UNVEILING REALITIES: A QUALITATIVE EXPLORATION OF GENDER EQUALITY POLICIES TO MAINTAIN A WORK BALANCE IN SWEDEN.

VAXJO
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GRACE NDUTA MACHARIA
SUPERVISOR: YOONHYOK CHOE
Abstract

This qualitative study delves into the intricate relationship between gender equality policies and work-life balance in the Swedish professional landscape. Thematic analysis of narratives from four respondents reveals insights into "Perception of Gender Equality Policies," "Key Challenges in Balancing Career and Family Responsibilities," and "Organizational Practices and Cultures." Aligned with Herzberg's Balance Theory and Feminist Theory, the findings highlight the positive impact of gender equality policies, fostering inclusivity and challenging norms. Challenges persist, including gender role conformity, family prioritization stigma, and glass ceilings for women. Organizational culture and leadership play pivotal roles, with resistance varying across departments. The study extends discourse on policy effectiveness to Sweden, emphasizing nuanced considerations in the evolving work landscape. Resonating with prior research, it underscores the necessity of future studies on individual experiences, evolving work paradigms, and intersectionality to enhance gender equality policy implications. A vital step in understanding Swedish work dynamics, this research offers insights for policymakers, organizations, and scholars, aiming to inform policy improvements for a more equitable work environment.

Keywords

Gender equality policies, work-life balance, Sweden, Herzberg's Balance Theory, Feminist Theory, organizational culture, leadership, policy effectiveness, workplace dynamics, Scandinavia, intersectionality, qualitative research, thematic clusters, stigma, organizational practices,
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CHAPTER 1. Introduction

The pursuit of gender equality and work-life balance has become a central focus in contemporary societies, reflecting a broader societal shift towards recognizing and addressing gender disparities in various spheres, including the workplace. Sweden, renowned for its progressive stance on gender equality, serves as an intriguing context to delve into the nuanced dynamics of policies designed to foster work-life balance. This study embarks on a qualitative exploration, aiming to uncover the intricate realities of how gender equality policies in Sweden influence the maintenance of work-life balance among its diverse workforces.

1.1 Gender equality, a cornerstone of Swedish societal values, has been enshrined in various policies and legal frameworks.

Sweden's commitment to gender equality is deeply embedded in its historical and cultural fabric, with a long-standing tradition of policy initiatives aimed at dismantling gender-based disparities. The Swedish government has consistently implemented and revised policies to promote gender equality, recognizing it as essential not only for individual well-being but also for the overall economic and social development of the nation (Evertsson & Nermo, 2004). The proactive stance of the Swedish government is evident in the implementation of policies such as parental leave, subsidized childcare, and flexible work arrangements. These policies are designed not only to facilitate women's increased participation in the workforce but also to encourage men's active involvement in caregiving responsibilities, thereby challenging traditional gender roles (Haas & Hwang, 2008).

1.2 Despite these commendable efforts, the efficacy of gender equality policies in ensuring work-life balance remains a subject of scrutiny.

While Sweden has made significant strides, it is imperative to critically examine the lived experiences of individuals within the Swedish workforce. Gender equality policies, no matter how well-intentioned, must be assessed for their impact on the ground to ensure that they effectively contribute to the overarching goal of work-life balance. This study aligns with the growing recognition that the mere existence of policies does not guarantee their successful
implementation or the elimination of gender disparities (Crittenden & Bianchi, 2009). Thus, a qualitative exploration becomes essential to uncover the multifaceted dimensions of how these policies are perceived, adopted, and experienced by individuals within diverse organizational and societal contexts.

1.3 Understanding work-life balance requires a holistic examination of the challenges faced by both men and women.

Work-life balance is not a one-size-fits-all concept; rather, it is a dynamic interplay between professional and personal spheres that varies across individuals and social contexts (Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985). In Sweden, as in many other societies, achieving work-life balance is intricately tied to gender roles and expectations. Both men and women navigate the complex terrain of career aspirations, familial responsibilities, and societal expectations. Previous research indicates that while gender equality policies have positively influenced women's participation in the workforce, challenges persist in dismantling deeply ingrained stereotypes and expectations regarding caregiving responsibilities, particularly for men (Borchorst & Siim, 2008). Thus, a comprehensive examination must consider the experiences of both genders to provide a holistic understanding of the impact and effectiveness of gender equality policies in fostering work-life balance.

1.4 The role of organizations as mediators between policy frameworks and lived experiences adds another layer of complexity.

Organizational practices and cultures play a pivotal role in shaping the effectiveness of gender equality policies. The alignment between policies and the day-to-day realities of workplaces influences how individuals perceive and enact work-life balance. Previous studies have highlighted the importance of supportive organizational cultures in facilitating the successful implementation of work-life balance initiatives (Kossek et al., 2017). In the Swedish context, where gender equality is championed at the national level, exploring how organizations interpret and integrate these policies into their internal structures becomes crucial. This study aims to unravel the organizational nuances that either enhance or hinder
the translation of policy intentions into tangible improvements in work-life balance for employees.

