense'.

Such a view seemed to have knock-on implications for these participants' expectations of support when it comes to the management of the work-life interface. The following excerpt from the interview with Adam (Teacher, Sixth Form College, 35-39) is quite illustrative:

Int: Do you think people are interested at all in your work-life balance? Do you have a sense of people thinking about what you might have going on outside?

Adam: [Pause] I don't know, I don't think so. Why would they be?

Int: In general is there an awareness of people's work-life balance? So for the females perhaps that have children, do you think there's... that people are conscious that they're...?

Adam: Yeah, I think they're more appreciative of that, I think they are. They're understanding, you know?

Adam appeared to believe that whilst working parents had responsibilities outside of work that deserved to be 'appreciated' and 'understood' by the employer, he as a solo-living employee did not: the 'why would they be?' suggesting he felt he had no reason for any support. It should be noted that this employee reported work-life balance problems in his broader interview – describing his work-life situation as 'a contest really, it's a contest, it's always a conflict as well', when discussing how heavy workloads had limited his development of a social life in the Manchester area and prevented him from indulging hobbies as much as he would like. He just thought that working parents had it far harder, which is emphasised in his comments: 'I don't understand how people who are married with children do it (cope with the workload)', because children are 'an extremely big burden' in terms of 'sleep deprivation, constant worrying, sickness, all those types of things'.

This explanation might also go some way towards explaining Bob's (Senior Manager, Food Company, 35-39) reaction to the idea that he might have made use of any of his company's work-life balance policies, which he seemed to consider ridiculous:

Int: Do you know if the company has got any work-life balance policies?

Bob: Oh yeah, absolutely, you can guarantee it, this company's got every ethical policy going.

Int: Have you ever made use of any of them?

Bob: Oh no, don't be daft, no, not, no [laughs]

A further phenomenon in the data that should be discussed here is the apparent unconscious acceptance by some participants of a needs-based approach to work-life balance support in their organisations – even when this personally disadvantaged them. On a number of occasions, participants provided examples of where they had received less beneficial treatment than a colleague who had children, and yet they did not recognise the discrepancy, instead seeming to unconsciously accept it as fair. Lee (Radiologist, NHS, 35-39) clearly stated at one point that he saw no unfairness in treatment in his organisation on the basis of domestic circumstances, and yet elsewhere talked about there being two different rota

systems in operation, with only those with children being allocated to the more preferable fixed-hours one. Another example comes from Max (Accounting Analyst, Accountant Company, 30-34), who talked of having asked at one point whether he could change his start and finish times slightly to avoid rush hour traffic, and being answered with 'No, it's nine to half five'. Whilst this might indicate some sense of entitlement to support – as he made the request in the first place – he was quite matter of fact about the response he got from the company, and did not appear to notice the discrepancy between this and the treatment of a female colleague that he discussed later in the interview, who 'could leave the office at two o'clock to pick up the baby from kindergarten', provided she started earlier in the morning.

It might be considered surprising that these solo-living participants seem to consider it fair for their organisations to adopt a needs-based DJR when it comes to work-life balance support. This is because prior research has found that individuals are more likely to consider a needs-based DJR to be fair when they themselves have the need in question – due to self-interest, or egocentric bias (Kulik et al. 1996). It could be that participants were thinking they will fall into this category in the future. When Grover (1991) researched the perceived fairness of parental leave policies in America, he found that it was not just those with children, but also those of childbearing age, alongside those who held positive views towards women, who were more likely to view a needs-based approach as fair. There was however only one quote in the data that seems to evidence such a position:

'Our cashier, she's got a young family and her daughter sometimes goes 'Hi mummy, I'm in school, I don't feel well, can you pick me up I want to come home', and she has to go. Now I don't have any excuses like that to leave work... But I'm thinking that one day I'll be a dad, and I would like to be able to turn round to my boss, or be the boss, and turn round and say 'I'm going to pick up the kids'. So it's almost an unwritten acceptable thing to do, but at the moment I would not ever say that, or do that, because I don't have any reason to' (Fred, Senior Manager, Insolvency, 35-39)

From the discussions above, it could be that contextual factors are more prominent for shaping participant perceptions of the fairness of organisation DJRs than such individual-level factors. That many participants seem to unconsciously accept as fair the needs-based DJR approach used by their organisations (itself shaped by legislation) might indicate that employee personal DJRs are shaped by organisational and/or broader societal norms. Lewis & Smithson (2001) acknowledge the issue of broader social context, and specifically national institutional framework, when it comes to young people's sense of entitlement to work-life balance support from both the state and their employer. Whilst not explicitly addressing

issues of distributive justice rules, the study revealed that individuals in different countries – with different national policies around welfare provisions in terms of the ‘gender contract’ – had different views about what was fair, and differing sense of entitlement, when it came to support for the reconciliation of work and family life.

It is important to note that not all participants thought such an approach to the distribution of work-life balance support was fair. For some participants, perceptions were not clear cut when discussing the issue. When Gemma (Clinical Psychologist, NHS, 35-39) was asked if she knew whether her organisation had any work-life balance policies, her response suggested mixed feelings about the subject:

‘I know that I can apply formally for like flexible working hours, and I know that you can apply for things like annual hours, but I also get the sense that without having children my managers could turn around, you know could legitimately turn round and say ‘no, you can’t have them’, because it doesn’t suit the way they want my service to be provided. So yeah it feels as though it’s based around having children – being a single person they just look at you and go ‘er no’ [laughs]’

Despite saying that she knew she could formally apply for flexible hours (which would suggest the policy in her company is open to everyone), that she thought this would probably be refused if she didn’t have children suggests that she believed a traditional needs-based principle and legislative compliance were at the heart of her organisation’s approach. She seemed to think that her employers would be obliged to accept a request from an employee with children, whilst requests from others were likely to be turned down if it didn’t suit the business needs. Whilst this appears to be a slight misunderstanding of the legislation (where requests from anyone can be turned down based on business need), it is her perception of fairness that is important here – which seems unclear. The fact that she says the company could ‘legitimately’ refuse a request from someone without children suggests she somewhat accepts a needs-based approach, but the comment on her own situation, and the expected reaction if she made a request, does suggest a feeling of being disadvantaged.

For other participants, perceptions of unfairness were stronger. Two different thinking processes were evident here. The first was where participants seemed to think a different type of DJR should be used, with work-life balance support being offered to everyone equally, or relative to their inputs. Ed (Business Development Director, Bank, 24-29) provided one example. It was noted above that he recognised that parents in his company could make a

request to work part-time and that the company would be legally obliged to consider it. He went on to add:

‘but I go to my boss now and say ‘I can’t really be arsed to work five days a week, can I work three days a week and get paid less?’ – no way you’d get that. Whereas actually I think there’s a lot of people, when you get to your fifties, who might just want to work three days a week, but they wouldn’t help you do that’

This suggests that he thought an equality-based approach to flexibility should have been applied, with everyone having the opportunity to make a request and have it fairly considered. He also expressed a sense of dissatisfaction with the distribution of work-life balance support at a more informal level in his company. As well as talking about formal policies around flexibility, he elsewhere talked about norms in the company when it came to employees having to stay late to complete work. He noted that colleagues with children tended to go home on time, which meant that those without families had to stay. He demonstrated some understanding for the needs-based approach, but suggested that equity should also be a consideration – in terms of ensuring that employee ‘inputs’ in terms of hours are fairly reflected in the outputs of ‘salary’:

‘But you know, we get paid the same salary basically, so why is my going home less important? It is less important apparently. I mean you understand that to an extent, and they’re your mate so you do it, but it’s not quite fair I think’

Ed actually mentioned having taken action to improve his own work-life balance experience when dealing with a similar situation – where his personal DJR was at odds with the DJR that informed a norm in the work environment (as opposed to a formalised policy) concerning the booking of annual leave. He said that he always used to avoid booking leave during the school holidays because the general attitude towards holiday allocation was needs-based – with those with children being given priority. He said that this had caused him personal problems in the past, because he would end up working at times when many of his contacts were off work, so he would not be able to progress with projects easily, and then he would have to take his leave at times when everything was quite busy operationally. He said he ‘totally reversed that... and just said sod it, I want to be off in the quiet time – and the reduction in stress is huge’. This suggests a change to an equality-based perspective, where everyone should be entitled to take their holidays at a time that is most convenient. I believe that Ed’s status in his company was a possible enabling structural factor behind this agency, and this will be discussed later in the chapter.

The second thinking process evident in the interviews concerned an alternative conceptualisation of the term 'need'. A number of participants suggested that the needs-based principle behind organisation work-life balance supports was appropriate – that those that most required support for their work-life balance should be the ones that got it – but that organisations should consider broader needs than just family-based ones. A similar issue was noted in Young's (1999) research on the fairness perceptions of different employees regarding work-life balance support, where the same distributive justice principle was seen to be subject to different interpretations within focus group discussions (Young, 1999: 42).

Gemma (Clinical Psychologist, NHS, 35-39) was very passionate when talking about her need for flexibility in a previous job in order to be able to access the education that was required for her to progress in her chosen field. When her organisation did not recognise this need, and support her, she felt a strong sense of unfairness, and so spoke up:

'I asked my workplace if they would allow me to work part-time so that I could attend the course part-time and they said no. I really kicked up a stink about that because I said 'you employ me as a Trainee Forensic Psychologist but you're not actually supporting me in training'.

Other participants explicitly made reference to their needs as solo-living employees, and how these were not recognised by their companies. This was most evident in a specific subset – female participants aged 35-44. Suzanne (Corporate HR Manager, Restaurant Chain, 35-39) stated: 'I do think there's a lack of understanding about the challenges of working when living alone'; and Charlie (female T&D Manager, NHS, 40-44) said:

'there are sort of assumptions made by the world I think, that if you live on your own you've got all this time... and it does bug the hell out of me – all this 'oh they have to go because they've got children' or they have a day off because their kids poorly, another day off because their kids poorly, another day off. There's no... we have to be soldiering on because we've not got that'

Many of the needs that these individuals referred to resonate with the issues raised in the last chapter. One is the need for time to manage a house on their own, with Charlie saying 'people seem to forget that [living alone] means I have to do absolutely everything in the house/garden/life, so I can't be expected to work silly hours and always do the Christmas cover etc.'. Another is the need for time for personal health and wellbeing. Again an apt quote came from Charlie: 'poor little child at school gate, not being picked up by mummy – that's an awful thing, but you needing to get home to do some exercise and not die of a heart attack is

not really a legitimate reason'. Another is the need for time to see friends and potentially find a partner. Jenny (Marketing Manager, Food Company, 35-39) commented how she worked such long hours that she had little time for life outside: 'it does get me quite down, because you know the weeks go by and you realise that you've hardly seen anybody and you don't get to see your friends... and I mean I'm nearly 40 and single as well, you know it'd be nice to be going out a bit more to meet somebody as well'. She found it frustrating that these needs were not acknowledged by the company, whilst the childcare needs of others were respected, with colleagues having their working hours protected:

'some of the people I work with now, they work part-time so finish at three and they would never check e-mails again until they get in at half nine the next morning, so that's a bit [laughs] that can be a bit frustrating because you know their line managers make sure that they don't have any pressure or stress, which just puts more on me you know'.

Unlike with Gemma's education issue however, none of the participants that raised these issues in their interviews mentioned having spoken up about their perception of unfairness. This will be explored later in the chapter.

To provide a summary to this section, many participants perceived their organisations to be taking a needs-based approach to work-life balance support – with the needs in question being those recognised in UK legislation. Many participants considered this approach to be fair. The approach was considered to be problematic where a different distributive justice rule was considered more appropriate by a participant, or where a broader conceptualisation of 'need' was utilised. In terms of participant characteristics, it seems that female participants aged 35-44 were the least satisfied when organisations took a needs-based DJR approach. This will be explored later in the chapter. At this point, the focus moves to the next DJR – that of equality.

6.2. Equality-based DJR

6.2.1. Perceptions of organisations using an equality-based DJR

A minority of participants said that certain work-life balance provisions were available to everyone in their organisation – or at least their worksite – irrespective of domestic situation or job role. Jack (Manager, Local Government, 30-34) and Trent (Progression Officer, Central Government, 30-34) both mentioned the equality-based provision of flexi-time in their organisations; Jude (HR Manager, Local Government, 24-29) and Sebastian (Pharmacist, NHS,

30-34) said that all employees had the right to request flexible working in their companies; and Stacy (Nurse, NHS, 30-34) talked about the shift allocation system in her department being fair to all:

‘What we do is they print out a blank off-duty every month, we can fill it in, obviously we have to look at what other people have requested, but we can literally request what we want to work for the whole month’

She said that the system for allocating who works on Christmas day each year was also explicitly equality-based, with every person being required to work it every other year, regardless of their personal situation. Interestingly, all of these examples come from participants in public sector organisations.

Some tensions were evident in the data when participants spoke about equality-based company approaches however, in terms of the policy versus the practice. Jude (HR Manager, Local Government, 24-29) spoke at one point about the work-life balance provisions available in her company, and the fairness of the distribution:

Int: I’m sure you do know this, but do you know if the organisation has any formal work-life balance policies?

Jude: Yeah, we’ve got a flexible working policy, your right to request, etc. And then we’ve got a few: home-working policy; agile working; a working carers’ policy; and then we’ve got like special leave; compressed hours; term-time only – these are all obviously subject to management approval

Int: And do you think there’s fair access to provisions for all employees, regardless of domestic situation?

Jude: Yeah, at [the Council] we... obviously the law is that it’s restricted to working carers really, isn’t it, so where you’ve got dependents or children, but at [the Council] it’s open to anybody as long as they’ve got six months’

She was commenting here on the Council provisions at the time of interview, stating that they went over and above the needs-based legislative approach to work-life balance support, and offered the same support to all employees (an equality-based approach). She painted a very different picture of the principles in operation in the Council at a different point in the interview however. This was when she spoke about the situation after the Council was put into partnership with a private sector company, where the open attitude to working patterns

(with most people working flexible hours and working from home when they wanted) changed to one where individuals had to make a formal request in order to work flexibly:

‘People have had to use formal procedures to get any kind of flexible working. So there’s one person for example whose husband’s got MS, and she has to take him to the clinic or wherever on a Wednesday, so she’s had to put a formal flexible working request in; and then there’s another one with childcare responsibilities, so she’s had to put a formal flexible working request in’.

Both of the examples that she provided here concern a request for flexible working related to a need that falls under legislative provisions – childcare or carer responsibilities. As noted earlier in the chapter, she also mentioned her own request to work flexibly, which was based on another legislatively recognised need (disability). Thus whilst she suggested that the formal policy was equality-based (where anyone can apply for flexible working), it seems that the norm in the organisation was that flexible working applications should be needs-based in order to be granted. It is difficult to know whether this reflects the attitudes of employees (with only those with a legitimate need having made a formal request) or the attitudes of management (requiring a legitimate need in order to consider/grant a request), but it seems that the needs-based DJR is dominant in the organisation despite the policy statement of equal access.

A similar issue was reported by Trent (male Progression Officer, Central Government, 30-34). Whilst he said that the formal policy in his organisation was for flexi-time to be available to everyone, he suggested that when it came to implementation at a local level, the needs-based perspective was often dominant:

‘I say people come and go as they please, but often you get a situation where a lot of people go around three o’clock and the phones are still ringing until half five. My manager stepped in and said ‘well, I’d like people to cover a bit later’, and it’s always more difficult to argue against people who say they’ve got to do this and that with the kids. So yeah, it’s never been explicitly said to me, I have had the feeling that I was expected to be more flexible because I haven’t got those commitments. It’s more of a perception than something that’s been laid down’.

One explanation for the perceived policy versus practice discrepancy could be linked to the nature of the organisations that these employees work in. It was noted above that all of the organisations seen to take this approach were in the public sector, where there is a statutory duty to operate according to certain principles, whether or not these principles are shared by those required to operationalize the policies. This issue was noted by two of the participants.

Jack (Manager, Local Government, 30-34) replied to a question about whether his organisation was generally interested in the work-life balance of all employees with the following comment:

‘Yeah I think they are, I think public sector organisations realise they’ve got much more of a duty, because people go to the public sector expecting that they get a good work-life balance, expecting things like flexi-time, and they’re very concerned about things like equal opportunities for staff, and obviously we have a bigger burden upon us legally to be an equal opportunities employer, than private sector companies are expected to do’

Sebastian (Pharmacist, NHS, 30-34) echoed this view when asked the same question. He said ‘I think so yeah, because it’s the NHS I think they have to be. I don’t think they’d get away with any like perceived like favouritism in any kind of situation’. This again links the perceived organisational DJR choices to structural factors at a national level.

So far the discussion here has been around organisation support concerning flexible working patterns. Two other forms of equality-based organisation work-life balance support were mentioned by participants – interestingly both of which are linked to national legislative provisions. Two participants mentioned an Occupational Health service being available to everyone in their organisations – a provision that Stacy (Nurse, NHS, 24-29) linked to employer efforts to support employees with stress management (something that can affect employee lives both in work and outside work). Occupational Health provisions are likely to fall under employer responsibilities under Health and Safety Legislation – which mainly takes an equality-based approach, covering all employees and workers equally. Four participants said that their employers were keen to monitor the working hours of all employees, to ensure that no one was working too much. All of these participants linked this to the Working Time Directive: ‘I know that there have been some people that have been pulled up for doing too many hours, because you know, people are in danger of breaching the European working hours thing’ (Lewis, Senior Manager, Pensions Company, 35-39). This can be seen to reinforce the argument that organisation approaches to the distribution of work-life balance supports seem to be shaped by the regulatory approach to such issues. As with the comments about flexible working policy provisions above, there is a sense from some participants that their organisations are only monitoring working hours because there is a requirement, not because they genuinely care about ensuring all employees work reasonable hours:

Vin: My last place, the pharmaceutical company, was very big, very well established, very well set up, everything had been set up for years... And they talked a lot about work-life balance, but it was all bull-shit, it was all just nonsense, they talked about it and promoted it but in actual fact they weren't doing anything about it.

Int: So if something needed doing, you'd have to stay and do it.

Vin: Yeah, they might say 'you've got to go home now', because you know they think you're doing too much overtime, they want you to have that work-life balance, but in practice they were only doing it because there was a legal requirement that they've got to try to say to people 'go'

(Vincent, Accountant, Engineering Company, 30-34)

So, to what extent did the solo-living participants in this research project consider an equality-based DJR to be fair when it comes to work-life balance support? This is discussed in the next section.

6.2.2. Perceptions of fairness: Equality-based DJR

There were only a few examples in the data of participants commenting on the fairness or otherwise of an equality-based approach. Stacy (Nurse, NHS, 30-34) provided one when she discussed the system for holiday allocation cited above, suggesting she thought it unfair that domestic situation was not considered:

'I had Christmas off this year and I did feel a little bit guilty I suppose because I've got no family that I go to for Christmas, or I've got no children, and then there'll be someone else who's got children and they're working – and I do think is that fair?'

From this, it seems that her personal approach to the distributive justice of holiday allocation over the Christmas period was needs-based, with those with children having a greater need to spend Christmas day with the family – hence her feeling of guilt when she has the day off without having that need.