1.5 Significance of the Study: Bridging Gaps in Knowledge and Practice

This qualitative exploration holds immense significance for multiple stakeholders. Academically, it contributes to the growing body of literature on gender equality, work-life balance, and policy effectiveness (Folbre, 2006). By delving into the specificities of the Swedish context, the study adds nuance to the broader discussions on the intersectionality of gender, policy, and work-life dynamics. Furthermore, the findings may inform policymakers in Sweden and beyond about the strengths and weaknesses of existing gender equality measures, offering valuable insights for policy adjustments and improvements (Folbre, 2006).

Organizations stand to benefit significantly from the study's outcomes. Insights into the challenges faced by employees in achieving work-life balance can guide companies in refining their internal practices. By fostering a workplace culture that aligns with the goals of gender equality policies, organizations can contribute to employee well-being, satisfaction, and productivity. The study's holistic approach, considering both individual experiences and organizational dynamics, provides a comprehensive understanding that can inform practical interventions for creating more inclusive and supportive work environments.

Moreover, the research contributes to the global discourse on gender equality and work-life balance, offering comparative insights for other nations grappling with similar challenges. Cross-cultural studies have demonstrated the contextual variations in the implementation and impact of work-life balance policies, emphasizing the need for nuanced, locally informed approaches (Lewis, Gambles, & Rapoport, 2007). By focusing on the Swedish context, this study provides a unique perspective that can inform international discussions and initiatives aimed at advancing gender equality and work-life balance.

1.6 Relevant to the master’s in international Affairs.

This study holds significant relevance for a Master's in International Affairs as it offers a nuanced exploration of the complex interplay between gender equality policies and work-life balance within the Swedish professional landscape. Understanding how such policies operate within a specific cultural and organizational context is crucial for international affairs.
professionals dealing with global workforce dynamics. The insights derived from thematic analysis, guided by established theories like Herzberg's Balance Theory and Feminist Theory, provide a robust framework for comprehending the broader implications of gender equality policies on workplace dynamics.

Moreover, the study's emphasis on organizational practices, leadership roles, and challenges faced by individuals aligns with the broader discussions on diversity, equity, and inclusion in international affairs. Professionals in this field often grapple with issues related to gender dynamics and policy effectiveness, making this study a valuable resource for informing policy decisions, promoting inclusivity, and fostering work environments that resonate with global standards of equality. The comparative aspects of the research, exploring Scandinavian nuances, further contribute to a well-rounded understanding that is essential for navigating the complexities of international work environments and policymaking.

In conclusion, as I embark on this qualitative exploration, the aim is to uncover the realities that lie beneath the surface of gender equality policies in Sweden. By examining the lived experiences of individuals, considering the challenges faced by both men and women, and scrutinizing the role of organizations, this study aspires to shed light on the complexities of achieving work-life balance in a context where gender equality is a national priority. Through this exploration, the study aims to contribute not only to academic knowledge but also to the ongoing efforts to create workplaces that are truly equitable and supportive of diverse life paths and choices.

1.7 Aim of the Study and Research Questions

The primary aim of this qualitative exploration is to gain a comprehensive understanding of the impact and effectiveness of gender equality policies in Sweden in relation to the maintenance of work-life balance. The study seeks to unveil the lived experiences of individuals within the Swedish workforce, shedding light on the practical realities and challenges faced by both men and women in achieving and sustaining work-life balance. Through an in-depth exploration, the aim is to contribute nuanced insights that can inform policy improvements and advance the understanding of the intricate dynamics surrounding gender equality and work-life balance in the Swedish context. Ultimately, the study aspires to
provide valuable knowledge that can contribute to the enhancement of gender equality policies and promote a more equitable and balanced work environment in Sweden.

Research Questions

1. **How do Gender Equality Policies in Sweden Influence the Perception and Implementation of Work-Life Balance Among Employees?**

   This research question delves into the impact of gender equality policies on the attitudes, behaviours, and experiences of employees in Sweden. It seeks to understand how these policies are perceived, embraced, or possibly overlooked in the pursuit of work-life balance. By examining the lived experiences, the study aims to uncover the nuances in the implementation of gender equality measures and their influence on individuals within the Swedish workforce.

2. **What are the Key Challenges Faced by Men and Women in Sweden in Balancing Career and Family Responsibilities, and How Do Gender Equality Policies Address or Contribute to These Challenges?**

   This research question focuses on identifying and analysing the specific challenges encountered by both men and women in Sweden concerning the balancing of career and family responsibilities. It explores the gender-specific aspects of work-life balance and investigates whether existing gender equality policies effectively address or contribute to overcoming these challenges. By considering the intersectionality of gender roles and professional life, the study aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of the complexities involved in achieving work-life balance.

3. **How Do Organizational Practices and Cultures in Sweden Influence the Effectiveness of Gender Equality Policies in Facilitating Work-Life Balance?**

   This research question explores the organizational level of analysis, investigating how the practices and cultures within workplaces in Sweden contribute to or hinder the effectiveness of gender equality policies in promoting work-life balance. By examining the alignment between policies and organizational realities, the study aims to uncover potential gaps and areas for improvement. Understanding the interplay
between policy frameworks and organizational dynamics can offer valuable insights for both policymakers and employers to create a more supportive and inclusive work environment.

1.8 Explanation of Concepts

**Gender Equality Policies**: Gender equality policies refer to institutional measures and frameworks designed to ensure equal opportunities, rights, and treatment for individuals of all genders in various aspects of life, particularly in the workplace (World Economic Forum, 2019).

**Work-Life Balance**: Definition: Work-life balance entails maintaining a harmonious relationship between one's professional and personal life, ensuring well-being and satisfaction in both domains (Greenhaus & Allen, 2011).

**Thematic Analysis**: Thematic analysis is a qualitative research method involving the identification, analysis, and reporting of patterns (themes) within data, often used to uncover underlying meanings in textual information (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

**Herzberg's Balance Theory**: Herzberg's Two-Factor Theory posits that job satisfaction and dissatisfaction are influenced by separate sets of factors, where "motivators" contribute to satisfaction, and "hygiene factors" prevent dissatisfaction (Herzberg et al., 1959).

**Feminist Theory**: Definition: Feminist theory encompasses a range of perspectives examining issues related to gender equality, discrimination, and social justice, often emphasizing the need to challenge and transform existing power structures (Tong, 2009).

**Intersectionality**: Intersectionality is a theoretical framework that acknowledges the interconnected nature of social categories (such as gender, race, class) and explores how they mutually shape individuals' experiences and identities (Crenshaw, 1989).

1.9 Thesis Disposition

Chapter 1 introduces the reader to the study's focus on gender equality and work-life balance in Sweden. It outlines the historical context, emphasizing Sweden's progressive policies. The need for a qualitative exploration is highlighted, considering the holistic nature of work-life balance. The role of organizations and the study's significance for academia and practical applications, particularly in International Affairs, are briefly discussed. The chapter
concludes by presenting the primary aim and research questions that guide the study. Plus the explanation of the concepts.

Chapter 2 reviews existing scholarly works on gender equality policies and work-life balance in Sweden. It explores the impact of flexible working arrangements, conducts a comparative analysis of Scandinavian policies, and delves into the shaping of gender equality policies in Europe. The synthesis of literature underscores the need for deeper research into individual experiences, evolving work paradigms, and intersectionality. The chapter concludes by identifying gaps and suggesting future research directions.

Chapter 3 explores the impact of gender equality policies on work-life balance in Sweden using Balance Theory and Feminist Theory. Balance Theory delves into job motivators, hygiene factors, and job characteristics, providing insights into work satisfaction. Feminist Theory, rooted in the Third Wave perspective, emphasizes intersectionality, challenging traditional gender roles and advocating for inclusive policies that recognize diverse experiences. The synthesis of these theories offers a comprehensive framework to analyse and recommend gender equality policies that foster work-life balance in Sweden.

Chapter 4 outlines the methodology of the research, employing a phenomenological approach within the philosophy of science perspective. The study adopts an interpretive paradigm, recognizing the subjective nature of reality and multiple socially constructed perspectives. The chosen research design is a descriptive phenomenological approach, aligned with Moustakas' principles, emphasizing freedom in expression for participants. The data collection involves qualitative interviews and supplementary sources, with the analysis following Moustakas' guidelines to uncover thematic clusters and extract the essence of participants' experiences.

Chapter 5 analyses the impact of gender equality policies on work-life balance in Sweden. Thematic clusters include perceptions of these policies, challenges in balancing career and family, and organizational practices. Positive impacts on the work environment align with Herzberg's Balance Theory and Third Wave Feminism. Varied employee perceptions, challenges in conforming to traditional roles, and the need for tailored policies are discussed. The chapter also explores organizational cultures, emphasizing the role of leadership. Findings align with existing literature, contributing nuanced insights to the discourse on gender equality policies and work-life balance in Sweden.
Chapter 6 concludes the study on gender equality policies in Sweden, aligning with Balance Theory and Feminist perspectives. The discussion emphasizes the positive impact of policies on work environments, addresses challenges such as gender roles and glass ceilings, and suggests avenues for further research. Overall, the chapter provides insights into the complexities of policy effectiveness and offers a roadmap for advancing equity in the professional landscape.

CHAPTER 2- Previous Research.

Gender equality stands as a cornerstone in the narrative of Swedish societal evolution, illustrated by a robust collection of policies carefully constructed to cultivate parity across diverse realms, notably within the workplace. This literature review conducts a discerning analysis of current scholarly works to unveil the complex details surrounding the impact of gender equality policies on work-life balance in Sweden. By scrutinizing historical contexts, policy frameworks, and the tangible implications for the workforce, this review aims to contribute a comprehensive understanding of the multifaceted relationship between gender equality policies and the intricacies of achieving work-life equilibrium.

2.1 The influence of flexible working arrangements.

Synthesizing existing research, Chung and Van der Lippe (2018) underscore the profound impact of gender equality policies on work-life balance while acknowledging persistent challenges that warrant further investigation. They advocate for in-depth research into micro-level factors affecting policy effectiveness, including individual perceptions, coping mechanisms, and the intersections of gender with other social categories.