Another participant seemed to suggest that taking an equality based approach to things like flexibility was not fair because it did not reflect differences in individual inputs (here in terms of working hours), thus suggesting that an equity-based approach would be more fair. Jenny (Marketing Manager, Food Company, 35-39) said that her company offered no flexibility when it came to hours or location of work: 'it's very much a culture that you know you need to be

there from nine to five'. This is a case of treating everyone equally when it comes to hours. She went on to comment that her job was different to others in the company however, and that she worked longer hours as a result. She felt the company should acknowledge this discrepancy and give her more autonomy/flexibility:

'I do feel that they're kind of taking advantage of the fact that I put in these hours, because I don't think that other people would – and you know if I left on time we'd be losing loads of hours – if I left at five that'd be like four and half hours, and if I took a full lunch break that'd be kind of five hours less... Everyone else works 9-5, they like leave en mass at the stroke of five... So yeah I think more working from home would be nice for me, and just a bit more...you know if you had a night out or something, so like I've got a work evening out in a few weeks coming up – me going out with another company, and I know that I'll need to be in work for nine the next morning. So just a bit of flexibility, you know'

To conclude this section, it seems that organisations are more likely to take an equality-based approach to work-life balance support when they are in the public sector, which some participants consider to be linked to the greater emphasis on equality that is expected by these organisations from the government. The perspective is also more likely when the work-life balance support in question is linked to an equality-based legislative provision, such as health & safety law or the Working Time Directive. There were only a couple of examples of participants feeling that this approach was not fair, but several participants did think the policy was not related to the actual practice in their organisations, with a needs-based DJR often being used when implementing provisions.

The focus will now turn to the final work-life balance support DJR – participant discussions of an equity-based approach being taken by their organisations.

6.3. Equity-based DJR

It was noted at the start of this chapter that equity was the most studied DJR when it comes to the employment sphere, this is because it has been considered the most common type of rule used in the work setting (Greenberg, 1990; Leventhal, 1976), linked back to Deutsch's (1975) assertion that it is the most appropriate rule for dealing with economically-oriented groups. The principle also has relevance for this specific research project because equity concerns appear to be at the heart of the 'family-friendly backlash' issue – where employees without

children are said to feel that their inputs in terms of working hours/effort are greater than colleagues with children, but that the allocation of outputs (various rewards) does not reflect this (Flynn, 1996; Korabik & Warner, 2009; Kossek & Van Dyne, 2008; Young, 1999). So what evidence was there of this approach in the data?

6.3.1. Perceptions of organisations using an equity-based DJR

In the interviews as a whole, there was evidence of organisations providing work-life balance support that could be interpreted as being equity-based. Participants tended to discuss two different types of provision here. The first concerned the allocation of working time or location flexibility (a desired output) on the basis of employee job role. From an equity-based perspective, this desired output would be balanced against the relative input of qualifications, skills, and experience needed to perform the role. Seven participants stated that they had been given a degree of schedule and/or location flexibility that was not offered to everyone in their organisations: Roo (Finance Manager, Bank, 40-44); Fred (Senior Manager, Insolvency Practitioners, 35-39); Leah (HR Manager, Law Firm, 24-29); Vincent (Accountant, Engineering Company, 30-34); Bob (Senior Manager, Food Company, 35-39); Adam (Teacher, Sixth Form College, 35-39) and Judith (Academic, University, 30-34). Some explicitly linked this outcome to their role as Managers/professionals. Leah noted that working from home was available to the Solicitors and Leadership team (herself included) in her Law firm, but that the administrative staff had to make a formal application; and Fred states:

‘Now, in my current job, if I need to go somewhere, like on a course or finish early at four o’clock one day, I’m Senior Manager – I can turn round and say ‘I’m going to an appointment’ and clear off. I mean, you don’t want to take the mick, and you don’t want people to think, this guy’s not pulling his weight, but every now and again you can certainly engineer it’

This status factor can also be seen to have influenced the decision taken by Ed (Business Development Director, Bank, 24-29) to change his approach to his annual leave – something that was mentioned earlier in the chapter – from avoiding school holidays to selecting the times that most suited him. As well as his personal stance being informed by an equality-based DJR, as noted above, he seems to think that his actions were accepted by others because of his status and the inputs he provides to the team and the organisation: ‘I’m the most experienced person on the team, they sort of try to keep me happy a little bit... my negotiating position is strong enough that I can say I want the time off then’.

In the literature review, it was noted that according to the 2004 Workplace Employment Relations Survey, professional and highly educated respondents were more likely than other respondents to perceive that they had access to work-life balance provisions of this kind – concerned with providing autonomy over when and where work is carried out, as opposed to those providing support for family (Nadeem & Metcalf, 2007). This suggests that an equity-based DJR may be used by many organisations when it comes to the allocation of such provisions. An alternative explanation however would be that these are the individuals with the most power and bargaining status in the organisation, who do not necessarily ‘earn’ more in terms of outputs, but are more enabled by industry and organisational structures than other employees – which would not necessarily equate to fairness.

The second type of equity-based DJR that participants discussed concerned situations where organisations were seen to provide access to different types of reward (outputs) on the basis of employee working hours (the input). In the following quote, Gerard (Auditor, Accountancy Firm, 24-29) talked about the situation in his company, where career-development outcomes were distributed as an alternative to work-life balance support to take account of hours-based employee inputs:

‘I think if you have got responsibilities and you do leave (the office at your contractual end time), then yeah I think it’s considered to be acceptable, it’s fine, but I know for example my line manager, she’s got a child, she won’t work at the weekends, which is kind of fair enough obviously, she probably doesn’t get involved in the social activities as much, because she wants to probably get home to see her child. And I think ultimately, in a way, it counts against her. I don’t know how ambitious she is in terms of progressing in the firm, but I think it probably does inhibit her progress, or her profile within the organisation, because she isn’t at those sort of events’

A number of participants made similar comments about the practice in their organisations, suggesting that they thought their organisations were using two different DJR alongside each other. Organisations were seen to provide flexible working and other work-life balance supports to certain individuals on the basis of their need; but then ensure that other employees were not disadvantaged by this by using an equity-based approach to the distribution of a broader package of outputs.

This has implications for the discussion of agency, structure and culture. In such organisations, work-life balance policies (structural factors) can be seen to constrain the ability for solo-living

employees to improve their work-life balance (constrain their agency), whilst they enable employees with children. At the same time however, the broader culture of the companies act to enable solo-living employees when it comes to progression (which is often a more desired outcome for these individuals), whilst constraining employees with children. This supports Giddens' (1984: xvi) notion of structural and cultural factors being both enabling and constraining at the same time – having different outcomes for different individuals.

6.3.2. *Perceptions of fairness: Equity-based DJR*

In terms of the first equity-based DJR – where flexibility was seen to be allocated on the basis of job role – there was little evidence that participants were considering the fairness of the situation, in terms of comparing their experience to the experience of individuals in the company that did not get such flexibility. For some participants however, there was a suggestion that the outcome of flexibility was considered to be generous, and that they felt the need to reciprocate by providing an input of flexibility too. Roo (female Finance Manager, Bank, 40-44) for example said: 'I'm really lucky, and I know I'm lucky' for being able to work from home, and suggested willingness to return the favour to the company:

'it's all give and take, that's what work-life balance means to me, if I want a bit of time to do something for my family, for my 80-year old mother, then I'm happy to log on at eleven o'clock at night to send some management information off, it's a total two-way thing in my opinion'

This can be linked to studies on the sense of entitlement concept (Gager, 1998; Major, 1989; Major, 1993). Lewis & Smithson (2001: 1548) observe that in situations where participants tend to have low expectations for support, they can feel the need to reciprocate. In this context, the participants may feel that support for work-life balance is not an entitlement for them because they don't have family responsibilities, and that from an equity perspective, their inputs in terms of their job role (skills and experience) are not enough to justify the output (flexibility) – so they give an extra input of flexibility to even the calculation.

Turning to perceptions of the fairness of the second equity-based DJR – where the distribution of broader outputs is seen to be linked to the employee input of working hours – it is important to note here that this practice has generated a lot of criticism in broader work-life balance literature and debate. Quite rightly, it is seen to be unfair to those with family responsibilities (and other reasons for reducing/limiting hours at work) to link things like

opportunities for progression to face-time rather than work outputs – linked to the work of Acker (1990) on gendered organisations. For some of these participants however, the approach appeared to be popular, and accepted as fair. Ed (Business Development Director, Bank, 24-29) said that he thought that in companies like his:

‘there’s a cross-roads where you can either have a good family life and have a work-life balance, but... your work will only ever be so good, and you’ll never get promotion; or you don’t have a work-life balance but your career does well’.

He talked about the inconvenience (to himself and clients) of having colleagues who are on part-time contracts, but then added:

‘I mean in fairness I suppose, there is... this is where that glass ceiling kicks in... none of them are in the senior jobs really, because they all get to a certain level and then plateau because they only work three days a week’.

He did not seem to see the ‘glass ceiling’ as unfair for such colleagues, but similarly did not think it unfair that his own work-life balance was not considered, as long as the career-progression outcomes were being delivered. This is mirrored by other participants. Louise (Marketing Manager, Shopping Centre Company, 24-29) talked quite positively about a situation which was negative for her work-life balance, because the other outcomes were considered more valuable. She spoke of a time when she was asked to work for two days each week in London to cover for a higher level colleague on maternity leave, when she lived and normally worked in Manchester. She felt there was an expectation that she could do this because she didn’t have any responsibilities at home, and she doubted whether the company would have asked a parent to do it, and yet she said she felt ‘quite advantaged because I’ve been able to take such opportunities’, because the experience was good for her career progression. Such attitudes fit with the prominence of the work-centric orientation in the sample (see last chapter), with many participants prioritising career progression over work-life balance at the time of interview.

This supports the findings of Gager (1998). He explored the role of valued outcomes as well as justifications and comparison referents when exploring perceptions of the fairness of the distribution of domestic work in dual-earner couples. He found that when a participant’s marriage was happy in general terms, there was less perceived unfairness from the wives about them doing more domestic work than their partner: ‘Because wives described their relationships with their spouse as fulfilling in other ways, they were more inclined to overlook the imbalance’ (Gager, 1998: 636). The idea of a trade-off being made between work-life

balance and progression was also seen by Herman & Lewis (2012) in their study specifically into sense of entitlement to both outputs in group of working parents in the Science, Engineering and Technology (SET) field. They noted where mothers were afforded part-time work, few had any sense of entitlement to progression, and that at least one father thought it would not be feasible to ask for part-time work because the required workload for progression could not be done in less hours.

It is important to note that this particular equity-based DJR was mentioned mainly by participants who worked in companies where there appeared to be a long-hours culture – as in the SET companies that Herman & Lewis (2012) studied. Another participant worked in an organisation where this approach was not in place, but seemed to suggest she would like it to be. Jenny (Marketing Manager, Food Company, 35-39) worked long hours due to the nature of her job role, but in a company where most people did not. She seemed to think it unfair that outcomes like progression did not reflect this:

‘there certainly isn’t a culture of having to work long hours, and they don’t seem to frown upon the fact that people work nine to five, you know a lot of people are kind of packing up their bags at quarter to five – it’s like being at school where the bell goes. And if it was my company I would think they’re obviously not very committed, they’re out the door, you know five to five they’re heading down the stairs. But so they seem to accept that and I assume that people get promoted even when they do those hours’

The data suggests that many participants felt that it was acceptable for specific outputs to be distributed unequally as long as the overall package matched their perception of individual inputs and also priorities. As discussed in the literature review, however, equity is a difficult calculation to apply to the field of work-life balance, and especially when a range of different inputs and outputs are included in the calculation. Certain outputs in relation to work-life balance support, that are based on legislatively recognised needs (around childcare), have been introduced in organisations to level the playing field and reduce discrimination. To trade these supports off against other outputs/benefits is to negate their actual purpose. Furthermore, it is unclear how certain inputs should be assessed and compared to other inputs. When organisations, and indeed these participants, consider the quantity of working hours as a proxy for ‘inputs’ and neglect the quality of the work done, it is not a valid calculation of how much different people ‘deserve’ certain outcomes.

Now that we have considered participant perceptions of the distributive justice rules used by their organisations, and their perceptions of the fairness of each, I would like to conclude the

chapter by looking at participant reflections on their own treatment in their organisations – whether they felt satisfied with their own work-life balance situation, what factors they based this on, and the consequences.

6.4. Participant perceptions of the fairness of their own work-life balance situation

When considering their personal work-life balance situation, most participants did not seem to feel that they were being treated unfairly, even when they were receiving different levels of work-life balance support than colleagues. In many cases, this was because their personal DJRs corresponded with those perceived in their organisations. In some cases however, thinking processes around fairness were more complicated, with different factors being considered. An example came from Sebastian (Pharmacist, NHS, 30-34), when talking about working hours in his department in a previous company. After discussing his own working hours, and the frequent need for him to work late, he introduced the discrepancy between this and the working hours of others in the department:

‘There was kind of a bit of a two-tier system, because the Pharmacy Technicians, because a lot of them couldn’t do final checking of stuff, they tended to down tools at five o’clock and even say ‘you finish this off because I’m going now’.

This statement suggests he felt some unfairness in the situation – that the Technicians were able to leave work at the end of the shift, and yet he as a Pharmacist would need to stay. This is linked to an extent to the nature of the respective job roles, with Technicians being unable to do a specific task that was at the end of the day, but appears broader than this – with them passing on half-finished jobs to the Pharmacists at the end of the shift. He then elaborated on this situation, and suggested that he and fellow Pharmacists were somewhat complicit in the arrangement due to their professional identity and sense of responsibility:

‘...and us Pharmacists, you often felt... I think it was just a thing in us that you felt more responsible, more professionally responsible in a way, that we kind of stayed behind to finish stuff. Your conscience wouldn’t let you say ‘right that’s it, I’m going home now’

At this point, he then broadened the issue – acknowledging that there was also some variation in the working patterns of Pharmacists within the team. Rather than seeing this as an unfair situation however, he justified it by invoking a needs-based DJR:

'There were a couple of Pharmacists who just left at five, and then a core of people, me and Margaret and so, who would always stay behind because we should – especially me because I didn't have kids or anything, and I was single. I was married at one point during it, but then after I was single, and I was going home to an empty house effectively, so it's like there wasn't a need to, whereas some people had young families and stuff and they would go'.

In carrying out the interviews, it seemed that a number of the participants were not used to discussing such issues, and were thinking on their feet when asked to discuss the fairness of their situation. The excerpt above seems to suggest that Sebastian used different thought processes when comparing his situation to Technicians and to fellow Pharmacists. With the Technicians, he seemed to feel some unfairness that they left on time, despite the fact that he was paid more, and it was somewhat a choice to stay late – linked to his attitude towards his work and sense of professional responsibility; whereas with fellow Pharmacists who left on time for childcare, there was no sense of unfairness because of their legitimate need. He then went on to reinforce this latter stance by mentioning another colleague who was similarly placed and held the same view:

'Margaret had a family, but they had grown up and moved on, and her husband was a Consultant at the hospital and he was often late as well, so she didn't feel pressured to push you out of the door either, so I think that's one of the reasons why we tended to stay'

This can be seen to resonate with Major's (1989, 1993) studies on the sense of entitlement concept, where people in situations that seemed to place them at a disadvantage often made justice assessments that made their situation feel fair via careful choice of comparator. In Major's (1989) research on the gender-pay gap, women who earned less than men were found to compare their pay levels to other women (also often lower paid), rather than men doing a similar job, in order to feel that their pay was fair. Similarly, in Major's (1993) research on domestic workloads for married couples, women who performed more domestic activities than their husbands were seen to compare their inputs (domestic work) to those of other married women, rather than to those of their husbands, in order to make their situation seem more fair. So here, Sebastian compares his working hours to a colleague who is similarly able to work long hours due to her domestic situation, rather than to colleagues with children.

It is important to acknowledge however that not all participants expressed a positive opinion when discussing their work-life balance and the perceived fairness of their treatment. For a

specific subset of the sample – mainly female participants aged 35-44 – there was a strong sense of frustration in the accounts, which I believe can be linked to two of the DJR factors cited above. These individuals were the most likely to use the broader needs-based DJR when it comes to work-life balance support – mentioning the needs they had as solo-living employees. They felt frustrated when they thought their organisations did not consider their needs, and only acknowledged needs related to dependent care and disability. This frustration might well have been exacerbated where participants did not actually want to be solo-living, and would have liked to have children themselves, especially where they thought their work commitments were acting as a barrier to this (see chapter five).

These individuals also expressed dissatisfaction with their situation in association with the equity-based DJR. Many of the participants seemed to feel that they had not received the outputs (rewards) that they deserved as a result of having invested so much (in time and energy) into their careers/organisations – investments which had often interfered with their lives outside of work. These outputs related to career progression, but also things like recognition and fulfilling work. An example of such concerns comes from Suzanne (Corporate HR Manager, Restaurant Chain, 35-39):

‘My boss left and I didn’t get my boss’ job, so I’m getting a new boss but I know there’s no next upwards move for me here, and I feel that I’m not being given challenging work to do any more – I’m doing all the things I was doing before, and then getting last minute, mini tasks – not ‘here’s a project, I want you to be responsible for it’.

There will be further discussion of the dissatisfaction of this group of participants in the next chapter. Where there is such general dissatisfaction with the work package, and a sense of limited agency, it makes sense that individuals might start to look more closely at the allocation of rewards between different groups, and consider the distribution of support for work-life balance to be unfair. It is useful here to refer back to the work of Gager (1998) on feelings of fairness in the distribution of domestic work in dual-earner couples. It was noted earlier that where women had a happy marriage, there was less perceived unfairness when considering that they did more domestic work than their husbands. Also worth pointing out here was that ‘When asked to speculate how their perceptions might change if their marriage were not so happy, most believed that they would be less forgiving of their husbands’ lesser participation’ (Gager, 1998: 636).

Whilst the frustration of these individuals was evident in their interviews, an interesting finding is that none mentioned having raised any concerns with their employers – such as

making a complaint to HR – one of the outcomes reported in connection to the ‘backlash’ phenomenon by Flynn (1996). There was also no mention of the more informal responses cited in the backlash literature – such as refusing to help colleagues that were seen to be getting a better deal or any reduction in organisational citizenship behaviour (Kossek & Van Dyne, 2008). Of course, it could be that individuals had reacted in this way, but were reluctant to admit this to a researcher for fear of sounding unreasonable or politically incorrect. Another reason for a lack of action however is that the work-life balance policies that were causing concern were often based on legislative provisions, rather than being at the discretion of the organisation. Roo (female Finance Manager, Bank, 40-44), for example, talks of having had informal discussions with her manager who is similarly childless about the fact that ‘there’s lots of benefits for people with children’ whilst they personally ‘never had any time off... and never had any monetary benefits, kind of thing, for being on maternity leave’.

The backlash phenomenon may be more prominent in America because of the difference in regulatory context, and the balance of supports offered by the government and organisations. In the UK, difference in treatment between employees with children and those without is often only linked to organisational policies/provisions that are linked to legislation. In the US, however, the lack of government provision for welfare (such as the absence of a national health service), means that organisation policies cover a wider range of benefits, with organisational discretion potentially becoming an issue. In US articles on ‘backlash’ for example, one contentious issue is the coverage of private medical insurance (Young, 1999: 36), with some employees without spouse/children thinking it is unfair that they subsidise programmes that cover themselves only, but cover colleagues’ dependents.

6.5. Conclusion

This chapter has used distributive justice theory to explore participant perceptions of fairness when it comes to the work-life balance support provided by their organisations. Whilst many participants did note a difference in treatment on the basis of employee domestic situation, many did not think there was anything unfair about this because they based their assessments of distributive justice on the same criteria as their organisations – either a traditional needs-based approach, which defines need as relating to family/caring responsibilities, or a broad equity-based perspective, where differences in support for work-life balance are offset by differences in other outputs (notably support for career progression). A sense of unfairness was evident for a subset of the sample, mainly female participants aged 35-44, where they

held a different conceptualisation of 'need' to that of their organisations, and/or where their personal equity calculations had been disappointed – with them feeling that their ratio of inputs (effort, hours) had not been adequately rewarded in terms of outputs (progression, recognition, fulfilling work). Where this sense of unfairness was the case however, there was little evidence of any 'backlash' (Flynn, 1996; Korabik & Warner, 2009; Kossek & Van Dyne, 2008; Young, 1999) taking place.