The evolving nature of work, marked by remote work and changing employment structures, prompts a reassessment of existing policies for continued relevance and effectiveness. Additionally, the role of technological advancements in shaping work-life balance is a crucial consideration, exploring how digital tools either facilitate or hinder the achievement of a harmonious balance (Chung & Van der Lippe, 2018).
Chung and Van der Lippe (2018) contribute to the discourse by distinguishing between different types of flexible working arrangements, such as flexitime, working from home, and part-time work. Their analysis reveals distinctions in how these arrangements relate to increased unpaid overtime hours for men and women, highlighting the need to consider the nuances of flexible working for different groups. A comprehensive understanding of the intricate dynamics of gender equality policies and their implications for work-life balance requires exploring individual experiences, the evolving nature of work, and the intersectionality of gender with other social factors.

2.2 A Comparative Analysis of Scandinavian Gender Equality Policies

The preceding previous study, conducted by Borchorst and Siim (2008), illuminates the intricate landscape of gender equality policies in the Scandinavian context, specifically examining Denmark, Norway, and Sweden (Borchorst & Siim, 2008). This examination scrutinizes the interplay of gender with other societal dimensions, such as ethnicity and immigration. Additionally, it investigates the transforming role of women in politics, the influence of state feminism, and the effectiveness of welfare policies designed to support women.

Within the Scandinavian region, disparities in the implementation of gender equality policies are evident (Borchorst & Siim, 2008). Denmark emerges as a case with a relatively fragile manifestation of state feminism, encountering difficulties in institutionalizing gender equality measures. This is coupled with a diminishing connection between feminist activism outside the parliamentary sphere and the engagement of female politicians. Norway is characterized by an ambivalent approach, coexisting with diverse models of gender equality. In contrast, Sweden stands out as a success story in state feminism, marked by a revitalized feminist movement and a progressive strengthening of gender equality (Borchorst & Siim, 2008).

The exploration extends to the changing dynamics of the public-private divide, particularly concerning tasks related to reproduction and caregiving. The narrative contemplates the influence of political ideologies, such as right-wing perspectives emphasizing individual choice and marketization, on the formulation of gender equality policies (Borchorst & Siim, 2008). Moreover, the analysis delves into the global dimension, addressing challenges posed by globalization and aging populations to welfare policies. Varied viewpoints on woman-friendly policies come to the forefront, with some advocating for their indispensability for
economic competitiveness, while others express reservations, particularly from a neoclassical economic standpoint, about their fiscal implications (Borchorst & Siim, 2008). This discourse offers a nuanced understanding of the Scandinavian encounter with gender equality policies, encompassing the intersectionality of gender with ethnicity, the role played by state feminism, and the ongoing challenges and debates within the region (Borchorst & Siim, 2008).

2.3 Comparative Analysis of Policies and Reconciliation Patterns

Sigle-Rushton's (2005) comparative study between the UK and Sweden is instrumental in highlighting the distinctive features of Sweden's policies and their influence on work-family reconciliation patterns. This research traverses beyond mere policy examination, offering a profound exploration of the cultural and institutional factors that shape work-life balance. By scrutinizing policy design intricacies and variations in approaches between nations, researchers gain insights into the adaptability and transferability of successful policy elements. Comparative analyses, when expanded, offer a robust framework for understanding the contextual factors that influence the reception and effectiveness of gender equality policies.

Expanding on the comparative analysis, it is essential to delve into the temporal dimension of policy impact. Policies may undergo modifications over time, responding to societal changes and evolving understandings of work-life dynamics. Investigating how policies have adapted to meet contemporary needs provides a comprehensive perspective on their effectiveness. Moreover, understanding the longevity of policy impacts enables a nuanced analysis of their sustained influence on work-life balance (Lewis, 1992).

2.4 Shaping Gender Equality Policies and Work-Life Balance in Europe

In the pursuit of fostering gender equality and achieving work-life balance, a body of literature has emerged, offering diverse perspectives on policy interventions and collaborative mechanisms across European countries. Rubery's exploration of gender and employment relations (Rubery, 2007) sheds light on the organizational structures that influence gender dynamics, providing a foundation for understanding the complexities of work-life balance.

Sainsbury's work on gender and welfare state change in Europe (Sainsbury, 2012) contributes valuable insights into the intersection of gender, welfare policies, and societal changes. By
examining the evolving landscape of welfare states, Sainsbury offers a lens through which to analyse how policy frameworks impact work-life balance.

Conrad's research on feminist perspectives in the foundational economy (Conrad, 2020) delves into the role of feminist thought in shaping economic structures and policies. This perspective adds depth to the understanding of how economic systems can either facilitate or hinder the achievement of gender equality and work-life balance.

Ostner's comparative analysis of changing inequalities and societal impacts in rich countries (Ostner, 2014) provides a nuanced examination of societal impacts, including the gendered dimensions of work-life balance policies, offering valuable insights into the varying experiences across European nations.

This literature review, drawing on the works of Rubery, Sainsbury, Conrad, and Ostner, offers a nuanced understanding of the complexities surrounding gender equality policies and work-life balance in the European context. Their diverse perspectives contribute to a comprehensive exploration of the successes and challenges encountered in the pursuit of effective work-life balance strategies across European nations.

The European context holds significant relevance for this study on gender equality policies and work-life balance in Sweden. By examining policy approaches and experiences from diverse European countries, the study gains a broader understanding of effective strategies and challenges in fostering work-life balance. Insights from the European lens, enriched by authors like Rubery, Sainsbury, Conrad, and Ostner, contribute to a mosaic of perspectives. Analysing these collaborative mechanisms provides insights into how nations can mutually benefit from each other's experiences, fostering a collective approach to advancing gender equality and work-life balance.