Three main issues have been addressed in this chapter: perceptions of fairness; sense of entitlement to work-life balance support; and propensity to speak out against perceived unfairness (of which there was little evidence). It is worth discussing now how these issues relate to questions of the relative influence of structure, culture and agency when it comes to individual attitudes and experience.

A number of structural and cultural issues have been identified in this chapter that appear to have had an influence on participant perceptions, some in interlocking ways: organisational policies and practices; the sector (public or private); the organisation hierarchy (indicating status); the occupation; promotion structures and gender. The key structure however is the UK legislative framework on work-life balance issues, and the needs-based DJR foundation – which appears to have influenced participant agency in both an indirect and a direct way. Indirectly, for many participants, legislation on work-life balance appears to have informed the structural/cultural context they face at the organisational level: having influenced both work-life balance policies and norms around work-life balance support, in terms of being based on a needs-based DJR. This limits participant agency in two ways: they have limited access to provisions to change their work-life situation; and they are not able to voice dissent about the fairness of the policies – as they are based on national legislation, not employer whim. The legislation also has an impact on employer agency in a direct way, by influencing the DJR they personally use when assessing the fairness of work-life balance support provisions. This is supported by Reeskens & van Oorschot (2011), who discuss how the DJRs underpinning national approaches to welfare provision seem to have an impact on individual citizen preferences.

Lewis & Smithson (2001) and Lewis & Hass (2003) have both acknowledged that there are national differences in legislation and government policy when it comes to the work-life interface and the distribution of supports to employees. It could be that research in different countries would result in different findings when it comes to solo-living employee perceptions of the fairness of their organisations policies; their personal sense of entitlement to support;

and their propensity to act on any perceived unfairness. At the time of writing, the law is changing in the UK in relation to the right to request flexible working – moving from being based on need (covering parents and carers only) to being based on equality (covering all employees with 26 weeks' service). It would be interesting to see how this affects organisational approaches to work-life balance policies moving forwards, and in turn the DJRs used by solo-living employees, so this is an avenue for potential future research.

7. Individualisation and gender

The last two chapters have focused specifically on the work-life balance concept. Chapter five identified and explored a number of work-life issues that were reported by participants, including four that appear specific to solo-living employees. Chapter six then explored participant perceptions of the fairness of their organisations' work-life balance policies and provisions, and their own sense of entitlement to support. It made use of distributive justice theory to explain some of the variations in attitudes towards fairness, and began to engage with the interaction of structure, culture and agency in understanding participant perspectives. This chapter extends the focus, and utilises individualisation theory – as conceptualised by Beck (1992) and Beck & Beck-Gernsheim (2002) – as the conceptual framework for exploring the interaction of structure, culture and agency in the broader work-life experience and attitudes of the solo-living employees in the sample.

Chandler et al. (2004) noted that the rise of solo living has frequently been seen as an indicator of growing 'individualisation' in society. In the literature review, it was noted that many of the central tenets of individualisation, as conceptualised by Beck (1992), and the associated 'institutionalised individualism' (Beck & Beck-Gernsheim, 2002: xxi) – which suggest an individualisation where structure and culture are as prominent as agency in individual trajectories – seemed to chime with the solo-living lifestyle, especially for young managers and professionals. One of the central tenets of the theory is that individuals have become dis-embedded from the dominant social institutions of simple modernity – including class, religion, local community, and notably here the nuclear family – and simultaneously re-embedded in the labour market, which is seen to be the dominant social institution of late modernity. One of the central requirements of the late modern labour market is seen to be mobility, which is easier to achieve as an unencumbered worker. Other tenets include an emphasising of individual self-fulfilment and achievement over care for others; narratives that emphasise personal choice and responsibility; and greater awareness of risk. This chapter explores each of these issues in turn in relation to participant data and argues that individualisation, as conceptualised by Beck (1992) and Beck & Beck-Gernsheim (2002), is evident in the sample. It suggests however that some of the claims need moderating, and that the experience of individualisation varies on the basis of participant gender and age – with male and younger female participants emphasising the positives in their situation around freedom and agency; whilst the older females are more likely to recognise the negative aspects of their freedom, and also the constraints.

The chapter builds on some of the gender and age-based variations noted in the previous chapters, where female participants aged 35-44 were shown to raise work-life balance concerns that were not mentioned by other participants, and be less satisfied with both the work-life balance policies and provisions in place in their organisations, and their general work-life experience. It answers the question of 'does gender matter?' in late modernity in the affirmative – but suggests that a different understanding of the influence of gender on individualisation is needed to that presented by Beck (1992) and Beck & Beck-Gernsheim (2002), who suggest that gender is a 'zombie category' (Beck & Beck-Gernsheim, 2002: 27), except for where women are 'not yet' (Beck & Beck-Gernsheim, 2002: 54) as free to live their own lives as men because of their role as mothers.

7.1. Dominant social institutions

In assessing the utility of the individualisation concept for understanding the experiences of participants in this study, the first section of the chapter explores the extent that participants emphasise engagement with different social institutions. It starts with the labour market, which is seen to be the dominant social institution in late modernity, before moving on to the social institutions that are said to have lost their influence, specifically the nuclear family, local community and religion.

7.1.1. Primacy of the labour market

As noted in the literature review, in conditions of late modernity, the labour market is seen to be the key social institution that individuals are embedded in. Work is therefore seen to be of primary importance to individuals, and a main source of identity. As an individual's place in the labour market is no longer influenced by their gender and class however, individuals are required to take personal responsibility for deciding their own career path and navigating the labour market – which is seen to be more precarious than that of simple modernity. Long-term, full-time employment is considered a thing of the past (Beck-Gernsheim, 2002:30), and individuals are therefore required to navigate a pluralised work trajectory, which in turn requires active engagement in education and mobility (Beck, 1992: 93-4).

Upon reflection on the research findings so far, there is some support for the first element of this assertion – that work is very important to individuals, and a primary source of identity. It was noted in chapter five that the majority of the participants (22 of 36) were seen to be work-

centric in their orientation, considering work to be their main priority at the time of interview. There was also evidence that the demands of employment (including long working hours and unpredictable finishing times) were causing time-based work-life conflict for some participants, reducing their ability to be involved in other activities/domains. Furthermore, the discussions in the last chapter seem to suggest that participant attitudes towards a key issue (their fairness judgements when it comes to work-life balance support) were being shaped by UK employment legislation and the organisation policies and norms that derive from this.

There is considerable support for the argument that participants had been actively engaged in education. This is to be expected considering the nature of the sample however – professionals (for whom specific qualifications are a prerequisite for the job) and managers. It is worth exploring the nature of engagement with education however. Most of the participants were university educated, with twenty reporting having supplemented their degrees with vocational programmes, many of which were still on-going at the time of interview. Of particular interest however, five individuals said that they were currently undertaking, or had undertaken, courses that were unrelated to their job roles in order to expand their options for the future. Patrick (Regional Contract Manager, Recruitment company, 24-29) was undertaking an MBA, despite his manager having refused to support him and not considering it relevant for his job role, so that he had more options for the future. Similarly, Trent (Officer, Central Government, 30-34) was doing an Accountancy qualification at the time of interview. When asked about this he commented:

‘I felt I was stagnating a bit in the [organisation], and I wanted to do something that I had control over and was completely separate from anything I was doing in my current role – because I thought I can’t put all my eggs in the revenue basket in terms of progressing my career because there was a big recruitment freeze at the time’.

These tendencies link with Kelen’s (2008: 1174) proposal that individuals in late modernity are beginning to act more like self-managing entrepreneurs. Even where the participants had a steady job, there was often evidence of a concern for developing skills for future employability. This was indicated in Bob’s (Senior Manager, Drinks Company, 35-39) comment that: ‘I’ve always taken the ethos that I may be part of a large organisation, but ultimately I work for Bob’. Read in the context of the broader interview, he seemed to be suggesting here that whilst he completes the work required of him in his current company, he is not complacent that he has a job for life, and so he constantly tries to gain opportunities that will help with his future employability.

In terms of mobility, 21 participants mentioned having relocated for employment – locally, nationally and even internationally. Bob said: 'I've moved about with my jobs... in the Services and all the way through adult life... as necessary to service roles and develop a more rounded Bob'. In terms of job mobility only, Jude (female HR Manager, Local Government, 30-35) reported the most career transitions in her work-life history, citing twelve different jobs to the point of interview. Whilst this is extreme, most participants had moved company or job role several times. Whilst many transitions were not voluntary and were the result of redundancy situations (structural factors), there was evidence of other transitions being chosen by participants, often in connection with personal development. This reinforces the perceived importance of on-going engagement with education that was noted above, and is central to individualisation. Fred (Senior Manager, Insolvency Practitioner, 35-39) for example stated: 'I did move to different firms, I kept going OK well I've learnt whatever here, let's go to the next firm, OK I've learned whatever here, let's go to the next firm'. This participant was also positive about international mobility earlier in his career, describing a previous Consultancy role as 'an exciting lifestyle – you'd pack up on a Sunday night, you'd be jetting of somewhere, you'd spend time in 4 star hotels, eating very nice meals, meeting interesting people, and it seemed to be a great life'. This suggests that mobility was expected and accepted by many of the participants, because of a perceived requirement in pursuit of career goals and/or a personal desire to be mobile – something which was also found in Heath & Kenyon's (2001) research into the living arrangements of young professionals.

Importantly, some participants considered mobility to be an on-going requirement for the future in their industries, which had consequences for how they viewed other areas of their lives. When Max (Analyst, Accounting Firm, 30-34) talked about the future, he clearly emphasised how career requirements would dictate his overall work-life trajectory, and how decisions about relationships and where he lived would follow on from this:

Max: I think I will move on one day from Manchester, in terms of maybe five-ten years' time. Just because, if you want to get to the level that I want to get to, sooner or later you have to be exposed to an Asian economy...

Int: And you're quite happy to do that?

Max: Yes, you have to be ready one day, you have to. Um, Middle East. [pause] No, for as much as I love Manchester, I know already... it depends of course on your ambition, if this is your ambition then sooner or later you have to be exposed to it...

Int: Do you feel that attitude might ever impact on relationships... Like if you met a partner and they didn't want to travel, would you put them first, or would you put the ambition?

Max: That's a very good question, I think it is something I'd try to find out at the very beginning, I'd tell them my ambition for one day, and clarify from the very beginning. If you have your roots, your friends, your family, that you can't see yourself moving away from, not even one mile away, then...

Int: Then you're not compatible?

Max: Exactly

This provides some support for the notion that long-term, stable employment with one employer is a rarity in late modernity, as suggested by Beck-Gernsheim (2002:30). It is important to note that three participants proved to be exceptions, having been employed for over ten years in their current organisations. Interestingly, despite their tenure, these individuals did not expect a job for life, or consider there to be any particular loyalty from either party in the employment relationship. Samantha (Regulatory Project Manager, Pharmaceuticals, 35-39) suggested that she was always open to moving to another company, despite twelve years' employment with her company:

'For years I was looking for opportunities outside of [the company], not seriously but even now I have my CV with a recruitment agency and if any other opportunities come up in the North West I'm always going to go and see what they've got to say'

For Roo (female Finance Manager, 40-44), despite having been employed by her Bank for 27 years, and having a close, trusting relationship with her manager of ten years, she did not feel secure of her future – saying she thought she could be made redundant at any time because her company was frequently restructuring. This was a specific concern because she didn't have any formal finance qualifications, having worked her way up in the company, and she thought it would be hard to find another job elsewhere. This again reinforces the perceived importance of the education system, and the sense that an individual is personally responsible for any career problems if they do not engage.

An important observation however, is that whilst the labour market was clearly considered to be a dominant institution for most participants, a number had been questioning its on-going centrality in their lives. This was most notable for females aged 35-44. Suzanne (Corporate HR Manager, Restaurant Chain, 35-39) said: 'I think what's really changed for me... things change with age. So I think as you get older your home... my home life is more meaningful to me now

than it was in my mid-20s', and talked about a desire for a partner and children in the near future. These individuals were concerned about the unpredictability of the labour market and associated requirements however, in terms of the implications for the engagement with other institutions and the development of relational roles. Using Suzanne again as an example, she talked about the frequent travel and long hour requirements of her job, and said:

'I feel a bit like I'm stuck in a catch-22 situation – like I'm in work so much there's not time to have a social life outside of work, and to meet somebody who would... I'd love to move in together and I'm really looking forward to having a cohabiting relationship again, but I'm just in such a frenzy'

From the discussion so far, it seems that there is support for the centrality of the labour market in most participants' lives, and a labour market in which on-going individual responsibility for the management of the career is required. There is therefore initial support for the individualisation theory as conceptualised by Beck (1992) and Beck & Beck-Gernsheim (2002). In terms of the interplay of structure, culture and agency in participant lives, this section provides support for a notion of agency that is both constrained and enabled by the structural environment. As with most conceptualisations of individualisation, there does appear to be a capacity for individual agency – with participants having chosen engagement with education and many of their career transitions. The individuals are not free to decide exactly how they wish to live their lives however, as they are bound by the constraints of the labour market system, which limits their capacity to prioritise other areas of their lives. Within that labour market system however these individuals appear to be in a privileged position – enabled by the education structure, their earning power, and their domestic situation to meet the requirements for success.

The different priorities of participants at the time of interview, and the extent to which these align with the requirements of the labour market, can be seen to influence the nature of participant agency. Taking Emirbayer and Mische's (1998) notion of a temporally embedded conceptualisation of agency, the male and younger female participants appear to have been acting largely iteratively when it comes to the work-life interface – perpetuating the habits of the past as these were expected to continue meeting their career progression objectives moving forwards. The older females were engaging in projectivity and practical evaluation however – imagining alternative future possibilities, but being aware of how their past habits and the current context might impede them.

Now that the labour market has been discussed, it is important to consider how participants discuss other social institutions – the ones that are seen to have lost their influence over life trajectories in late modernity: specifically the family, religion and local community.

7.1.2. Dis-embedding from other institutions

Despite some similarity in the education and early career experiences of participants in the sample – in terms of university education, and continued professional development in managerial or professional roles – their childhood experiences seemed to vary considerably. Some feature extended family, church and/or close-knit local community quite strongly; some appear more aligned to a 'late modern' experience, featuring divorce, step-families and considerable geographic mobility; and some display a mixture of the two. In terms of the latter, Grace (Solicitor, Law Firm, 30-34) said that she had grown up in what felt like 'a very working class set up really', with a close-knit extended family (her auntie living with her and her grandparents living round the corner), church involvement, and knowing most people in the neighbourhood. Yet on the other hand, she commented on her dad having been married three times, having a half-brother, and mobility associated with this extended family:

'I'd go to London to see dad, well at that time he was with Jack's mum, so I'd stay there with the family, then later on it became even more complicated because Jack was in Bristol, I was in Manchester and dad was in London, and we'd have to try and tally'

Whatever the background however, few individuals saw religion, the local community or even the nuclear family as having a significant shaping influence on their adult trajectories. Stacy (Nurse, NHS, 30-34) was the exception, discussing how her family's Jehovah Witness involvement meant that early marriage was encouraged, and that work was placed secondary to family and religious obligations. Her perspective on work only changed when she divorced her first husband and left the religion. Others explained how they distanced themselves from such institutions at an earlier age. Bob (Senior Manager, Drinks Company, 35-39) said that he was brought up in a strict Catholic household, but that he had made the decision at the age of thirteen that 'I just don't think there's much in this [religion], so I'm not going to be having any of that'. Four participants mentioned having felt the need to move away from their home towns as early as they could, because they considered their community to be narrow-minded, with everyone being expected to act the same. Vincent (Accountant, Engineering Company,

30-34), for example, said that Sale was 'a bit of a small-minded place, the sort of place where people who live there believe that this is the world, and that there's no reason to go anywhere'. He wanted to escape that mentality and see more of the world – to be the 'the author of his own life' (Beck & Beck-Gernsheim, 2002: 23).

In a similar way to religion and local communities, many individuals mentioned a distancing from the nuclear family over time. Ed (Business Development Director, Bank, 24-29) commented: 'I grew up in that environment so part of me always assumes I will [have a family], but I just don't know whether I want it... I'm increasingly feeling not paternal'. In the light of individualisation theory, this comment suggests that something that would have once been a given (that an adult would get married and have children) is now considered to be a choice. This individual also talked of feeling distant from his own parents and sister, because he had chosen a different path in life to them: 'they've got absolutely no concept of what I do - none. Which isn't their fault, but it's just, they ask how it is and you can only say 'it was fine''.

The notion of a dis-embedding of individuals from the institution of the family, and re-embedding in the labour market is also supported by evidence of what might be termed a 'colonisation' (Deetz, 1992: 17) of the family by the labour market. There is evidence in the interviews of participants using familial terminology to refer to work-based relationships, and also utilising employment-based skills in the management of family issues. In relation to the first of these, Florence (Solicitor, Corporate Law Firm, 30-34) spoke of her training contract friends, despite working in different firms, as 'almost like my cousins or my brothers... they're doing exactly the same thing, and they know the same people... they understand'. In relation to the latter, there was evidence of family issues and relationships being treated by participants like 'projects' to be managed using work-based skills. When discussing a disabled step-brother who required a lot of care by his aging parents for example, Bob (Senior Manager, Drinks Company, 35-39) said: 'my procurement skills came to hand and I outsourced his care'.

Having said this, there was evidence of some individuals lamenting their situation with regards to the social institution of the nuclear family. As noted in the last chapters, many of the female employees in their late thirties and early forties were commenting on their desire for a partner at the present time and for children in the future. This does not go against the idea of individualisation as a dis-embedding from the family and a re-embedding in the labour market however because the labour market requirements are informing the decisions that they make

and the actions that they take, including working long hours, which then limits/constrains the development of family roles.

There was evidence of one occasion in which a participant experienced a conflict between the two sets of institutions, and chose to prioritise those associated with simple modernity (the family and local community) over that of late modernity (the labour market). This was in Fred's (Senior Manager, Insolvency, 35-39) account of his decision to return to the UK after a period of working abroad:

'I came back from Australia at a time when the economy would say otherwise, in terms of opportunities... logic would say to you that at that point I should stay in Australia, because I could have walked into another firm with ease...and it was tough... but in my heart, I felt I actually want to be back at home, in my home town... your life is back in the UK, and you want to make foundations and develop relationships'

This example is interesting because Fred seems to be acting against the norm – in terms of the logic of the labour market and pursuit of self-actualisation – especially for his gender. It seemed to be a viewpoint that had developed only in recent years however. He was the participant who was quoted above as having said that he found the international business consultancy lifestyle 'exciting' in previous years, but went on to say that:

'Of course, as the years go by, you start to reflect, well actually, it's a bit of a solitary life, you're living out of suitcases, your friends stop calling you because they know you're not around all week, and then the whole emphasis I have on friendships seems to, and even relationships, seems to suffer'.