2.5 Synthesis and Future Directions

The integration of existing literature underscores the significant influence of gender equality policies in Sweden on the equilibrium between work and personal life (Jonung, 2016; Jansson, 2008). However, it also reveals persistent challenges that warrant further exploration. This amalgamation prompts a call for forthcoming research to delve more deeply into the lived experiences of individuals, scrutinizing micro-level factors that impact the effectiveness of these policies (Perrons, 2015). A more detailed examination of individual
perceptions, coping mechanisms, and the intricate negotiation between work and personal life is imperative. Future research should also consider the intersections of gender with other social categories, such as race and socioeconomic status, to gain a more comprehensive understanding of the diverse ways individuals experience the effects of gender equality policies on work-life balance.

Furthermore, the evolving landscape of work demands a more thorough investigation (Lewis, 1992). The surge in remote work, gig economy roles, and shifting expectations around conventional employment structures necessitates a reassessment of existing policies. It is essential to explore how gender equality policies can adapt to these changing work paradigms, ensuring their sustained relevance and effectiveness. Additionally, research should examine the influence of technological advancements on work-life balance, exploring how digital tools and communication technologies either facilitate or impede the attainment of a harmonious balance.

Moreover, the concept of intersectionality assumes significance in understanding the impact of gender equality policies on work-life balance (Crenshaw, 1989). Acknowledging that individuals simultaneously navigate multiple social categories; intersectional perspectives highlight the intricate ways these intersections shape their experiences. Future research should delve into how intersecting identities, such as gender and ethnicity or gender and disability, converge to influence the nuanced experiences of work-life balance within the context of gender equality policies.

In conclusion, this literature review provides a nuanced exploration of the intricate relationship between gender equality policies and work-life balance in Sweden. By delving into historical roots, understanding the rhetoric and reality of policies, conducting comparative analyses, and drawing lessons from the broader European context, this review lays the groundwork for future research directions. The synthesis calls for a more granular examination of individual experiences, a consideration of evolving work paradigms, and a deeper exploration of intersectionality, providing a roadmap for advancing the in depth understanding of gender equality policies and their practical implications for work-life balance.
CHAPTER 3 - Theoretical Framework

In the context of exploration the gender equality policies to maintain a work-life balance in Sweden two essential theoretical frameworks come into play in my study: Balance Theory and feminist theory. I have chosen these two frameworks as they offer a comprehensive insights into the impact of these policies on the equilibrium between men and women in the workplace. The combination of Balance Theory and Feminist Theory provides a robust theoretical framework for the study. Balance Theory delves into the intricacies of work design and individual well-being, while Feminist Theory sheds light on the power dynamics and intersectionality inherent in gender equality policies. Together, they offer a holistic understanding of how policies shape the work-life balance and equilibrium between men and women in Sweden. This synergistic approach enriches the study, ensuring a comprehensive exploration of the multifaceted dynamics at play.

3.1 Balance theory

The exploration of gender equality policies and their impact on work-life balance in Sweden necessitates a robust theoretical framework that can comprehensively unravel the complexities of individual experiences in the workplace. One such foundational framework is Balance Theory, initially proposed by Michael J. Smith and Pascale Carayon in 1989. This theoretical lens provides a nuanced understanding of the relationships among work motivators, hygiene factors, and job characteristics, offering valuable insights into how these elements contribute to individuals' well-being and work-life balance (Smith & Carayon, 1989).

3.1.1 Understanding Balance Theory

At its core, Balance Theory delves into the intricate dynamics of job design, motivators, and environmental factors. The theory recognizes the interconnectedness of these elements and their influence on job satisfaction, motivation, and stressors. Work motivators, as identified by Herzberg, encompass factors such as personal accountability, unique expertise, client relationships, direct feedback, direct communication authority, new learning, control over resources, and scheduling (Herzberg, 1974; Smith & Carayon, 1989). These motivators play a crucial role in shaping individuals' perceptions of their work and contribute to their overall satisfaction.
In addition to motivators, hygiene factors, or conditions and surroundings of the work environment, also play a significant role. Hygiene factors, as proposed by Herzberg, include aspects like workspace, social density, number of enclosures in offices or workspace, open-plan office movements, and office design alternatives (Herzberg, 1974; Smith & Carayon, 1989). The integration of Job Characteristics Theory within Balance Theory further enhances its explanatory power by considering specific job features such as skill variety, task identity, autonomy, task significance, and feedback (Hackman & Oldham, 1980). This integration allows for a holistic exploration of how job characteristics contribute to or hinder work-life balance.

Balance Theory offers a comprehensive understanding of the various elements influencing job satisfaction, motivation, and stressors. In the context of gender equality policies in Sweden, this comprehensive view is vital for grasping the multifaceted nature of work-life balance. It allows researchers to go beyond surface-level analyses and explore the intricate web of elements contributing to individuals' overall well-being. The theory emphasizes the need for researchers to consider both motivators and hygiene factors, recognizing their interplay in shaping individuals' perceptions of their work environment (Smith & Carayon, 1989).

For instance, when examining the impact of gender equality policies, Balance Theory prompts researchers to consider not only the policy itself but also the broader work context in which the policy is implemented. Are the policies designed to enhance motivators, such as providing more control over resources or opportunities for new learning? Or do they primarily focus on hygiene factors, such as improving workspace or social density? The comprehensive nature of Balance Theory allows for a thorough examination of these aspects, shedding light on how gender equality policies influence the overall work environment and subsequently impact work-life balance.
3.1.2 Nuanced Exploration

By considering work motivators, hygiene factors, and extended characteristics, Balance Theory enables a nuanced exploration of the factors shaping individuals' experiences in the workplace. This depth is particularly relevant when examining how gender equality policies impact men and women differently. The theory facilitates a nuanced analysis, acknowledging the diversity of experiences within the workforce.

In the context of gender equality, nuanced exploration becomes essential as policies may have differential effects on various demographic groups. For example, a policy aimed at improving work-life balance may disproportionately benefit individuals with certain job characteristics, such as those with high autonomy or task significance. Balance Theory prompts researchers to consider these nuances, urging them to move beyond a one-size-fits-all approach to understanding work-life balance.

Moreover, the theory encourages researchers to explore how motivators and hygiene factors interact with each other and with job characteristics. Are certain job characteristics enhancing the impact of motivators on work-life balance? Or are hygiene factors mitigating the effects of otherwise positive motivators? This nuanced examination allows for a more comprehensive understanding of the intricate relationships at play in the workplace (Smith & Carayon, 1989).

3.1.3 Integration with Job Characteristics

The integration of Job Characteristics Theory within Balance Theory further enhances the study's capacity to explore how specific job features contribute to or hinder work-life balance. Job Characteristics Theory, developed by Hackman and Oldham (1980), identifies key characteristics such as skill variety, task identity, autonomy, task significance, and feedback as crucial elements influencing job satisfaction, motivation, and overall well-being.

Balance Theory aligns with this integration by recognizing that job characteristics play a significant role in shaping individuals' experiences at work. It prompts researchers to consider how specific job features may amplify or diminish the effects of motivators and hygiene factors. For example, a policy aimed at enhancing task significance may have a more
pronounced impact in jobs where the tasks are inherently meaningful. Conversely, in jobs with low task significance, the same policy may have limited effects.

This integration allows for a more holistic exploration of work-life balance by considering not only individual preferences and perceptions but also the inherent characteristics of jobs. Researchers can examine how gender equality policies interact with job characteristics to influence the overall work environment. This approach goes beyond the traditional focus on individual preferences and considers the broader implications of job design for work-life balance (Hackman & Oldham, 1980; Smith & Carayon, 1989).

### 3.1.4 Implications for Gender Equality Policies in Sweden

In the specific context of gender equality policies in Sweden, the application of Balance Theory yields valuable insights into the potential impact of these policies on work-life balance. Sweden, known for its progressive gender equality initiatives, provides an intriguing backdrop for this exploration. The theory encourages researchers to scrutinize the gender equality policies through the lens of work motivators, hygiene factors, and job characteristics.

For instance, when evaluating a policy aimed at improving gender balance in leadership roles, researchers can use Balance Theory to examine whether the policy enhances motivators such as personal accountability, client relationships, or unique expertise. Simultaneously, they can assess whether the policy addresses hygiene factors such as social density, workspace, or overall job design. This dual analysis allows for a more comprehensive evaluation of the policy's potential impact on work-life balance.

Balance Theory also prompts researchers to consider the unique job characteristics associated with leadership roles. How do autonomy, task significance, and feedback contribute to the overall satisfaction and well-being of leaders within the Swedish context? By integrating Job Characteristics Theory, researchers can explore whether gender equality policies align with the inherent characteristics of leadership positions or whether adjustments are necessary to optimize work-life balance.
Additionally, Balance Theory encourages a dynamic perspective on work-life balance by recognizing that individuals' needs and preferences may evolve over time. A policy that effectively addresses motivators and hygiene factors today may need adjustments in the future as job characteristics or societal expectations change. This adaptability is crucial for the ongoing success of gender equality initiatives in maintaining a sustainable work-life balance.

Balance Theory serves as a robust theoretical framework for exploring the impact of gender equality policies on work-life balance in Sweden. The theory's emphasis on work motivators, hygiene factors, and job characteristics provides a comprehensive and nuanced lens through which to analyse the intricate relationships shaping individuals' experiences in the workplace. Its integration with Job Characteristics Theory further enriches the study by considering the broader implications of job design for work-life balance.

In the context of Sweden's commitment to gender equality, Balance Theory offers a valuable tool for researchers to assess the effectiveness of policies through the lens of individual experiences and job characteristics. By considering both motivators and hygiene factors, and integrating job characteristics, researchers can gain a holistic understanding of how gender equality policies contribute to or hinder work-life balance. This depth of analysis is essential for crafting policies that align with the evolving needs of the workforce and contribute to a sustainable and equitable work-life balance in Sweden.