Although this seems to go against Beck (1992) and Beck & Beck-Gernsheim's (2002) notion of a dis-embedding from the structures of family and community and a re-embedding in the labour market, it can be seen to fit with other parts of their theory – that individualisation 'can be tremendously liberating—or terrifically burdensome—depending on the resources at the person's disposal' (Cote, 2000:11). Fred can be seen to possess the resources of education and experience that are required to find suitable employment back in the UK, albeit maybe not as easily as in Australia at that point, which means that he does have a level of choice over where he wants to be. There might have been more evidence of such deliberations and prioritising of family and community, labour-market requirements permitting, had this relatively privileged sample (in terms of labour market resources) been extended beyond 44 years of age. The influence of age on experience and attitudes does not appear to be considered in the works of Beck (1992) and Beck & Beck-Gernsheim (2002), which is a limitation.

7.2. An emphasis on a 'duty to oneself'?

The second individualisation tenet that I would like to explore is the idea that a 'new ethics' is prevalent in late modernity, based on a 'duty to oneself' as opposed to duties that are 'necessarily social in character and adjust the individual to the whole' (Beck & Beck-Gernsheim, 2002: 38). There was evidence of an 'ethic of individual self-fulfilment and achievement' (Beck & Beck-Gernsheim, 2002: 22) in the data, especially from male participants and females in the 24-34 year age brackets. The self-achievement and fulfilment was mainly linked to the work domain and/or the pursuit of personal challenges in the non-work domain – which can be seen to echo Beck and Beck-Gernsheim's (2002: 38) 'hunger for the fuller life'. Louise (Marketing Manager, Shopping Centre Company, 24-29) for example, not only wanted a sense of achievement at work (the first quote below), but also in her personal life (the second quote):

'[work] does mean a lot – I've put in a lot of work to get to where I am, ... I'm proud of what I've achieved so far, and I do see that there's further progression, and through my work that will help me both commercially and personally. So it plays a big [emphasised] role'

'I set personal goals each year, to sort of push myself – whether that's... I'm doing the three peaks challenge this year in 24 hours, I'm thinking of doing a half-marathon, um, but yeah it's just having those personal goals outside of work, just to keep pushing me. Um, and to also sort of have on-going activities that kind of stimulate the mind and make sure I'm progressing in that sense'

It is important to point out that these personal goals seldom required fixed time commitments, and so could fit around the labour market demands (including long, unpredictable hours) experienced by these individuals, and considered to be necessary for career development.

Beck & Beck-Gernsheim (2002: 161) stated that the most valued commodity in late modernity was time – as 'the key that opens the door to the treasures promised by the age of the self-determined life'. The ethic of self-fulfilment is therefore seen to require some control over time. For many of these participants, solo-living was seen as a useful domestic situation in this sense, with 'time' and 'freedom' being cited as the dominant benefits by most participants, but especially the males and younger females. Two illustrative comments came from Gerard

(Auditor, Accounting Firm, 24-29), who said: 'I can do what I want, when I want [laughs]... I'm probably a little bit selfish like that [laughs]'; and Vincent (Accountant, Engineering Company, 30-34) who commented:

'these hobbies that I like to do, the jogging things like that, these solitary hobbies that I can do specifically because I live on my own and I'm not expected to sort of entertain someone else. So that's the big advantage – you've got complete and utter control over your time'

In both of these quotes, solo-living was seen to be especially valuable because the individual does not have to consider the needs of (i.e. care for) another party. I will return to the issue of solo-living and individualisation in the next section.

There seemed to be a gendered element when it came to individual fulfilment and achievement however. Most of the male participants, and some of the younger females, talked about career goals, personal challenges, hobbies and even owning their own home when it came to self-fulfilment, all of which resonate with the concerns that Beck (1992: 92) says are central in later modernity: 'control [over] one's own money, time, living space and body'. For many of the females aged 35-44 however, personal fulfilment was also linked to relational concerns. At one point in her interview, Judith (Academic, University, 35-39) reflected on how her attitude towards what provides fulfilment had changed over time, to include a more relational element:

'I had a boyfriend then, who I was quite serious about, that third year [of university], and he had another year because his was a four-year degree... And I thought 'I'm not going to hang around', if I stay in London it'll be just because he's in London, and I don't want to be pinned down by that. So I just decided to go to Edinburgh without really thinking it through, well just assuming we'd have a long-distance relationship, and he was like 'no'... and I kind of think 'oh life could have been really different if I had', and actually now I think, yeah I still wouldn't go 'I'm not going for my career because of my relationship', but I actually would think that the relationship is also important in an ultimate decision'

This suggests that she now considers care for others, and being cared for, as an important part of a 'duty to oneself'. This can also be seen in some of the issues identified and discussed in chapter five, such as a concern for the lack of emotional support in the home domain, and a concern for the maintenance of friendships. In terms of the latter, individuals spoke of going to great lengths to try to continue relationships when friends were becoming distant due to

changing priorities around family. As Grace (Solicitor, Law Firm, 30-34) commented: 'I don't think you realise when you're in a couple how time-consuming it is for single people just to, just to you know get your married friends out even just to do lunch'. This links to the CAVA studies and others cited in the literature review (chapter three) where it was argued that there is an on-going 'moral economy' (Irwin & Bottero, 2000:271) based on care for others, in which the specific formations may have changed (from nuclear to more varied forms of family), but the underlying principles had not, with individuals in late modernity remaining 'energetic moral actors, embedded in webs of valued personal relationships, working to sustain the commitments that matter to them' (Williams, 2004: 41-42).

I argue that making an effort to sustain relationships that matter does not necessarily stand in contrast to Beck & Beck-Gernsheim's (2002) conceptualisation of a 'duty to oneself' however, as they suggest that individuals will still want relationships and interactions which suit them, but will just not 'adjust the individual to the whole' (Beck & Beck-Gernsheim, 2002: 38) – in terms of giving up their personal goals for the sake of responsibilities to others. Only one participant spoke of having prioritised the needs of another over themselves when talking through their work and personal trajectory. Grace (Solicitor, Law Firm, 30-34) reported moving to Essex after the completion of a vocational qualification because her partner had a job there, despite this being problematic for her own employment situation. This individual seemed somewhat different to other participants however in that she was openly more relational and less career-oriented than most. When asked what was important to her in life, her response included:

'Being in a relationship I'd say – being in a committed relationship is important to me... I'm glad I've got a career, I enjoy it, but it's not everything, it's just a part really... I never saw myself as this kind of massive career woman'

Grace commented that she moved back to Manchester after the stint in Essex however – initially without her partner – because she was unable to secure a job. In this sense her action mirrors many of the other participants who mentioned de-prioritising or even ending relationships when their careers required mobility.

What this example highlights therefore is the constraints faced by individuals when they try to pursue self-fulfilment in the context of competing demands – both relational and career. Maria (University Lecturer, 35-39) spoke of an even more complex situation, where she was trying to reconcile her career with a relationship, housing, and an on-going medical issue, when considering her options for the future:

'At the moment I'm not really sure what I'm going to do... my ex or whatever he is now, because it's a little unclear what we are now, are talking about getting back together... [but] he's just been offered a job in Germany which he's decided to accept... I've been applying for jobs, I've got an interview in Manchester in a couple of weeks for a part-time job, and I've had an interview in Leon for a part-time job... [but] when you've moved so many times, I've moved four times in the last four years, and I just 'can I be bothered with doing it again?' And that's part of the reason I won't follow him to Germany... It's also the health thing, because I'm still being treated for my health issues... and I don't know what Germany's like but I probably wouldn't qualify for free health care... I'm not really sure what happens next, but that's really where I'm at – frustrated is probably what I'd call it'

From this discussion, I conclude that a 'duty to oneself' is the aim of the participants, but that this does not preclude relationships with others – or indeed result in self-fulfilment. In terms of the agency-structure debate, a 'duty to oneself' should not be equated to freedom/agency, because the decision-making of individuals remains limited by the structures of the labour market and the agency of other individuals (partners and also friends). There does appear to be a gendered and age-related element to the 'duty to oneself' however, with male and younger female participants equating fulfilment and achievement to the work domain and personal challenges – which was enabled by their solo-living lifestyle and embedding in the labour market – whilst female participants aged 35-44 desired more relational forms of fulfilment, which were constrained by these same factors.

7.3. Narratives of choice and personal responsibility

The third tenet of individualisation to discuss in this chapter concerns participant narrative style – because as well as being reflected in individual experiences, individualisation is also said to manifest itself in the way that individuals discuss their lives. Beck & Beck-Gernsheim (2002: 25) say that:

'If biographies spoke only of 'blows of fate', 'objective conditions' and 'outside forces' that 'overwhelmed', 'predetermined' or 'compelled', that would refute our formulated theory, for it has been argued that individuals have to perceive themselves at least partly shaping themselves and the conditions of their lives'.

This relates to participant perceptions of the interplay of agency, structure and culture in their lives. For individualisation to be supported in the sample, the above quote suggests that participants would emphasise personal control, choice and agency when talking about their work-life histories, their current work-life situation, and also their current domestic situation. From the discussions about the dual dis-embedding and re-embedding process of individualisation however, this quote from Beck & Beck-Gernsheim (2002) seems slightly limited, as narratives that emphasised 'objective conditions' and/or 'outside forces' would not negate the presence of individualisation if they were connected with the labour market.

7.3.1. Discussions of work-life histories and current work-life situation

For this element of the discussion, one of the broad principles of BNIM data analysis (Wengraf, 2011) proved useful. This refers to the analysis of an individual's open narrative (response to the initial SQUIN and following probes) in terms of the 'told story'. Whilst full BNIM analysis was not conducted in this study, the narratives were examined in relation to the chronology of life events (how work and personal transitions came about, whether they were self-driven, chosen from amongst limited options, or the result of external factors) but also how the participants narrated them (what was mentioned/omitted, what was foreground in terms of choice/constraint).

When it came to reporting the work-life trajectory to the point of interview, some variation could be seen in the sample on the grounds of gender and age. For most of the male participants (eleven of the eighteen), and half of the females aged 24-34 (five of eleven), most transitions in the life history were presented as personal choice. For ease of reference, I term this a 'choice narrative'. Only one male participant emphasised external factors as the driving force behind decisions consistently in his account – a 'constraint narrative' – which was Patrick (Regional Contract Manager, Recruitment, 24-29). Patrick had moved to the UK from Poland at the age of eighteen because he needed to earn money (the Polish labour market being tight) and wanted to avoid National Service. As he came to the UK as an immigrant with no qualifications, he can be seen as an anomaly within the sample in terms of material and cultural resources. The remaining seven males and six females aged 24-34 presented mixed trajectories, emphasising free choice and external influence at different points over time.

The sixteen individuals who presented a choice narrative also tended to present the consequences of their decisions in positive ways – in terms of new jobs enjoyed; promotions

gained; and gaps in employment being fulfilling – facilitating things like travel. On the occasions where transitions were negatively experienced, they tended to be underplayed. Alan (Dentist, NHS, 30-34) for example, only mentioned his failed attempt to open his own practice during the probing question section of his interview – having omitted this in the opening account, and simply referring to ‘a little stint in Birmingham’. Furthermore, where external factors were discussed as being influential, they were discussed as often in enabling as in constraining terms. For example, participants discussed grants secured for further development; contacts between their educational institutions and organisations which helped them to secure their first jobs; beneficial organisation restructures; and industry evolution, which provided additional opportunities.

Related to the issue of personal choice is the issue of personal responsibility. It was noted in the literature that, according to individualisation theory, when individuals are required to be ‘the authors of their own lives’ (Beck & Beck-Gernsheim, 2002: 23), then they are also required to take responsibility for the consequences of their decisions (Beck, 1992). This was evident when the choice narrative participants discussed the management of the work-life interface – which was mainly described as a personal responsibility. They accepted the working patterns in their organisations as fixed, and thought that if a change to their work-life interface was desired, then it would be up to themselves to sort it, as opposed to an organisational adjustment being required. For example, Ed (Business Development Director, Bank, 24-29) said:

‘If I really had an issue with it I could stop doing my job and start being a Relationship Manager which is much more steady-eddy type stuff, controllable. It’s just the nature of my job, so if I really had a problem with it then I should just vote with my feet and go and do a different job’

This links to Lewis & Smithson’s (2001: 1463) finding that young adults (aged 18-30, most of whom were yet to have children – therefore a similar demographic to this research) from a number of countries seemed to prioritise ‘individual responsibility, independence and self-reliance’ when considering work-life balance, as opposed to expecting support from the state or their employer.

There were positives to such a conceptualisation, as when the work-life situation was good, there was a sense of achievement. This can be seen in Fred’s (Senior Manager, Insolvency Practitioners, 35-39) pride in his management of the work-life boundaries:

'My job, the nature of the work is that it can be very stressful when you're there, but I think I have a pretty impressive way of immediately switching off the work when I get out of work, so I have all these worries, concerns, issues, challenges, competing activities whilst I'm in work, but I think it's a sign of credit to myself that I deal with them in work, so that once I leave work I don't have to think about them'

There were also negatives to a sense of personal responsibility for work-life balance management however, which were evident when the work-life situation was not good – which had the potential to be seen as a personal failing. Courtney (Project Manager, Local Government, 30-34) for example followed a discussion about a period of long hours of work with the words 'my excuse was that it was a time limited project' – which suggests she feels the need to defend herself.

At the extreme of the personal responsibility conceptualisation, some participants stated that support for work-life balance from the organisation would not be welcome. Vincent (Accountant, Engineering Company, 30-34) said that whilst his previous company 'talked a lot about work-life balance', he liked that his current company did not, adding: 'they treat you like adults basically', letting you sort your work-life balance yourself. The personal responsibility attitude seemed to be reinforced where workplaces were perceived to take a needs-based approach to the distribution of work-life balance support, as discussed in the last chapter.

As stated above however, the choice narrative was not universal. Some participants provided more of a constraint narrative – discussing their life-course transitions in terms of choices made from within limited options or factors beyond their control, and conceptualising work-life balance management as their organisation's responsibility. Importantly, the limited options and factors beyond their control were almost universally based on labour market issues – thus not negating the presence of individualisation. Whilst there was some evidence of this attitude for females aged 30-34, this was most evident in females aged 35-44 – the individuals that were identified as less satisfied with their situation in general in the previous findings chapters. These were the individuals that tended to raise concerns about the impact of their work commitments on their life outside of work and the development of non-work roles; the most likely to perceive their employers to be failing to recognise their needs as solo-living employees; and the most likely to feel frustration in the equity of their overall reward package at work – feeling that their lack of work-life balance had not been adequately compensated for by their organisations in the form of promotion, recognition and fulfilling work.

When it came to the work-life trajectory, the constraint narrative tended to attribute job and/or housing transitions to structural factors associated with the labour market institution, such as organisational restructures (redundancy situations); other management decisions (such as changes to workload or location); industry requirements; and broader labour market trends. An example of an industry issue that was held as responsible for significant changes in personal life was found in Anaesthetist Ann's (NHS, 30-34) interview. She reported having to return from a placement in Australia because of a new National training initiative that was expected to lead to job cuts, meaning that 'it would be quite difficult to get back into the system if you were out of it'. Furthermore, the scheme also meant that people previously allocated to one regional area could be sent anywhere in the country, meaning additional disruption to her social life and personal stability:

'most of my friends ended up leaving... it was quite disruptive in terms of my social life, especially because you know you're working long hours in the job, and the job is now messing up your social life because it's interfering in where people are living. And there's a whole pile of stress with the fact that I might have to sell the house that I'd only just bought'.

Whilst participants presenting a choice narrative tended to emphasise the positive consequences of the decisions made, these participants (constraint narrative) often noted the negative consequences of transitions as well as the positive ones. Charlie (female T&D Manager, NHS, 40-44), for example, alluded to a few career moves that she had later regretted:

'I needed to actively move rather than end up without a job. So that's how I ended up in Bradford, which was an absolute nightmare job – it was the worst move, one of the worst – closely followed by this one – one of the worst moves that I've ever made'

As noted by Josselson (1993), because the storyteller always knows the end of the story, the life-course narrative can be used as a justification for the situation at the time of the telling. It could be that the participants who were happy with their career and solo-living situation at the time of the interview wanted to emphasise their own role in driving their life story, whereas participants who were less happy preferred to emphasise the structural factors, so that they appeared less responsible.

Linked to this, in the constraint narratives, work-life balance was less likely to be presented as a personal responsibility, and instead an organisation responsibility. When asked what work-

life balance meant to her, Suzanne (Corporate HR Manager, Restaurant Chain, 35-39) said it was a 'management issue' and that 'the work environment should be more supportive and less chaotic', whilst Charlie (female T&D Manager, NHS, 40-44) equated it to a number of practices, which she said were absent in her organisation:

'This is the first NHS organisation I've worked in where we haven't been able to do things like flexitime – so you're very stuck in terms of, if you need a bit of time to have your car serviced or something – you're having to take half day annual leave... other places do flexi-time, or like a nine-day fortnight'

From this perspective, structural factors were seen to be responsible for whether work-life balance was positive or negative. This links in to the discussion in the last chapter, where female participants aged 35-44 were more likely to articulate a belief that their organisations' DJR around work-life balance should be amended – for example with a needs-based DJR including consideration for the needs of solo-living workers.

It seems like the male and younger female participants' narrative of their lives match some of the more optimistic views of individualisation, such as that of Giddens (1990, 1991). In terms of the agency-structure debate, they emphasise their own agency in determining their life course. For the older female participants however, there is a clear emphasis on the constraining aspects of their structural environment and the limits to their agency. As most of the constraints discussed relate to the labour market however, their narratives do not stand in opposition to individualisation theory, they just align more closely with Beck (1992) and Beck & Beck-Gernsheim's (2002) conceptualisation, where the dis-embedding from traditional structures and associated freedoms are accompanied by a re-embedding in the labour market; and where increased freedom over decision-making does not necessarily equate to wellbeing. It seems that individualisation can therefore be experienced in different ways by different individuals, here linked to gender and age.

7.3.2. Discussions of living alone

As stated in the Literature Review, 'solo-living' should not be used to suggest a homogenous experience, as the experience of living alone is likely to vary depending on the circumstances – whether relatively stable or a transient situation, and whether chosen or not. For 20 of the 36 individuals, solo-living had been the main housing situation for the adult years, albeit with residence changes. For a further eleven, it was the current living situation in a more varied

trajectory. Jude (female HR Manager, Local Government, 24-29) for example reported the following since university:

‘I lived at home then for quite a while - in and out though, sometimes I’d live with friends in a shared house. When I was at Manchester Met [for further degree] I lived in Salford for a bit with someone from work, when I worked in Liverpool I lived on the Wirral with my boyfriend at the time – in a little cottage there. And then, where else have I lived? Oh I’ve lived with a boyfriend in Radcliffe, which is near Bury, for a bit when I’d just left university and stuff... I lived with my sister for a bit when I worked at Oldham, and then I bought this house in 2007’

Only five of the participants reported a trajectory where co-habiting had been the main experience for the adult years before the current phase of living alone. The actual life trajectory does not indicate how the situation is perceived however. When asked about the advantages and disadvantages associated with the housing situation, considerable variations were evident within the sample linked to the gender and age factors noted. Male participants and females aged 24-34 were considerably more positive about the experience and the freedom that it brought. Solo-living was presented as a largely positive experience by all of the males who had not cohabited in the past, and by three of the six that had. The main downside noted by the males was financial. Only one male participant said he would prefer to cohabit, with another saying that he really enjoyed living alone, but thought cohabitation might be preferable moving forwards, because many of his friends were now cohabiting. Only six of the eighteen females on the other hand stated a preference for living alone, and with the exception of Roo (Finance Manager, Bank, 40-44), they were all in the younger age brackets (24-34 years). For most of the female participants aged 35-44, solo-living tended to be presented as a hindrance to self-fulfilment, linked to discussions about the lack of interaction and emotional support at home; the burden of domestic chores; and the difficulties of maintaining friendships and finding a partner (see chapter five). With the exception of Roo, all of the women in these age groups said that they would prefer to co-habit with a partner if they had the choice – even the two who had never cohabited before.

Male and younger female participants were also more positive about the likelihood of a transition out of living alone if/when this was desired. When asked about plans for the future, for example, Lou (Engineer, Engineering Company, 40-44) saw his domestic future in terms of a choice to be made: ‘because I’m forty, it’s more of the bigger question for me: What do I do? Do I settle down or keep living the single life?’ For Samantha (Regulatory Project Manager, Pharmaceutical Company, 35-39) on the other hand, it was considered more a matter of

chance/circumstance: 'It'd be really nice to meet somebody... I just can't imagine [having children] ever happening to me, but anyway [laughs] if I did meet someone and had kids and stuff like that...' This reinforces the gendered experience of individualisation presented above, and suggests that the males and younger females have a strong sense of agency in their lives as a whole; where older females are more aware of the limitations to their agency.

7.4. Awareness of risk

The final individualisation tenet that I would like to discuss concerns the issue of risk. Beck argues that late modernity is a 'risk society'. Risk is here conceived as 'bads' – negative threats that dominate individual consciousness as opposed to the 'goods' of simple modernity (Lash & Wynne, 1992: 3). These risks are seen to have consequences for individuals' temporal perspectives, requiring thought about tomorrow and the taking of action today to 'prevent, alleviate, or take precautions' against likely problems (Beck, 1992: 34). Risk is also seen to be a universalising threat – something that affects everyone in late modernity equally. This element of the theory has been questioned by Lash (1993) and empirically argued against by Lupton & Tulloch (2002: 332), who found their interviewees' responses to risk were 'strongly shaped via such factors as gender, age, occupation and sexual identity'. In this section, the focus will be on the types of risk identified by participants; and variations in attitude on the grounds of gender and age.

7.4.1. Perceived risks

As noted above, participants were oriented to a considerable extent towards the labour market. This is a social institution that is seen to be fairly precarious in late modernity (albeit somewhat less precarious for those with the resources required to navigate it successfully than for other groups) in terms of being 'more varied and unstable' (Beck-Gernsheim, 2002:30) than in simple modernity. With this in mind, it is perhaps not surprising that employment-related risks were identified by many participants. The recent economic downturn was a concern for a number of participants, but others believed that risk was a feature of their jobs in general. Fred (Senior Manager, Insolvency, 35-39) noted that Insolvency was 'not necessarily a safe environment to work in', because the pressures of the work were great, and mistakes likely to result in dismissal; and Florence (Solicitor, 30-34) said that in Corporate Law Firms, 'if you're not bringing in enough, or working hard enough, they get rid of you'. This view was shared by

Tony (Solicitor, Law Firm, 24-29), who drew on a real-life experience from the early stages of his training contract to demonstrate the precarious view he had of his employment:

‘I’d been here about six weeks and they got rid of someone who’d only been here a few months and they’d given him the boot already. So you’re already thinking they’re not messing around, so I could be out of a job in a couple of months’

Some of these risks were seen to be exacerbated by gender. Four of the female participants made reference to perceived gender discrimination in their organisations and/or industries, which they thought limited their advancement opportunities:

‘There are more women in the [legal] profession than men, more females doing it at university, more women trainees and everything, but yet you still see – we’ve only got three women Partners, and there’s 50 Partners in our office. And that’s fairly reflective across the board at any law firm’ (Isla, Solicitor, Law Firm, 30-34)

Florence (Solicitor, 30-34) echoed this, saying the only route for progression in Corporate Law firms was Partnership, and yet there were far fewer women than men at that level.

Associated with this issue, there is an argument that women have to work harder to be considered equally capable and achieve the same level of recognition and progression as male counterparts. In the legal profession, Walsh (2012) noted how, in order to establish partnership potential, women had to demonstrate higher standards of performance than men in terms of law school grades, hours’ worked, number of professional activities and client development (Kay & Hagan, 1998; Noonan & Corcoran, 2004). Whilst comments related to these specific issues were not made in the interviews, Solicitor Florence (Corporate Law Firm: 30-34) did comment that just doing her job was not enough in order to be successful, and that there were additional requirements linked to her gender. On the one hand, she felt that she was expected to incorporate elements of her female identity into her work:

‘You’re disadvantaged because you’re a woman because a) men who are in charge see you as a woman, and b) they’ll want you to have the characteristics of a woman – so they’ll want you to be all smiley and happy. So like someone told me I don’t smile enough when people come in my room. So like I can work really hard, but unless I smile you’re not really interested’

On the other hand, however, she noted that most of her colleagues and clients were men, and so client entertaining was oriented around male pursuits, such as football and rugby games, which meant that she had had to spend time learning about sports to be able to build rapport.

Support for the position might also be found in the discrepancy in reported working hours between the two genders. It was noted in chapter five that more females than males were working regularly over their contractual working hours, and especially those in the 35-39 age bracket – who were averaging 19 extra hours per week. Whilst some of the discrepancy can be attributed to the different job roles of participants, it could be that female participants felt more pressure to work longer hours. This seems to be supported when working hours are cross-referenced with attitudes towards work. Many of those in the male group that reported the most additional working hours (aged 24-29) could be seen to be working extra hours somewhat willingly. This is reminiscent of Bunting's (2003) work on 'willing slaves', where certain employees were seen to prefer spending time in the work than the home domain due to the rewards offered. Only one of the younger males, Regional Contract Manager Patrick (Recruitment Company, 24-29), reported a negative attitude – complaining that his hours of work were forced upon him and interfered with his personal life. For the females aged 35-44 however, longer hours were more prominently linked to workload requirements, and were somewhat resented: 'I'm spending, like I say, 45-50 hours a week most weeks, and sometimes having to take stuff home, doing things that I'm not really all that interested in' (Charlie, female T&D Manager, NHS, 40-44).

Beck & Beck-Gernsheim (2002: 68) mentioned how women were now entering the working world with similar demands and expectations for their career to their male counterparts, but that their expectations were not being met (which they attributed largely to factors related to parenting): 'This tense relationship between women's life plans and their actual chances of fulfilling them [becoming] a breeding ground for insecurity, anxiety and disappointment'. Whilst this view is extreme, there is more evidence of insecurity, anxiety and disappointment in the interviews of the female participants aged 35-44 than in the interviews of other participants, despite the absence of children.

In addition to perceptions about gender influencing the options available in the work domain, participants also considered age to have an impact. Florence (Solicitor, 30-34) commented that 'at Associate level there's no one over forty, they're all like 35 and under.... it's a bit weird to think 34 and our career is over. It's quite harsh'. She expected the two factors – gender and age – to work in tandem against her in terms of promotion in the future, and was therefore considering alternative routes – citing the decisions made by others to move to either an in-house role or a smaller law firm outside of London. Jenny (Marketing Manager, Food Company, 35-39) saw a similar problem in her career, commenting: 'you don't see many older

'Marketeters'...I don't know where they go', which was forcing her to question her on-going commitment to her current role/career. This indicates that the structural and cultural organisational environment was seen to increase risk for participants if they were to act purely in accordance with their career goals, influencing the type of action they were likely to take moving forwards.

Importantly, for many of the women aged 35-44, engagement in projectivity and practical evaluation (see Emirbayer and Mische, 1998) – in terms of imagining alternative futures where non-work roles were present alongside work roles, and considering these alongside the contingencies of the present – also brought to the surface risks in the non-work domain. These issues were discussed in chapter five: the risk of failing to find a partner; the risk of a relationship breaking up; and the risk of failing to procreate if a stable partnership was formed. Again, these risks were often connected to organisational structures in terms of demanding workloads, long hours and lack of flexibility. Participants felt limited in their ability to invest time in dating and relationship maintenance. In terms of having children, Maria (Lecturer, University, 35-39) said she would like to have children, but added: 'that's if it's possible to get pregnant with the kind of stress that I'm under at the moment, which is... I've been told not to try'. Other participants were concerned about the limited window they had left biologically, as a result of previous years focused on the career: 'whether I'll have kids – probably not given that I'm nearly 40' (Samantha, Regulatory Project Officer, Pharmaceutical Company, 35-39).

The findings here contradict one argument on gender and risk made by Kelan (2008: 1175), based on research with information communication technology (ICT) workers, which was that 'many of the threats to identity which come with higher risk and insecurity at work seem to apply mainly to a male breadwinner, as women have tended to have alternative identities on which they could draw'. For the women in the current research sample, they not only lacked alternative identities (not being partnered or parents) meaning that work was primary, but this very absence was an additional worry – the roles being desired, but not perceived to be within their grasp.

Importantly, there were also perceived risks around balancing work and family roles should they actually have a family moving forward:

'I don't necessarily want to have children but I just think actually it's just not considered at all... there's no way that... you would absolutely need a partner who would support you, and even then... it would be so difficult to not be in the rat-race...in the game, writing and things' (Judith, Academic, University, 30-34)

In this quote, Judith was concerned about the risks involved in trying to meet the requirements of academia whilst also having children. In other quotes, participants backed up such perceptions with stories about the experience of colleagues. Florence (Solicitor, Corporate Law Firm, 30-34) for example, related the story of a female colleague who was unable to meet the requirements of the job role after having children, and who had to take an alternative role that was far less interesting and had little opportunities for development/progression. Whilst concerns about balancing work with children are well addressed in the work-life balance literature (Acker, 1990; Allen et al. 2000; Beutell & Greenhaus, 1983; Casper et al. 2002; Frone et al. 1992; Gambles et al 2006; Greenhaus et al. 2001; Kanter, 1977b; Kirchmeyer, 1998; Major et al. 2002; Stroh et al. 1996; Tharenou, 1999), for these individuals, the issue is not just the structural constraints to balancing work with family; but the fact that a personal decision needs to be made at some point – to have children or not – where there are consequences that will have to be lived with. In Judith’s quote above, she suggests that she hasn’t made a decision yet on the issue; and similarly Florence said she wasn’t sure what she wanted for her future. This emphasises Beck’s (1992) conceptualisation of individualisation, where freedom to choose does not necessarily link to wellbeing but can instead be a burden.

Finally, risk was associated with the solo-living situation itself, and how this interacts with the precarious nature of employment in terms of financial concerns. Charlie (female T&D Manager, NHS, 40-44) spoke of a company restructure where her function was at risk, and where she chose to jump before she was pushed: ‘that is an issue with living on your own – that’s a biggie – I thought I can’t be without a job. So I needed to actively move rather than end up without a job’. The same financial risk was seen to make individuals more tolerant of negative work experiences, again as evidenced by Charlie:

‘It’s not a job I’d choose to stay in – if I could get out I would, but we’re back to the fact that I’ve got a mortgage to pay and there’s nothing doing. So in some ways I think it doesn’t help that I feel trapped – trapped in a job that I don’t really want to be doing’.

7.4.2 Mitigating risks

In acknowledging the vulnerabilities of the unencumbered worker, seen as single people without close family ties, Beck (1992: 122) noted that ‘precautions are necessary to protect this way of living against its built-in hazards’. It is worth considering therefore the self-protection strategies that participants discussed in relation to the risks that they perceived. A number of individuals mentioned having put personal strategies in place to minimise the risks

inherent in the work domain. Five participants said that in the work domain, they had strategies in place to minimise wasted time or the chances of making a mistake – both things that could put their job at risk. Fred (Senior Manager, Insolvency Practitioners, 35-39) commented:

‘You have a set of principles that you work within, and mine tend to be that you have got to be absolutely transparent with everything that you do, record everything, be absolutely, 100% truthful with everybody... I can sleep easy at night that I’ve got every bit of evidence ever on everything, so I can back up my decisions’.

Participants also discussed a range of other strategies to mitigate the risks of the labour market, including continuous development (education and skills); keeping a ‘little bit of money as security’ (Jenny, Marketing Manager, Food Company, 35-39); and even turning to trade unions – a structure traditionally associated with collective concerns, but here seen to help with individual concerns. When asked in a routine question about whether they were a member of a trade union, a number of participants stated that they were, but for purely self-protection reasons. Roo (female Finance Manager, Bank, 40-44) said: ‘I always thought that if anything happened or I was ever accused of anything, not that it ever happened Krystal, but I just had it in the back of my mind that if I ever needed any support from anyone, the union would be there to help me’. In these examples individuals are exercising agency, often enabled by the structures within the labour market (education, trade unions) and associated resources (money) to protect themselves against possible dangers in the same environment.

There was also evidence of individuals having spent considerable time weighing up the pros and cons of major decisions, which aligns to the notion that in conditions of individualisation, individuals are more conscious of burden of making decisions, and being personally responsible for the consequences (Beck, 1992: 135). This can be seen in Ann’s (Anaesthetist, NHS, 30-34) discussion of a forthcoming trip to Australia to work with the flying doctors:

‘when I come back I’ll only have six months left before the end of my training contract, which puts me at a bit of a disadvantage because of things like trying to get a Consultant job, you know, that six months when I’m away other people will be going round knocking on hospital doors saying ‘hi, do you remember me, I used to work here years ago’. But you know, I think it will be outweighed by the benefits I’ll get from it...I’ll get a lot of experience; I can teach other people, I might be able to get some papers and things out of it as well’.

A major problem for the female participants was that there was less sense of agency in mitigating against the risks perceived in the non-work domain. They could try to invest more time and energy in meeting a partner, developing a relationship, and trying to start a family, but there was no guarantee of success.

7.5. Conclusion: Gendered individualisation

Taking the sections above as a whole, it is argued that there is evidence of individualisation, as conceptualised by Beck (1992) and Beck & Beck-Gernsheim (2002), in this sample of solo-living managers and professionals. It has been suggested that if individualisation is present at all, then it could be limited to the privileged minority of white, middle-class males (Dawson, 2012: 313; de Lange, 2004). This study suggests that it is evident for both genders – albeit within a privileged minority of managerial and professional employees. What it also argued however is that individualisation is experienced in a qualitatively different way by different individuals, largely in connection with their gender and age.

In terms of the first tenet of individualisation to be explored, there was evidence throughout the sample of limited engagement with some of the social institutions that were seen to prescribe individual life roles in simple modernity – the nuclear family, religion and local community. Instead there was embedding in the social institution of the labour market, and engagement with education and mobility (Beck, 1992: 93-4). Rather than prescribing an individual's place in society, this institution was seen to prescribe that individuals decide for themselves, and live with the consequences. There was also evidence of the second tenet – a 'duty to oneself' (Beck & Beck-Gernsheim, 2002: 38) – throughout the sample, but this was conceptualised in different ways by different individuals. For some, mainly male and younger female participants, a duty to oneself concerned personal fulfilment in the form of career satisfaction and progression, and personal goals that could be arranged around work. For these individuals, the structures and cultures of the labour market were enabling, as was the solo-living domestic situation. For others however, notably older females, a duty to oneself included personal fulfilment through relationships with others – where the structures and cultures of the labour market proved more constraining (limiting the ability of individuals to improve their work-life balance), as did living alone.

In the light of these respective relationships with the structural and cultural environment, there were different perceptions of personal agency within the sample. This was evident in

the third issue explored in the chapter – individual narratives of the work-life trajectory. Whilst a certain amount of agency was evident for all participants, due to their relatively privileged position in society – in terms of access to resources of value in the labour market (the central social institution) – the males and younger females with the more career-based goals at the time of interview were more likely to emphasise agency in their narratives, and emphasise the freedoms that they had. As they were largely satisfied with their work-life balance at the time of interview however, when it came to working patterns, their behaviour was largely iterative. The older females however, who were starting to question the prioritising of work over the rest of life – and thus engaging in reflexivity, projectivity and practical evaluation concerning working patterns – were less likely to emphasise a capacity for personal agency in their accounts, and more inclined to conceptualise agency in a problematic way. This supports Beck's (1992) view that individualisation is associated with freedom, but that freedom is not necessarily linked to wellbeing, due to the prominence in late modernity of risk.

An awareness of risk was evident throughout the sample, but gender was seen to have an influence in terms of both the sort of risks discussed, and how they were conceptualised. This had implications for perceptions of agency in relation to the structural and cultural environment. Both male and female participants perceived risks in the work domain, but these were often accompanied by strategies designed to mitigate them. Individuals displayed a certain level of agency in developing such strategies, but an agency that was facilitated by enabling structures in the work domain – including education (to keep them employable), good salaries (to provide a financial buffer), and trade union membership (to provide assistance with personal problems if required). For the female participants however, additional risks were discussed in the work domain (associated with gender discrimination) and there was significant awareness of risk in the personal domain – associated with the development and maintenance of relationships and the achievement of a parental role. In relation to the latter, the structural environment was seen to constrain strategies (agency) to limit the risks, as work demands were seen to take up time and energy that could have been used in the personal domain.

Whilst there are clearly nuances in the data, it is concluded that individualisation is evident throughout the sample, but is experienced in a more enabling way for males and young female solo-living managers and professionals than it is for females aged 35-44. The male and younger-female participants were largely satisfied with their work; satisfied with their living

situation; and satisfied with their work-life balance. The older female participants on the other hand were more frustrated by their experience in the work domain and the likelihood of future career development; were less satisfied with living alone; and were more concerned by their work-life balance, and the negative effect that work commitments had on developing relationships and expanding roles in the non-work domain.

Dawson (2012: 314) argues that 'forms of stratification remain important' in late modernity, and that we should reframe 'individualisation' as 'embedded individualisation' – referring to late modern societies being categorised by increased individual responsibility, but opportunities to act not being universally available due to long-standing divides (predominantly class). The evidence presented above supports this argument on the basis of gender when it comes to young professional and managerial employees who live alone. Beck-Gernsheim (2002: 43) stated that 'modernity has created its own model of behaviour for actively coping with the uncertainties of life... Its watchwords are: Plan! Bring the future under control!' A key problem for the female participants aged 35-44 appears to be that they question their ability to plan for the uncertainties in either the work or the non-work domain – linked to the structural environment which seems to present them with constraints as well as enablers to agency.

As the sample only included participants aged 24-44, it is not possible to determine the situation for solo-living managerial/professional employees older than this. It could be that male participants' attitudes to various things (including parenting) become more akin to those of the females aged 35-44 at a later age. Considering the fact that parenthood has different consequences for men and women however, with fatherhood being possible later in life, and less likely to affect broader life roles for men than motherhood does for women, this may be unlikely. Furthermore, it might be that childless female solo-living employees feel more liberated when they are beyond reproductive age, and many of the associated uncertainties are removed from their minds.

Another important caveat is that one central element of all conceptualisations of individualisation cannot be supported in this study – this is that lives in late modernity are fundamentally different from lives in simple modernity. The cross-sectional nature of this research projects means that we cannot know whether the experiences and attitudes of these participants were distinct to their lives in 2011/2 – or whether similar experiences and attitudes might have been evident for this specific demographic – solo-living young managers

and professionals – in earlier decades. Some cross-reference with ‘elderly data’ (see Duncan, 2011: 312) on this demographic group would be required in order to address this issue.

8. Discussion

This study has provided an exploration of the work-life experiences and perceptions of a group of employees traditionally underrepresented in work-life literature and practice: young managers and professionals who live alone and do not have children. This chapter brings together the main findings of the research in relation to the nature of participant agency, and the dynamics of structure, culture and agency.