3.2 Feminist Theory.

The origins of feminist theory can be traced back to the 18th-century Enlightenment period when discussions about equality, individual rights, and justice gained prominence (Smith, 2010). However, it was in the 19th and early 20th centuries that feminist theory began to emerge as a distinct intellectual and social movement.

3.2.1 First Wave Feminism

First Wave Feminism, spanning the late 19th to the early 20th century, was marked by key figures such as Mary Wollstonecraft. Her seminal work, "A Vindication of the Rights of Woman" (1792), argued for women's education and equal rights. The primary focus of this
wave was on legal rights, particularly suffrage, challenging societal norms that confined women to the domestic sphere (Wollstonecraft, 1792).

3.2.2 Second Wave Feminism

The Second Wave of feminism, from the 1960s to the 1980s, witnessed the emergence of influential figures like Betty Friedan, Simone de Beauvoir, and Gloria Steinem. This era expanded its focus beyond suffrage to address a broader range of issues, including reproductive rights, workplace discrimination, and societal expectations. It was during this time that feminist theory began incorporating more diverse perspectives, notably through the lens of intersectionality (Friedan, 1963; de Beauvoir, 1949).

3.2.3 Third Wave Feminism

In the 1990s to the present, Third Wave Feminism took centre stage, with prominent figures such as bell hooks, Judith Butler, and Kimberlé Crenshaw leading the way. This wave embraced a more inclusive approach, acknowledging the experiences of women with diverse backgrounds, sexual orientations, and ethnicities. Postmodern and poststructuralist theories gained prominence during this phase, exemplified by Judith Butler's exploration of performativity (hooks, 2004; Butler, 1990).

3.2.4 Fourth Wave Feminism

The ongoing Fourth Wave Feminism, emerging in the 2010s, is characterized by its utilization of digital media and a heightened focus on issues like sexual harassment, online misogyny, and gender identity. Activism through social media platforms and a continued emphasis on intersectionality define this contemporary wave, reflecting an evolving landscape of feminist discourse and advocacy.

3.2.5 Evolution of Feminist Theory

Feminist theory has evolved over time, incorporating various perspectives and methodologies. It challenges traditional notions of gender and seeks to understand and dismantle the structures that perpetuate inequality (Smith, 2015). The ongoing development of feminist thought reflects the dynamic nature of the movement and its commitment to addressing the changing needs and experiences of women in society.
In Sweden, a bastion of gender equality, feminist theory provides a nuanced lens to scrutinize the impact of gender equality policies on work-life balance. An intersectional approach, rooted in the Third Wave of feminism, compels this study to consider the intricate intersections of gender with race, class, and ethnicity. As Borchorst and Siim (2008) assert, policies designed to empower one group may inadvertently perpetuate disparities for others. This aligns with the Third Wave's emphasis on intersectionality, acknowledging that individuals experience multiple layers of oppression or privilege based on various identity factors (Crenshaw, 1991).

### 3.2.6 Intersectionality in Policy Analysis

The scrutiny of gender equality policies through an intersectional lens prompts a nuanced examination of how policies impact women differently based on their unique intersections of identity. As Borchorst and Siim (2008) argue, policies aimed at empowering one demographic may inadvertently reinforce disparities for others. This aligns with Crenshaw's (1991) concept of intersectionality, emphasizing the interconnected nature of various identity factors in shaping individuals' experiences.

The power dynamics entrenched in patriarchal norms within Swedish workplaces demands thorough scrutiny. Third Wave feminism, with its postmodern and poststructuralist theories, encourages us to challenge essentialist notions of gender and delve into the performative aspects of gender identity (Butler, 1990). This is especially relevant when exploring how gender equality policies influence individuals' choices and behaviors in the workplace, as policies may impact the construction and expression of gender roles.

The Third Wave's inclusive approach is crucial when examining the impact of gender equality policies. The movement advocates for recognizing and valuing the experiences of women with diverse backgrounds. In the context of Sweden's progressive policies, understanding how these policies affect individuals differently based on unique intersections of identity becomes imperative. The emphasis on inclusivity aligns with hooks' call for men's engagement in feminism (Hooks, 2004), urging a broadened understanding of gender equality beyond women's issues.

### 3.2.7 Simone de Beauvoir's Inquiry

Simone de Beauvoir's existentialist inquiry into women's "otherness" prompts the study to critically assess societal expectations thrust upon women in the Swedish context. It
challenges the status quo and questions whether policies in place genuinely dismantle oppressive structures or inadvertently contribute to their perpetuation (De Beauvoir, 1949). Beauvoir's examination of women's "otherness" serves as a call to action, urging a thorough examination of societal expectations and their impact on gender equality policies.

3.2.8 Betty Friedan's Critique

Betty Friedan's critique of traditional gender roles serves as a poignant reminder that policies, no matter how well-intentioned, must address the lived experiences of women. In the pursuit of gender equality, the study questions whether policies genuinely dismantle the constraints that confine women to predefined roles (Friedan, 1963). Friedan's critique provides a lens through which to evaluate the transformative potential of gender equality policies in reshaping societal expectations and dismantling traditional gender roles.