In the literature review, when discussing different theories around the interaction between structure, culture and agency, the appeal of the critical realist approach of 'analytic dualism' was noted – where structure and culture at one level, and agency at another, are both seen to have explanatory power, but to have different causal influence over a situation at different points in time. The approach proved beneficial when collating the various issues discussed in the preceding three findings chapters and attempting to understand the dynamics of structure, culture and agency when it comes to work-life balance among solo-living managers and professionals.

Margaret Archer used analytic dualism to propose a Morphogenetic Cycle (Archer, 1995: 157), in which the socio-cultural environment always precedes and conditions individual agency, but this agency then acts to either reproduce or elaborate the environment. Whilst the data collected in this study does not include knowledge of whether structural/cultural elaboration has actually occurred as a result of participant agency (due to the nature of the data collected), it can be inferred from the data in the preceding chapters that there is little evidence of participant behaviour likely to change the structural and cultural environment when it comes to work-life balance for solo-living employees – meaning we have structural/cultural reproduction. This applies not only to the male and younger female employees, who expressed a large degree of satisfaction with their work-life situation at the time of interview, but also to the older females, who spoke of experiencing a range of work-life balance problems and perceiving unfairness in the allocation of work-life balance support in the workplace.

In order to explain this relationship between structure, culture and agency in relation to the work-life balance of the solo-living participants in this study, a conceptualisation of agency is proposed in this chapter which is temporally embedded but also incorporates the issue of risk – as central to individualisation theory.

Emirbayer and Mische (1998) suggested a conceptualisation of agency that is temporally embedded, with individuals socially engaged through three interrelated elements: iteration (following habits of the past in order to sustain identities, interactions and institutions); projectivity (imagining alternative future possibilities); and 'practical evaluation' (contextualising past habits and future projects in the contingencies of the present). They suggested that, in any action, whilst each of the three elements would be present, one would be 'predominant' – so an individual would be more engaged with either the past (iteration), the future (projectivity) or the present (practical evaluation). They suggested that as actors alter their agentic orientations, they 'increase or decrease their capacity for invention, choice, and transformative impact in relation to the situational contexts within which they act (Emirbayer & Mische, 1998: 1003). Though simplifying a complex issue considerably, when it comes to the interaction of a temporally embedded conceptualisation of agency with the structure/culture environment, it seems that an emphasis on iteration is likely to result in structural/cultural reproduction; whereas projectivity and practical evaluation allow the possibility for structural/cultural elaboration. I argue here that when the issue of risk is emphasised in projectivity and practical evaluation however, and specifically a conceptualisation of risk where possible negative consequences are seen in relation to any action selected, then paralysis becomes the likely agency outcome, and hence structural/cultural reproduction. The following sections elaborate this argument, using findings from the previous chapters.

8.1. The structural and cultural environment that precedes agency

With the Morphogenetic Cycle, Archer (1995) started with the premise that structure/culture necessarily predates agency, meaning that individuals are born into a specific socio-cultural environment which has a conditioning effect on their actions. From chapter seven, I argue that the solo-living managers and professionals studied were situated in an environment in which the labour market was the dominant social institution, and that this had a conditioning effect upon them, influencing their actions. When it came to individual trajectories to the point of interview, there was evidence of considerable choice, but choice from within options that were aligned with successful navigation of the labour market, emphasising investment in education and mobility.

It was noted that at the time of interview, in terms of capacity for agency in relation to the career, participants appeared to be in a privileged position. Participants' social capital and lack

of responsibilities in the home domain meant that they were able to take advantage of opportunities for progression – both within their organisations and in the broader labour market. When it came to balancing the work and home domains on the other hand, the same structural and cultural environment proved more constraining for these individuals than for others (notably employees with children). Individuals reported experiencing a range of work-life balance issues as a result of their structural and cultural environment. Whilst some of the issues have been acknowledged in the work-life balance literature, including long working hours (Hooker et al. 2007; McMillan et al. 2011), unpredictable finish times (Bunting, 2003), and boundary blurring (Kossek et al. 2005), participants felt that these issues were often exacerbated by their solo-living situation, due to perceptions about the legitimacy of their non-work activities and perceptions that they had less requirement for non-work time than colleagues with caring responsibilities.

The structural and cultural environment also appears to have had a conditioning influence upon participant perceptions of fairness in their organisations when it came to the allocation of support for employee work-life balance. Here, the national-level structure of employment legislation proved significant. Legislation was seen to inform the provisions offered by organisations; but also participant perceptions: in terms of their personal sense of entitlement to support; the fairness of organisational provisions; and their ability to act when unfairness was perceived.

The structural/cultural environment, with its balance of enablers and constraints, was experienced in a qualitatively different way by different groups of workers, with some (mainly male participants and females aged 24-34) feeling fairly positive about their situation and their capacity for personal agency in both the work and non-work domains; and others (mainly females aged 35-44) feeling more pessimistic. In the sections that follow, the nature of agency for each group will be explored, suggesting alternative explanations for the structural/cultural reproduction that each group's actions seem to signify.

8.2. Male participants and females aged 24-34: iterative agency

It was noted in chapter seven that the male participants and females aged 24-34 tended to have a strong perception of personal agency, and presented narratives of their work-life trajectory that emphasised personal control. When it came to their agency in relation to the

work-life interface at the time of interview however, the dominant temporal perspective for these participants was iteration – resulting in action that reproduced the environment.

These participants were quite happy to work long hours, finish work at the time dictated by the demands of the job, and engage in activities that blurred the boundaries between work and home, and so such behaviours were habitual. They acted this way because they enjoyed their work (see Bunting, 2003; Hochschild, 1997a; and Lewis, 2003) and also because this behaviour was aligned to their long-term goals for career progression. They were engaging in practical evaluation to the extent that they recognised that their actions had proved fruitful in the past in securing career success, and so they assumed they would continue to do so moving forwards. These individuals did not appear to be engaging in projectivity and practical evaluation in relation to work-life balance at the time of interview – in terms of imagining alternative futures that would require different action in the present. They were not really considering broader life roles at the time of interview, and held the view that if/when they wanted to develop familial roles in the future, they would address this then. As a result of this, these individuals paid little attention to the issue of work-life balance, as indicated in Vincent's (Accountant, Engineering Firm, 30-34) comment:

'I think work-life balance is like having your heart tick over properly, if it's working fine, you don't even think about it, it doesn't even occur to you, it's only when it's going wrong that you'll ever pay any attention to such a concept'

They therefore paid little attention to the policies and provisions in their workplaces. Many of these individuals did not know if their organisation had a work-life balance policy, or assumed that provisions would not be available to them. They did not sense any unfairness in provisions that were tailored to the needs of those with caring responsibilities, as they did not feel a need for work-life balance support and held a personal DJR around the issue which was aligned with the organisational approach and legislation.

The structural/cultural reproduction of a group of individuals with a strong sense of personal agency is something that is noted by Emirbayer and Mische (1998: 1008, emphasis in original):

'An analysis of the multiplex nature of agentic orientations can help to unpack the following paradoxical observation: *Actors who feel creative and deliberative while in the flow of unproblematic trajectories can often be highly reproductive of received context*'.

8.3. Female participants aged 35-44: reflexivity, projectivity, practical evaluation and risk

It was noted in the findings chapters that female participants aged 35-44 were considerably less satisfied with their work-life situation than other participants. It was noted in chapter seven that these participants had been questioning the centrality of work in their lives in the time leading up to their interviews, and that many expressed a desire to develop roles outside of work in terms of partnering and parenting. These individuals were therefore engaged with projectivity, imagining alternative future possibilities, and reflexivity, as conceptualised by Archer (2000: 297): where an individual is 'constantly considering whether what it once devoted itself to as its ultimate concerns are still worthy of this devotion, and whether the price which was once paid for subordinating and accommodating other concerns is still one with which the subject can live'. There was also considerable practical evaluation – with the women contextualising their past habits and future projects in the contingencies of the present. Participants were thinking about the working patterns that they had been, and still were, engaged in – including long working hours, unpredictable finish times and boundary blurring – and were recognising the problems that these would pose for the achievement of desired alternate futures if they were perpetuated. With this reflexivity and evaluation comes the potential for structural/cultural elaboration – the taking of action that challenges rather than reproduces the environment.

In considering alternatives to the behaviours that they had been engaged in however – such as working fewer hours, finishing work at a set time each day, and/or resisting boundary blurring (by not using technology to check on work from home, etc.) – these female participants articulated a different set of barriers, linked to their domestic situation as solo-living employees. Firstly, there were barriers to the utilisation of formal work-life balance provisions in the workplace. In chapter six it was noted that these participants often articulated a sense of unfairness about the allocation of work-life balance support in their organisations. They felt that the needs-based DJR upon which most of their organisations' policies were grounded were unfair because they equated 'need' with caring responsibilities only, and overlooked the many needs for time outside of work that solo-living employees had. They articulated a range of personal time requirements in the non-work domain that were not recognised by employers, including time for the building and maintenance of friendships; time for dating and developing a relationship; time for health and fitness; time for personal hobbies; and time for household chores – for which they had sole responsibility. Secondly, they also noted barriers to informal action to improve their work-life balance. In chapter five it was noted that

perceptions of the legitimacy of different non-work activities meant that solo-living employees often found it difficult to limit their working hours to contractual requirements only when there were requirements at work for someone to stay late. They noted that those with caring responsibilities had a legitimate reason to leave on time, whereas their own activities were less respected because they were largely self-oriented and more flexible.

In addition to considering structural and cultural barriers to the taking of alternative courses of action, their practical evaluation also highlighted the many risks associated with alternative future possibilities. For the male and younger female participants, as their agency in relation to work-life interface was largely iterative, and there was little consideration of alternative future possibilities, their consideration of risk was largely limited to those associated with the work domain, and seen to be a feature of the labour market environment that was applicable to everyone. It was noted in chapter seven however that for the female participants aged 35-44, a wider range of risks were articulated – as related to alternative possible futures. In relation to a future where they reduced their working commitments and devoted more time to developing roles outside of work, they noted risks such as being unable to find a partner, relationships breaking up, or inability to have children. In relation to a future where they remained focused on their work, and so continued with long working hours and boundary blurring, they noted risks associated with career plateaux (linked to perceived age and gender barriers to progression in their industries) or frustration (doing work that no longer made them happy, and having missed the boat in relation to other life roles). The outcome of such practical evaluation was that individuals expressed feeling somewhat ‘stuck’ at the time of interview, with their paralysis acting to reproduce the current environment.

My argument is that structural/cultural reproduction appears to be the likely product of the agency of both groups of participants, despite each having very different perceptions of their capacity for action. The reason for this relates to their agentic temporal orientations, and a foregrounding of risk in the projectivity and practical evaluation of the older females.

8.4. Changing the structural and cultural environment

Aside from structural and cultural elaboration resulting from the agency of solo-living employees, change to the environment that enables better work-life balance for this demographic could come from outside factors. Throughout this dissertation, mention has been made of changes to the UK legislation on the right to request flexible working – with the

right extending from those with caring responsibilities to all employees with 26 weeks' service. It is possible that changes to organisational work-life balance provisions and policies related to this development will have an impact on the practical evaluation of solo-living managers and professionals, allowing them make adjustments to their working patterns that are in line with a desired future where they have more time to devote to activities outside of work.

Progress can also come from on-going research that seeks to challenge and extend the dominant conceptualisations of work-life balance, potentially making work-life balance provisions more accessible to all. When considering problems with work-life balance, we tend to think of the term 'work-life conflict' (McMillan et al. 2011) – and yet this term sits uneasily with the problems reported by solo-living employees. Work-life conflict relates to inter-role conflict: 'the simultaneous occurrence of two or more role expectations such that compliance with one would make compliance with the other more difficult' (Katz & Kahn, 1978:204). The concept is grounded in scarcity theory, meaning that individuals have finite resources (time and energy), and that when excessive resources are consumed by one domain, there will not be enough to meet the requirements of the other(s). Whilst one aspect of this concept is applicable to the experience of solo-living employees – limited time, with excess being consumed by the work domain – the other part of the concept proves incompatible. Is it hard for solo-living employees to assert that they have requirements/demands for their time in another domain due to the issue of legitimacy. Whilst participants cited non-work roles that they occupied (relating to friendship, dating and hobbies); whilst these roles were important to them personally; whilst they required considerable time investment; and whilst they were frequently affected by organisational structural/cultural requirements, they were somewhat optional and so 'conflict' was not felt.

Taking the issue of friendship specifically, there were numerous examples in the interviews of work requirements having had a negative effect on participant friendships: participants having had to cancel social arrangements due to work commitments; refrain from making social plans for fear of last-minute cancellation; or being physically but not mentally present due to preoccupation with work. The key issue remains however that the 'friend' role is simply not seen to be as important as that of partner or parent – meaning real work-life conflict cannot really be claimed:

'I think if work spills into your personal life, then when you're co-habiting it does cause more problems... [because] it's upsetting two people... When you live alone... it could maybe upset friends if you're not free to do something, but they tend to be more forgiving generally' (Sebastian, Pharmacist, NHS, 30-34)

The issue of friendship has started to be acknowledged in the work-life balance field, albeit not in the UK context, but more attention is needed. Parris et al. (2008) looked at the experiences of time-pressured middle managers in Australia, and found a key emerging theme to be participant concerns about the negative effects of their work on their friendships. It was noted that because the 'first priority [of participants] was their immediate families... friendships were an area which 'had to give'' (2008: 411). Pedersen & Lewis (2012) looked at the time use of employees in different work arrangements in Denmark – with the specific intention of understanding 'how individuals do friendship in a period characterised by time dilemmas, blurred work-life boundaries and increased employer- and employee-led flexible working' (2012: 464). They found two ways that time pressured employees made time for friendship, one of which was 'blurring boundaries between friends and family' – which was clearly linked to their parenting role (taking part in family-based activities with other parents and their children), whilst the other was blurring the boundaries between friends and colleagues. The prioritising of familial roles identified in Parris et al. (2008), and the need to combine friendship with a more substantial role in Pedersen & Lewis (2012) can be seen to corroborate the finding that the friendship role in itself appears to lack legitimacy in issues of work-life balance. If the friend role was more widely recognised and acknowledged as requiring similar time and energy investments as familial roles, solo-living employees might feel more comfortable in articulating concerns about 'work-friendship' conflict, and acting in a way to protect friendship time from the demands of the workplace.

Another important issue for work-life balance conceptualisation concerns the acknowledgement of time requirements for dating – with a view to developing a meaningful relationship and starting a family. Some participants in the sample could be seen to be experiencing a form of 'work-life conflict' – not a conflict between work and the requirements of cohabiting family, but rather conflict between work and the requirements for gaining a cohabiting family. Participants explained their frustration at what one called the 'catch-22' nature of their situation: considerable time demands were experienced at work (where more was expected from them because they were solo-livers), which coupled with time demands at home due to sole responsibility for domestic tasks, meant they had no time to go out and meet a partner in order to start to change their situation.

In order to accommodate the experiences of this group, a new consideration is needed when considering work-life balance across the life-course – to reflect how current work roles and responsibilities can have a damaging effect on the initial development of, as well as the

fulfilment of, non-work domain roles. The need for a broader temporal perspective on the work-life interface has been acknowledged by Moen & Sweet (2004). They call for a 'life course perspective' on the topic of work and family, which considers the different roles and relationships that people have over time. Different types of linking mechanism need to be considered when dealing with life-course roles and responsibilities however. Moen et al. (2008) note that some studies of students in professional schools have noted something they term 'anticipatory life course (mis)fit', where young adults anticipate difficulties in resolving work and family roles over the coming years, thinking that future job demands may prevent them from achieving their marital and family goals (e.g. Gerson, 2002; Moen & Orrange, 2002; Orrange, 2007). Whilst this is evident to an extent in the current sample, it is different to the main problem noted for this subgroup – where the experience of conflict is current, it is just that it is not a conflict with existing roles, it is a conflict with the development of desired roles. The term 'work desired-life conflict' is therefore suggested.

In the next chapter, the conclusions of the thesis are put forward.

9. Conclusions

The aim of this research was to provide an insight into the work-life balance experiences and attitudes of a group of solo-living managers and professionals, by exploring the dynamics of structure, culture and agency. This chapter opens with a statement of the overall thesis. It then sets out four specific contributions to knowledge, before discussing the implications of the work for practice – at the macro-level (government policy) and meso-level (organisational policy and practice). The chapter also reviews the strengths and limitations of the thesis, and makes suggestions for further research.

The overall thesis is that young solo-living managers and professionals are both enabled and constrained by their structural and cultural environment. Whilst these individuals are in a relatively privileged position when it comes to career progression, they experience a number of constraints to the achievement of work-life balance. Whether dissatisfaction with the work-life interface is acknowledged by participants or not, there is little evidence of challenge to the structural/cultural environment – which is linked to the temporally embedded nature of agency, and the foregrounding of risk where alternative futures are considered.

In more detail, in line with individualisation theory (Beck, 1992; Beck & Beck-Gernsheim, 2002), these solo-living managers and professionals were shown to be embedded in the social institution of the labour market, which had structural and cultural features that had a conditioning effect on their attitudes and agency. Perceptions of agency varied in the sample on the basis of gender and age – in association with participant priorities at the time of interview and the gendered experience of individualisation. Where career progression was the priority (mainly males and younger females), participants recognised the structural and cultural enablers in their environment, and believed they were choosing to behave in a way that was congruent with the requirements of the 'ideal worker' (Acker, 1990). As such behaviours had become habitual, and there was little consideration of alternative futures and courses of action, their agency was largely iterative (following habits of the past in order to sustain identities, interactions and institutions) and did not provide a challenge to the structural/environment in relation to work-life balance provision. Where priorities were changing however, and work-life balance had become a bigger concern, participants (mainly females aged 35-44) were seen to be less satisfied with their situation, and more aware of the constraining elements of the same structural and cultural environment. Whilst these individuals were more reflexive, and engaged in projectivity and practical evaluation, it was the risks of alternative futures that tended to be emphasised – in line with gendered

individualisation – meaning that paralysis and structural/cultural reproduction ensued. This thesis adds several distinct contributions to knowledge, which are set out below.

9.1. Contributions

The overall contribution of the thesis is new insight into the work-life balance experiences and attitudes of a group of employees who have been under-researched in the work-life balance field to date – young managers and professionals who live alone and do not have children. A number of discrete contributions can be identified.

The first contribution is the identification of a number of work-life balance issues that are experienced by solo-living managers and professionals as a result of their interaction with their structural and cultural environment. Whilst some of the issues have been identified in prior literature on work-life balance – long working hours (Hooker et al. 2007; McMillan et al. 2011), unpredictable finish times (Bunting, 2003), and boundary blurring (Kossek, et al. 2005) – the consequences are seen to be qualitatively different for these participants. Rather than work-life conflict; inability to meet the requirements of the ‘ideal worker’ (Acker, 1990); and resulting disadvantage in terms of career progression, the solo-living participants were likely to be meeting the requirements of the ‘ideal worker’ but then suffering negative consequences in the non-work domain as a result – such as lack of support and alternative sources of identity. The same cultural and structural factors are argued to provide enablers to the cohort in terms of career progression, but constraints in terms of work-life balance. A problem with the situation is only perceived where participants are starting to desire more time outside of work.

In addition to the work-life balance issues that had been identified in prior research (albeit with different consequences), the main contribution of chapter five was the identification of four work-life balance issues that appear specific to the cohort as solo-living managers and professionals. The first two concerned perceptions of participant non-work time and the nature of their non-work activities. There was a feeling that activities linked to friendship, dating, health/fitness and personal hobbies were not considered to be ‘legitimate’ reasons for directing time and energy away from work (unlike childcare), because they were largely self-directed and flexible. Both of these issues were attributed to cultural values at a national level that equate the term ‘work-life balance’ to mainly ‘work-family’ issues – something linked to the national legislative framework at the time that the research was carried out. The third issue was an increased vulnerability to disappointments in the work domain. The final issue

was a lack of support in the non-work domain – practical, financial and emotional. Whilst it is generally recognised that solo-living employees have fewer responsibilities in the non-work domain, this other side of the situation is less acknowledged – that these individuals are solely responsible for themselves and their own welfare, and that they can find this problematic. This suggests that a ‘duty to oneself’ (Beck & Beck-Gernsheim, 2002: 38) for solo-living managers and professionals does not necessarily omit a duty of care for others and a desire for care from others.

The second contribution comes from the use of the distributive justice framework to explore participant perceptions of the fairness of their organisations’ work-life balance provisions, and their own sense of entitlement to work-life balance support. In terms of dynamics of structure, culture and agency, the structure of the national legislative framework again proved influential. At the time of interview, UK legislation related to work-life balance was predominantly needs-based, but recognising mainly the needs of employees with caring responsibilities. This legislation was seen to have a three-fold influence. Firstly, it influenced organisational work-life balance provisions – most of which were needs-based, though sometimes accompanied by a broader equity-based distribution of broader benefits. Secondly, it influenced the DJRs used by participants to assess their own sense of entitlement to work-life balance support, and the fairness of their organisation’s provisions. Thirdly, where any sense of unfairness was perceived, it limited participant ability to complain about the situation. This structural factor at the national level meant that backlash (Flynn, 1996; Korabik & Warner, 2009; Kossek & Van Dyne, 2008) was largely absent from the data. This extends the contribution made by Young (1999) by explaining not only the congruence or dissonance between individual employee DJRs and those of their organisations; but also why dissonance is often not acted upon in the UK context.

The third contribution is the concept of ‘gendered individualisation’ in the sample of young solo-living managers and professionals. Support for Beck (1992) and Beck & Beck-Gernsheim’s (2002) conceptualisation of individualisation was found in so far as the dominance of different social institutions. Whilst the term ‘dis-embedding’ in relation to the family, religion and local community (social institutions said to be dominant in simple modernity) is too strong, most participants were distanced from these institutions, and certainly seemed embedded in the labour market – the social institution seen to dominate late modernity. These individuals were relatively privileged within this social institution as they had the required social capital, and were relatively ‘unencumbered’ (Beck, 1992: 122). There was evidence of awareness of the freedoms afforded by individualisation, but also of the risks – which again supports Beck

(1992) and Beck & Beck-Gernsheim's (2002) conceptualisation. In terms of new insights, the 'gendered individualisation' proposed relates to participant perceptions of their individual agency – which was linked to their priorities at the time of interview, which in turn was linked to their gender and age. Male participants and females aged 24-34 tended to prioritise work and career progression at the time of interview – goals which were enabled by the structural and cultural environment, and their resources (including education and salary) within it. These individuals had a strong sense of agency, and emphasised the freedoms of their current work-life situation. Female participants aged 35-44 however were more aware of the structural constraints to progression linked to their gender and age, and were also starting to desire roles in the non-work domain (around partnering and parenting). These individuals were aware of the structural and cultural constraints to spending time in the non-work domain (constraints to work-life balance) and also the risks associated with their agency – the need to make decisions about where to devote their time and energy when there was no guarantees of a successful outcome in either the work or non-work domain.

The final contribution is a conceptualisation of agency that is temporally embedded, but that incorporates the issue of risk – as central to individualisation theory. Emirbayer and Mische (1998) suggested a conceptualisation of agency that is temporally embedded, with individuals socially engaged through three interrelated elements: iteration; projectivity and practical evaluation – one of which will be 'predominant' at any one time. I suggest that in simple terms, where iteration is predominant, there is the likelihood of structural/cultural reproduction. Where projectivity or practical evaluation are predominant, on the other hand, there is the possibility for elaboration – except where considerations emphasise the risk in all possible actions. In this scenario, projectivity and practical evaluation can actually be a troubling experience for individuals, resulting not in structural/cultural elaboration, but a sense of paralysis centred on worry about the negative consequences of any action.

9.2. Implications for practice

This thesis notes that whilst work-life balance was not the main priority at the time of interview for most of the young solo-living managers and professionals in the sample, there were structural and cultural barriers to the achievement of work-life balance where this was desired. There were also barriers to the expression of dissatisfaction with organisational support in relation to the work-life balance of employees without children – due to cultural norms around the legitimacy of different non-work demands, and the national legislative

framework upon which many organisational provisions were based. On the back of this, several recommendations can be made in relation to the structural and cultural context at both a national and organisational level in order to better accommodate the work-life balance requirements of solo-living employees.

Starting at the national level, a sense of entitlement to work-life balance support is likely to be more widely felt if policies and provisions in relation to work-life balance are based on an equality-based distributive justice rule as opposed to one based on need (related to caring role requirements). It might therefore be beneficial to place work-life balance under the banner of health, safety and wellbeing in the legislative framework, separate to the provisions linked to maternity and caring responsibilities. At the time of writing (2014), the Right to Request Flexible Working is being extended to all employees with 26 weeks' service, so it seems that progress is being made here.

It is hoped that the amendment to legislation above should have an impact on organisational work-life balance policies, and also on employee perceptions and sense of entitlement to support. With the right to request flexible working extended to all employees in legislation, organisations will have no option but to amend their policies – and may well reframe their entire work-life balance provision to be more equality based. Having said this, employee sense of entitlement to support is likely to depend not only on the formal work-life balance policies published in their organisations, but also on how the policies are operationalised, and the extent to which organisational cultures adapt. It was noted in chapter six that many of the organisations that took an equality-based approach to the distribution of work-life balance support in their formal policy actually prioritised the needs of employees with children in practice. With reference to Daniels et al.'s (2000) model of organisation work-life balance culture development, whilst a level three (culture change) or level four (work redesign) culture might be the aim or even the rhetoric in organisations moving forwards, the actual culture could remain at level one (grass roots), with work-life balance still being seen as a childcare issue (see Kinman & McDowell, 2009). In line with the recommendation above, organisations could situate their work-life balance policies within their health and wellbeing initiatives, to shake off the 'family-friendly' connotations, and ensure that all managers are trained in an equality-based approach.

HR professionals and employers should be aware that whilst many solo-living managers and professionals are happy with their work-life balance situation, the demographic is not a homogenous group, and some individuals are likely to be dissatisfied. Furthermore, where

there is dissatisfaction, individuals are likely to think that work-life balance is an organisational responsibility, but not raise their concerns due to perceptions about the legitimacy of their non-work activities. Such feelings are likely to negatively impact these individual's engagement levels, psychological contract (Argyris, 1960; Rousseau, 1989) and stress levels. To address such issues, steps could be taken to legitimise different non-work activities. There could be communication about the negative effects of work-life imbalance for both the individual employee and the organisation, as a result of physical and mental ill-health (Eby et al. 2005; Van Steenbergen & Ellemers, 2009) and burnout and psychological strain (Allen et al. 2000). Time out for 'recovery' from work could be promoted as an important issue for all.

In light of the individualised nature of the sample, organisations could perhaps look for ways to give individual employees more of a say in their work-life balance. Work-life balance could be a matter that is discussed in the individual performance reviews of all employees, with managers asking if there is anything that the company could do to help each individual meet their performance targets, but in a way that is synonymous with their broader life roles. In order to facilitate this, a culture would need to develop in organisations where performance is measured on outputs rather than face-time – something that is potentially in the interest of all parties. Annual satisfaction or engagement surveys could perhaps include questions about work-life balance, and also what is seen to be fair in terms of the allocation of supports. A range of employees could also be consulted before policies are updated – starting with any amendments made as a result of the 2014 legislation change. Giving employees an input into policy development – including the values upon which they are based – should also increase perceptions of procedural justice (Greenberg, 1990). If the policies are then communicated to all, including details on both the rationale and the specifics of the operationalization, perceptions of interpersonal justice should also be high, with employees feeling that they have been treated fairly because the grounds for decision-making have been thoroughly explained (Greenberg, 1990). It would be hoped that such a process would mean that all employees were well aware of the work-life balance policies and provisions in operation in their organisation, as opposed to assuming that it has some, but that they are not for them (as seen for many participants in the current sample).

Organisations might also bear in mind the risks that relate to the solo-living lifestyle, and consider the impact on solo-living employees of long hours, unpredictable finishing times, frequent travel, and mobility. Solo-living could be included as a category for consideration when organisations offer diversity management training to managers and employees. This should ensure that solo-living employees feel like their needs are being acknowledged, and

that organisational cultures are more inclusive. Organisational benefits packages could also offer provisions that are suitable for people who have devoted a lot of their lives to their jobs, to help them with fitness and wellbeing, and to build up hobbies and friendships. As noted in the Methodology chapter of this thesis, one of the sources for research participants in this study was Social Circle – an activity and social club in South Manchester. Some of the participants had joined this club as a way to try out new things and make friends when relocating to the area for their work, and found it useful to introducing them to like-minded people. Organisations could consider investigating such provisions for their employees as an extension to current benefits packages.

9.3. Strengths, limitations and further research

It is hoped that this thesis has made a contribution to knowledge on the subject of work-life balance, and has begun to shed some light on the specific experiences of a demographic group who have been under-researched to date – managerial and professional employees who live alone and do not have children.

36 in-depth biographical narrative interviews were conducted with male and female solo-living managers and professionals from a range of industries and occupations. By beginning the interviews with an open question about the work-life story to the time of interview, insight was gained into the frame of reference of each individual participant; what things were most important to them; and their perceptions of the interaction of structure, culture and agency over their trajectory.

Whilst the sample was considered large and diverse enough for the purposes of this study, it is acknowledged that it represents a very narrow subsection of the solo-living employee demographic. As gender in tandem with age seemed to have a significant impact on the experiences and attitudes of participants, it was unfortunate that only four participants fell into the oldest age band (40-44 years). Having said this, the participants that were seen to have experiences and attitudes that were somewhat different to the rest of the sample were the females aged 35-44, and seven participants were in this category. Further research could extend the age range to explore the influence of gender and age on the work-life balance experience of solo-living employees later in life. It would be interesting to see if male solo-living employees become more concerned with developing roles outside of work as they become older, and how females articulate the work-life interface once they are over the

normal reproductive age. Further research could also be conducted on different types of solo-living employee, looking at non-managerial/professional employees who perhaps are less advantaged in terms of their socio-economic resources.

The critical realist philosophical stance proved useful in understanding the dynamics of structure, culture and agency when it came to the work-life experience and attitude of solo-living managers and professionals. As a mono-method approach was adopted – comprised of in-depth interviews with solo-living employees only – it could be argued that limited information was gained on the structural and cultural features of the work environment, as only participant perceptions of these were available. Whilst I had hoped for more explicit discussion by participants of structural and cultural factors at different levels (national, industry, organisation, work-group), these factors could be seen in the background, proving generative mechanisms for participant experiences and attitudes. Having said this, some participants (notably the females aged 35-44) did speak of their structural and cultural context quite explicitly, suggesting that they were more conscious of things that were beyond their control than other participants. The overall philosophical position of this research can be seen to sit at the more social constructionist end of critical realism (Elder Vass, 2012).

Whilst interviewing solo-living managers and professionals from a range of different industries and occupations gave a nice breadth to this initial exploratory study, future case study research could be conducted in a specific organisation or organisations. If there were in-depth interviews with more than one solo-living manager/professional in one organisation, and this were accompanied by methods aimed at gaining more information about the organisational context, then further insight into the dynamics of structure, culture and agency might be possible. This could include an exploration of the extent to which different solo-living participants in the same organisation held similar perceptions about the organisational approach to work-life balance (or whether there were variations on the basis of factors such as gender and age), and how these compare with the intentions of the HR department and the perceptions of other stakeholders.

In terms of further research, there are a number of issues that would be interesting to explore in greater detail. Notably, with the change in legislation in 2014, it would be interesting to see if organisational approaches to work-life balance support change over the next few years, and if they do, the effect that this has on solo-living employee perceptions when it comes to the work-life interface. Another issue to explore further is the 'work-desired-life conflict' concept – where individuals' work requirements are perceived to be negatively affecting their ability to

develop desired roles in the non-work domain. It would be especially useful to speak to individuals who have felt such a conflict in the past, but who have taken some form of action to deal with the problem. Related to this, it would be interesting to conduct research on solo-living employees who have felt a sense of entitlement to work-life balance support from their employer, and who have spoken out to try and get this. It was noted that most of the participants that were frustrated with their work-life situation in this sample had not taken any action to redress this – it would be nice to explore the factors that give individuals the confidence to speak out.

9.4. Conclusion

The thesis supports a critical realist conceptualisation of the interaction of structure, culture and agency over time. The solo-living managers and professionals were situated in a structural and cultural environment that predated, and had a conditioning effect on, their individual agency. For these individuals, the labour market was the dominant social institution, and so it was the structures and cultures of the labour market that had an impact – in both an enabling and a constraining way.

In terms of enabling structures, education gave individuals a degree of choice over career path, and the balance of work and non-work in their lives (education allowed females the choice of working as well as/instead of being a wife and mother). It also provided individuals with another valuable resource – money – which increased the amount of choice available relating to broader areas of life, including housing situation. Organisational structures and cultures that equated long working hours and mobility with commitment were also enabling for this group, whilst they simultaneously constrained employees with children. Whilst enabling from the view of career progression however, these same structural and cultural factors constrained participant work-life balance, as did the national level legislative structure at the time of researching.

Perceptions of agency, and also the nature of agency, in the group were seen to vary on the basis of priorities at the time of interview and the gendered experience of individualisation. Male and younger female participants considered themselves to be largely in control of their work-life situation, but as they were largely satisfied with their current experience, their agency in relation to the work-life interface was largely iterative – reproducing a structural/cultural environment which championed the ‘ideal worker’ (Acker, 1990). Female

participants aged 35-44 on the other hand, were less confident of their potential for agency, and more reflexive – recognising the structural and cultural constraints in their situation, and the burdens associated with decision making. These individuals were less satisfied with their work-life balance at the time of interview and so were engaging in projectivity and practical evaluation – which provided the potential for structural/cultural elaboration. As risk was the factor that was emphasised in such projectivity and practical evaluation however, the end result was again structural/cultural reproduction.

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Appendices

1. Participant information sheet
2. Consent form
3. Participant Data Sheet
4. Interview schedule
5. Sample characteristics
6. Data Analysis Codes
7. Data Analysis Case example
8. Participant hours

Appendix 1: Participant Information Sheet

Project title: Work-life balance for the solo-living employee

Invitation:

You are being invited to take part in a research project being carried out by a Doctoral student at Leeds University Business School. Before you decide whether to take part, it is important for you to understand why the research is being done and what it will involve. Please take time to read the following information carefully and discuss it with others if you wish. Please do ask for more information if anything is not clear. Thank you for reading this document.

Project purpose:

Much interest has been devoted to the topic of work-life balance in recent years. Successive governments, trade unions, organisations, academics and the media all appear to agree that the issue is important, and that all individuals are entitled to a healthy work-life balance. Having said this, the overwhelming focus appears to be on working parents – and working mothers in particular. This research project seeks to investigate the work-life balance experiences and attitudes of full-time employees who live alone – a group that appears to have been largely neglected to date

Required participants:

A huge range of different people could fall into the category of 'living alone'. In order for meaningful results to be generated in this project, the scope has been narrowed considerably. Individuals invited to participate will fit the following criteria:

- Working full-time in either a managerial or professional position
- Aged 24 – 44 years old
- Currently live alone, or in a flat/house-share arrangement
- Do not have children

(Please ask the researcher for clarification if you are unsure about any of these categories)

It is hoped that around 30 individuals will agree to take part in the project. Participation will entail one in-depth interview that could last up to two hours. Individuals are being invited for participation via two main mechanisms - through Social Circle events, and through personal connections and snowball sampling. The Social Circle has been utilised because the membership base of the club is thought to include individuals from the target group for this

project – busy young professionals. Please note that the research is in no way connected to the club however.

Taking part:

Steve Sutherland of Social Circle has kindly provided permission for the researcher to approach individuals at Social Circle events, but it is up to you personally to decide whether or not to take part in the research. If you do decide to take part you will be given this information sheet to keep, and will be asked to sign a consent form. It is important to be aware that you can still withdraw at any time after this - you do not have to give a reason. If you refuse to participate or withdraw, this will have no negative consequences.

If you agree to take part, the researcher will contact you in the next couple of weeks to arrange a convenient date and time for one in-depth interview, which could last around two hours. You can choose the location for the interview, provided that the environment is conducive (i.e. quiet and relatively free from interruption).

The interview will use mainly open-questions, so that you have maximum control over what we discuss. It is important to be aware however that you can refuse to answer any specific question(s) in the interview and/or terminate the interview at any time. The interview will be tape recorded and then typed up by the researcher after the session. You will be given the opportunity to review of the transcript of your interview before it is used, and all data will be stored in accordance with University of Leeds guidelines on data protection.

Confidentiality:

All the information that you give during the course of the research will be kept strictly confidential. You will not be able to be identified in any reports or publications.

Contact:

Please feel free to contact the researcher at any time during the research process for more information. Details as follows:

Krystal Wilkinson

krystal.wilkinson@hotmail.co.uk

Leeds University Business School

Thank you for taking the time to read this document

Appendix 2: Participant Consent Form

Title of Research Project: Work Life Balance for the Solo-Living Employee

Name of Researcher: Krystal Wilkinson

Please tick the box to the right if you agree with the statement:

1 I confirm that I have read and understand the Participant Information Sheet which explained the above research project. I also confirm that I have had the opportunity to ask questions about the project.

2 I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time without giving any reason and without there being any negative consequences. In addition, should I not wish to answer any particular question or questions, I am free to decline.

3 I understand that my responses will be kept strictly confidential, but give permission for the researcher to have access to my responses and include them in the data analysis. I understand that my name will not be linked with the research materials, and I will not be identified or identifiable in any other reports or publications generated in connection with the research.

4 I agree for the data collected from me to be used in future research

5 I agree to take part in the above research project and will inform the researcher should my contact details change.

Name of participant

Date

Signature

Name of researcher

Date

Signature

To be signed and dated in presence of the participant

Appendix 3: Participant Data Sheet

Work-life balance for the solo-living employee

Agreed pseudonym:

1) Gender: Male Female

2) Age: 24-29 years 30-34 years
35-39 years 40-44 years

3) Ethnic origin: White
(categories from Mixed / multiple ethnic groups
2011 census) Asian / Asian British
Black / African / Caribbean / Black British
Other ethnic group

4) Relationship status: Single Partnered
Married Separated
Divorced Widowed

5) Living arrangement: Live alone House-share

Length of time in current living arrangement:

Financial commitment: Mortgage Renting
Other

6) Highest level of education: GCSE level education
A level or equivalent
Vocational education (NVQ, HNC, HND)
Some undergraduate (not complete)
Graduate level education (e.g. BA, BSc)
Postgraduate (e.g. MA, MBA, MSc, PhD)

7) Current Job Title:

Appendix 4: Interview Schedule

Pseudonym:

SQUIN:

As you know, I'm interested in people who live alone, and how they reconcile their work alongside their lives outside of work. Can we start with you telling me your life story so far, all of the events and experiences you feel have been important to you personally. Start wherever you like and please take all the time you need. I'll just listen first and won't interrupt, I'll just take some notes for if I have any questions for after you have finished telling me about it all.

Break & Data Sheet

Probing questions on issues raised in opening narrative.

Thanks for that. I'd now like to ask you some pre-prepared questions concerning your life in general, and then your work – including your work-group/team, your organisation, and your industry/occupation. I'll ask all of the questions I have here, but if you feel you have already given the answer, just let me know.

Life in general:

- What things are most important to you in life?
- What is your attitude towards your work? What does work mean to you?
- What got you in to your chosen line of work?
- In a typical week, how much of your time is occupied with work and work-related activities? So this could include things like checking e-mails at home, working on the train, going to networking events, or thinking about work at home?
- Again, in a typical week, how much time do you spend on other things in life – partner, friends, housework, hobbies?
- Do you think you tend to spend time on the things that are most important to you?
- Do you think there are any benefits of living alone?
- Do you think there are any down sides?
- What does the term 'work-life balance' mean to you?
- Do you feel in control of your work-life situation? Has this always been the case?

- Do you feel your work requirements have an impact on your relationships and activities outside of work?
- What would constitute your ideal work-life situation?
- Have you ever taken any action to improve your work-life situation?

Work-group:

- How big is your work-group/team?
- How is work allocated within your work-group/team?
- Do members of your work-group/team ever informally manage workloads or provide cover for each other?
- What would you say is the view of work-life balance in your work-group?
- Has your work-group ever had an impact on your personal work-life situation (positive or negative)?
- Have you ever taken any action in relation to how work is allocated in your workgroup?

Organisation:

- What is the size of your organisation (workforce?)
- Do you have any flexibility over your work – maybe hours or location?
- Does your job role require regular travel or mobility?
- How does your current role compare to previous jobs in terms of flexibility and job requirements?
- What do people think advances their career in your organisation? (culture)
- Are there any expectations in your organisation of staff doing some work-related activities in their personal time?
- Does your company have any formal work-life balance policies? If so, do you know what they are?
- Do you think the organisation is generally interested in the work-life reconciliation of its staff? Do they monitor hours, communicate about WLB, etc?
- Do you think your organisation is fair to all employees, irrespective of their domestic situation?
- Is your line manager supportive of your personal work-life reconciliation?
- Have you ever made use of the work-life balance provisions available in your organisation? Why is this?

- Have you ever considered work-life reconciliation factors when making decisions about companies or job roles?
- Is there anything your company could do to help facilitate your personal work-life balance?

Industry / Occupation:

- What is the labour market like in your industry/occupation? Does there tend to be a fair number of job opportunities, or is there a lot of competition for jobs?
- What are the qualification and CPD requirements for working in your field?
- What are the typical requirements in your field regarding working hours and travel, etc?
- What do people think advances their career in your Industry/occupation?
- Are there any expectations in your industry/occupation of people undertaking work-related activities in their personal time, such as networking?
- Have you ever considered work-life balance issues when making decisions about your occupation?
- Are you a member of a union? If so, why?

Moving forwards:

- What are your intentions for the future in terms of work life reconciliation? 5-10 years' time?
- Do you have anything else you would like to add before we finish?

THANK YOU VERY MUCH FOR YOUR TIME

Appendix 5: Participant profile

	Pseudonym	Sector	Job	Organisation	Gender	Age (years)	Ethnic origin	Salary (£)	Education level	Relationship status	Living situation
1	Lewis	Private	Senior Project Manager	Pensions company	Male	35-39	White	30 - 39k	Degree	Single	Alone
2	Fred	Private	Senior Manager	Insolvency Practitioners	Male	35-39	White	40 - 49k	Post-grad	Single	Share
3	Ann	Public	Anaesthetist	NHS	Female	30-34	White	Over 50k	Post-grad	Single	Alone
4	Leah	Private	HR Manager	Law firm	Female	24-29	White	20 - 29K	Post-grad	Partnered	Alone
5	Vincent	Private	Accountant	Engineering company	Male	30-34	White	20 - 29k	Degree	Partnered	Alone
6	Jack	Public	Manager	Local Government	Male	30-34	White	30 - 39k	Degree	Partnered	Alone
7	Paul	Private	Sports Writer / Journalist	Media	Male	40-44	White	20 - 29k	A Level	Partnered (after divorce)	Alone
8	Sebastian	Public	Pharmacist	NHS	Male	30-34	White	30 - 39k	Post-grad	Single (after divorce)	Alone
9	Courtney	Public	Project Manager	Local Government	Female	30-34	Black African	30 - 39k	Degree	Single	Alone
10	Bob	Private	Senior Manager – Procurement	Drinks company	Male	35-39	White	Over 50k	Post-grad	Single (after divorce)	Alone
11	Roo	Private	Finance Manager	Bank	Female	40-44	White	40 - 44k	GCSE	Single (after divorce)	Alone
12	Gemma	Public	Clinical Psychologist	NHS	Female	35-39	White	30 - 39K	Post-grad	Single	Alone

13	Trent	Public	Progression Officer	National Government	Male	30-34	White	20 - 29k	Degree	Single	Alone
14	Stacy	Public	Mental Health Nurse	NHS	Female	30-34	White	20-29k	Diploma	Single (after divorce)	Alone
15	Max	Private	Accounting Analyst	Accountancy company	Male	30-34	White	20-29k	Degree	Single	Share
16	Patrick	Private	Regional Contract Manager	Recruitment company	Male	24-29	White	20-29k	Degree	Partnered	Share
17	Lou	Private	Principal Engineer	Engineering company	Male	40-44	Other	N/A	Degree	Single	Alone
18	Ed	Private	Business Dev. Director	Bank	Male	24-29	White	Over 50k	Degree	Single	Alone
19	Grace	Private	Solicitor	Law Firm	Female	30-34	White	Over 50k	Post-grad	Single (after divorce)	Share
20	Samantha	Private	Regulatory Project Manager	Pharmaceutical company	Female	35-39	White	40-49k	Post-grad	Single	Share
21	Charlie	Public	T&D Manager	NHS	Female	40-44	White	40-49k	Post-grad	Single	Alone
22	James	Private	Bus. Dev. Projects Officer	Mutual business	Male	25-29	White	20-29k	Degree	Single	Share
23	Gerard	Private	Auditor (Associate)	Accountancy company	Male	25-29	White	20-29k	Degree	Single	Share
24	Louise	Private	Head of Marketing	Shopping Centre company	Female	25-29	White	30-39k	Degree	Single	Share
25	Jude	Public	HR Manager	Local Government	Female	25-29	White	30-39k	Post-grad	Single	Alone
26	Florence	Private	Solicitor	Corporate Law firm	Female	30-34	White	Over 50k	Degree	Single	Alone
27	Suzanne	Private	Corporate HR	Restaurant Chain	Female	35-39	White	Over 50k	Post-grad	Single	Alone

			Manager								
28	Adam	Public	Teacher	Sixth Form College	Male	35-39	White	30-39k	Post-grad	Single	Alone
29	Tony	Public	Solicitor	Law firm	Male	25-29	White	Over 50k	Post-grad	Single	Share
30	Isla	Public	Solicitor	Law firm	Female	30-34	White	Over 50k	Post-grad	Single	Share
31	Judith	Higher Ed	Academic	University	Female	30-34	White	N/A	Post-grad	Single	Alone
32	Lee	Public	Radiographer	NHS	Male	35-39	White	N/A	Degree	Single	Alone
33	Alan	Private	Dentist	Dental Practice	Male	30-34	Asian	Over 50k	Degree	Single	Alone
34	Maria	Both	Lecturer	University	Female	35-39	White	Varies	Post-grad	Single	Share
35	Jenny	Private	Marketing Manager	Food Company	Female	35-39	White	Over 50k	Degree	Single	Share
36	Vera	Private	Business Performance Analyst	Pharmaceutical company	Female	24-29	White	20-29k	HND	Single	Alone

Appendix 6: Data Analysis Codes

A priori codes - from the literature and research questions:

Work-life balance:

WLB: Negative

WLB: Positive

Boundaries

Temporal and spatial:

Working hours

Time flexibility

Location Flexibility

Mobility

Relationships:

Family

Partnership

Friendship

Structural/cultural influences:

Work-group

Organisation

Industry

Profession

Legislation

Family

Local community

Religion

Individualisation:

Choice

Freedom

Risk

Justice:

Fairness

Inequality

In vivo codes - emerging from the data during analysis:

Achievement

Fulfilment

Support at work

Support outside work – financial / practical / emotional

Dating

Social Group

Comparisons

Decisions – positive and negative

Chance/luck

Frustration

Gender inequality

Assumptions of others

Perceived lack of awareness from others

Legitimacy

Appendix 7: Data Analysis Case Example

Case Analysis 22

Name: Charlie
 Job: Training and Development Manager: NHS
 Category: Manager, Public Sector
 Gender: Female
 Age: 40 - 44

Trajectory:

Event	Factors affecting the situation / transition	Researcher thoughts
Moved away for university	Didn't get first choice of university because she didn't get the grades, so ended up at second choice university and doing a different course. 'A very unplanned life – it all kind of happens by accident really [laughs], more than design'.	Early experience of compromised choice
Placement year. Living at home	Worked in a Learning and Development department, hence her following career. Attributes it to 'luck' that she got a paid placement. Found it difficult living back at home - parents quite strict (lack of freedom)	Decision attributed to luck, and the experience was not all positive
First job & move from Lancashire to Yorkshire	Applied for several jobs. 'I was quite lucky in them days, got a job quite quickly, but it was working for Lucas Engineering which was based in Burnley'. Goes on to say she was offered a London job on the same day but that she didn't want to live in London, so went for the Burnley one.	Mixture of agency and luck
Bought house	Considered renting to be dead money	Agency
Job change	Had a bad experience, so felt the need to move. Prior to this, she had attempted an internal move: 'I actually tried very quickly to get a job back down in Birmingham, because Lucas had a lot of factories down in the Midlands... and then my boss got	Agency, but due to bad experience. Agency resulting in negative experience.

	grumpy about it and it all got a bit difficult'	
Job change	Saw an opportunity in the NHS	Agency
Bought house with partner, but did not move in.	The relationship broke down	Circumstance
Job change	Possibility of redundancy	Agency, but linked to structural changes
Job change to private sector	Saw a job that was paid well, 'thought there's no way I'm going to get it', but when somebody had a go at her for not doing something 'again the bullying stuff, and I thought right, I'm going for the interview – a bit of a temper thing really'.	Agency, but linked to bad experience
Job change	Redundancy	Structural factor
Job change	The possibility that the team would be going out of the NHS, also the distance	Structural factor and agency
Current job role	Feels the job was mis-sold - mainly 'number crunching' when she expected a training and development role. Feels trapped: 'So it's not a good job, it's not a job I'd choose to stay in – if I could get out I would, but we're back to the fact that I've got a mortgage to pay and there's nothing doing'.	Constraint

Narrative (tone / emphasis)

Brief opening account (2 minutes) focused mainly on her history of living alone. The story opens with: 'I've pretty much lived on my own ever since I left uni really'. The story is not strictly chronological, and contains some discussion of relationships alongside discussion of different housing situations, and contains some evaluation alongside description. She attributes most elements of the trajectory to circumstance, and concludes the story with: 'I don't think there's been any plan around it' it, I've just ended up kind of living on my own'. At the very end she adds a caveat that: 'Which is no bad thing [laughs], it's not a bad thing', suggesting she is either positive about living alone, or a little defensive about the state and what my assumptions might be. As the narrative did not touch on work, a prompt was made here: 'and what about the work side of the equation?' She responds in a similar way to her housing story, starting with:

'I've kind of moved about through different jobs just because of circumstances really'. There is one evaluation comment regarding her first organisation, which was negative, but apart from that, the account is descriptive. There is no comment on her personal work values or motivations, etc.

Key themes and issues in full interview:

What's important	Probably friends and family...I've only got a tiny family, well there's only really my mum now. And a few close friends', 'Being able to do what I want to do really. I suppose that's another one as well – being free to do what I want to do. Exercise and being healthy' (not possible at the moment - work hours and back injury)
View of work	Frustrated: 'I think in terms of worky stuff, it's about [what's important is] about doing something where I'm achieving things, and I'm not – I think that is a bit of a frustration at the moment'. Not able to make a difference, or do the things that she enjoys (interacting with people).
Work demands	'I'm spending, like I say, 45-50 hours a week most weeks, and sometimes having to take stuff home, doing things that I'm not really all that interested in' (number-crunching). Spoke more positively of regional job, even though it was also demanding (travel, etc.) because it was more fulfilling. Currently worries about work issues: 'All the time at the moment... Been quite... not really poorly, but I've been having palpitations and stuff since about July last year... nothing wrong with my heart, just stress' - 'it's the nature of the work, it's the culture of the organisation – very blame oriented, very political, people don't work together' and managing a difficult team. Tenuous agency statement later on: 'But I refuse to take work home. I've had a couple of weekends since I've been here where I've spent the whole weekend just working, solid. But I just refuse to do it - I won't take work home. But I've got a piece of work now that is getting that tight on deadline that I can't see any way of doing it other than taking it home'.
Family	Talks to mum every day on phone (multi-tasks by doing it on drive home). Her mother was a support when she had back injury, but she's aware that her mother is old and won't be around forever. I had to ask about family background at the start. Grew up with parents (both teachers) and brother - little info given. Mum is the only one really mentioned in rest of interview. Has a cat - negatively affected by long hours.
Partnership	In opening story: 'I've been in relationships but they're... kind of a bit of a disaster area around that'. Well into the interview that first mentions current partner, and sort of as an aside: talking about being off work with a back injury: 'And that was quite lonely, but my old boss, who's now my other half, he used to ring me every day, so

	I'd talk to him, and I did do my e-mails'. Mentions having a cynical perspective to relationships now. One bad experience in past put her off: 'had my fingers really badly burned so didn't even get involved in a relationship or anything for about nine years – so I've literally been on my own. It's only because he's come along and I'd been working with him for a long time, that I've thought well actually I do know him and it's a bit different'
Friends	One close friend, who she does most things with, is in a similar situation (lives alone). Others: 'a lot of my friends are married so you do tend to not see them as much'
Work group	Many colleagues cause problems - the senior manager who works long hours and sets an impossible precedent, the team members who are not competent and don't work beyond their hours at all, the HR department who 'drop us in it'.
Living alone	Pretty much always lived alone. 'I don't think there's been any plan really around it, I've just ended up kind of living on my own'. States throughout that not a bad thing - likes it. Benefits: 'God yeah [laughs] you can do what you want can't you? There's no one to answer to'. Thinks she might find it difficult to cohabit now after so long living alone. Down-sides: perceptions of others; no one to help with jobs, the responsibility - has in the past made career decisions because can't afford not to be working.
Mobility	- No mobility in childhood, always same house (mum's still there) - Mobility for first job, but tried to move back nearer home - Has moved jobs and houses a lot over trajectory, but has tried to stay in Manchester
Ideal work-life balance	Flexi-time - states that this is the first NHS trust that she's worked in that doesn't have it. Or maybe a nine-day fortnight. Quite modest: 'But really, to work my hours – so I can back to doing some exercise, not being so shattered at the end of the week so you don't do anything at the weekend except just jobs'
Any action taken to improve work-life balance?	No attempt to challenge structural contributors to over-working. Says the company already knows about the problems, so action futile? Not part of a 'collective' for action (her team just work hours, other manager is workaholic and has support at home) Leaves early on a Friday, but only because back-care class – a culturally 'legitimate' reason. Other days, too much work to leave on time, but doesn't feel like she has a valid reason to leave
Fairness	Disparity: 'It does bug the hell out of me – all this 'oh they have to go because they've got children' or they have a day off because their kids poorly, another day off because their kids poorly, another day off. There's no... we have to be soldiering on because we've not got that'. Thinks it's both the culture and self-imposed: 'there's definitely, even if it's unwritten or unsaid, there's that assumption that if you're not going home to somebody or to a family then you

	<p>don't need to go home', but then also: 'You feel like you need an excuse to get away, and you feel...you feel bad if you don't have that excuse'. Another statement: leaving for children is 'more acceptable. Whereas if I went 'sorry, gotta go', it'd be like 'where are you going?' and 'gotta go, because I'm... going running', it's not like a legitimate reason for not being in work. Because like poor little child at school gate, not being picked up by mummy – that's an awful thing, but you needing to get home to do some exercise and not die of a heart attack is not really a legitimate reason [laughs] - being dramatic now' - Feels need to comment on her statement, almost apologise for the strength of feeling.</p> <p>Another example: assumption that she would work over Christmas: 'somebody said to me 'oh we just assumed you'd be working because you won't need leave will you – for the days between Christmas and new year – because you've not got any family'' - even though her mum always came to stay at Christmas.</p>
Support	<p>Feels a lack of practical support in the home. Feels she has a lot of domestic chores to do, which limits her personal time. Talks of a time when she had a back injury, and she would not have been able to cope if her mother wasn't around to help – this is a concern as her mother is getting old.</p>
Comparisons	<p>Compares her situation to several others during the account:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Her team at work, most at lower level who just work their set hours - Senior Manager who has children so can leave at 3pm - Another Manager who is a workaholic, but is able to work long hours as she loves the work and has a supportive partner - Predecessor in role (became ill) <p>Most of the comparisons seen to highlight the difficulty of her own situation</p>
Risk, decisions, consequences	<p>Says she has a 'cynical' view of relationships because as has had her fingers burned in past – risk averse</p> <p>Says that living alone limits the actions she can take (moving jobs) and the voice she has at work ('rocking the boat') – due to the sole financial responsibility for paying the mortgage</p> <p>Demonstrates regret over some of the decisions she has taken over the course of her career</p> <p>Suggests that big decisions can seem harder when you have no one to share them with</p>
Plans for the future	<p>Hopes to not be in the same job in 6-months (unless it gets better).</p> <p>Personal side messy - partner coming out of a relationship, has a daughter, but hopefully will see more of him. Thinks she'll probably be still living alone. Can see benefits of each, but if did move in with him, would keep her own house - for the security.</p>

Appendix 8: Participant Hours

The following table indicates participant responses to the questions concerning their contractual and estimated actual weekly working hours, by gender and age group

Pseudonym	Gender	Age	Contract hours (per week)	Estimated hours (per week)
Patrick	Male	24-29	40	45
Ed	Male	24-29	40	60
James	Male	25-29	37.5	45
Gerard	Male	25-29	40	n/a
Tony	Male	25-29	35	40
Vincent	Male	30-34	40	40
Jack	Male	30-34	35	39.5
Sebastian	Male	30-34	39.5	39.5
Trent	Male	30-34	37	37
Max	Male	30-34	40	40
Alan	Male	30-34	40	40
Lewis	Male	35-39	35	39
Fred	Male	35-39	37.5	43.5
Bob	Male	35-39	39	47.5
Adam	Male	35-39	35	n/a
Lee	Male	35-39	37.5	Varies
Paul	Male	40-44	40	40
Lou	Male	40-44	37.5	39
Leah	Female	24-29	39.5	50
Vera	Female	24-29	37.5	37.5
Louise	Female	25-29	37.5	50
Jude	Female	25-29	37	n/a
Ann	Female	30-34	48	48
Courtney	Female	30-34	35	55
Stacy	Female	30-34	37.5	37.5
Grace	Female	30-34	35	35
Florence	Female	30-34	35	75
Isla	Female	30-34	37	42+
Judith	Female	30-34	Varies	Lots
Gemma	Female	35-39	37.5	n/a
Samantha	Female	35-39	36.5	36.5
Suzanne	Female	35-39	37.5	60
Maria	Female	35-39	Varies	70
Jenny	Female	35-39	38	60
Roo	Female	40-44	35	45
Charlie	Female	40-44	37.5	50