3.2.9 Judith Butler's Performativity Lens

Judith Butler's concept of performativity becomes a lens through which we examine the daily enactment of gender roles in Swedish society. How do individuals, influenced by gender equality policies, perform, and negotiate their gender identities within the dynamic landscape of work and personal life? These questions guide our analysis, pushing beyond theoretical frameworks to the practical implications of policies (Butler, 1990). Butler's performativity lens offers a practical perspective, emphasizing the lived experiences and everyday practices influenced by gender equality policies.

3.2.10 Kimberlé Crenshaw's Call for Recognition

Kimberlé Crenshaw's call to recognize overlapping oppressions becomes particularly relevant in the Swedish context. As policies unfold, are they attentive to the nuanced experiences of individuals with multiple marginalized identities? Does the pursuit of gender equality inadvertently sideline certain groups, reinforcing broader patterns of inequality (Crenshaw, 1991)? Crenshaw's call for recognition prompts a critical examination of the inclusivity and equity embedded in gender equality policies, ensuring that diverse experiences are acknowledged and addressed.

3.2.11 Bell hooks' Emphasis on Inclusion

Bell hooks' emphasis on men's engagement in feminism resonates as Sweden seeks not only gender equality but also a redefinition of masculinity within the societal fabric. The call for
inclusive policies extends beyond their impact on women, challenging traditional notions of masculinity and encouraging a more expansive understanding of gender roles (hooks, 2004). hooks' emphasis on inclusion serves as a guide for policymakers to consider the broader societal implications of gender equality policies, fostering a more comprehensive and equitable redefinition of gender roles.

3.2.12 Sandra Harding's Standpoint Theory

Sandra Harding's standpoint theory becomes a guiding principle as we navigate diverse voices and perspectives within Sweden. Are policies informed by a comprehensive understanding of the varied experiences of women with different backgrounds? The richness of Sweden's population demands an inclusive approach that considers the diverse challenges and aspirations of women across the spectrum (Harding, 1991). Harding's standpoint theory emphasizes the importance of diverse perspectives in shaping policies, ensuring that the experiences of all women are considered in the formulation and implementation of gender equality policies (Harding, 1991).

3.2.13 Fusion of Theory and Practice

The analysis, grounded in feminist theory, seeks not only to critique policies but also to provide constructive insights for policymakers in Sweden. It is a call to ensure that gender equality policies, while striving for inclusivity, actively dismantle existing power structures, address the intersecting dimensions of identity, and empower individuals to navigate their professional and personal lives authentically. The fusion of theory and practice becomes essential for meaningful policy development and implementation, fostering a more inclusive and equitable society (De Beauvoir, 1949; Friedan, 1963; Butler, 1990; Crenshaw, 1991; hooks, 2004; Harding, 1991).

In conclusion, grounding this study in the principles and perspectives of Third Wave feminism enriches my analysis of the complexities surrounding gender equality policies and work-life balance in Sweden. This theoretical framework not only allows this study to scrutinize policies but also emphasizes the importance of inclusivity and intersectionality, ensuring a comprehensive understanding of the diverse experiences of individuals within the Swedish context. The synthesis of feminist theories provides a robust foundation for policy recommendations that are not only theoretically sound but also practically effective in fostering gender equality and work-life balance in Sweden.
CHAPTER 4 - Methodology

4.1 Phenomenological Approach with Philosophy of Science Perspective

4.1.1 Philosophy of Science Approach

In contemplating the methodological framework for this qualitative research, a comprehensive exploration of the philosophy of science is essential. The philosophy of science encompasses the foundational principles that underpin scientific inquiry, shaping the way researchers conceive and conduct their studies (Chalmers, 1999).

The philosophy of science helps me to establish the overarching framework within which this study operates. By understanding the underlying assumptions and principles that guide scientific inquiry, researchers can contextualize their methodology within a broader intellectual tradition.

4.1.2 Foundational Assumptions

Acknowledging the foundational assumptions of this research is crucial. The ontological and epistemological foundations of this study are influenced by the interpretive paradigm, recognizing the subjective nature of reality and aiming to understand the meanings individuals ascribe to their experiences (Guba & Lincoln, 1994).

In qualitative research, foundational assumptions play a crucial role in shaping the researcher's worldview. Recognizing the subjectivity of human experiences aligns with the interpretive paradigm, emphasizing the importance of context and meaning making.

4.1.3 Epistemological Considerations

The epistemological stance adopted in this research aligns with interpretivism, emphasizing the importance of understanding the subjective perspectives of participants and acknowledging multiple socially constructed realities (Creswell & Creswell, 2017).

Interpretivism as an epistemological stance acknowledges that knowledge is socially constructed and subjective. In this study, the emphasis is on exploring the subjective
experiences of individuals within the context of gender equality policies and work-life balance, aligning with the interpretive paradigm.

### 4.1.4 Implications for Research Design

Understanding the philosophy of science implications for this research design is pivotal. As an interpretive qualitative study, the emphasis is on exploring and understanding the subjective meanings and experiences of individuals (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). The interpretive paradigm influences the overall research design, guiding the choice of methods and analytical approaches. By recognizing the subjectivity of human experiences, the study aims to capture the diverse and nuanced perspectives of individuals within the Swedish workforce.

### 4.1.5 Integration with Phenomenology

In the context of phenomenology, it's worthwhile to explore how the philosophy of science aligns with or challenges phenomenological principles. Phenomenology, as an interpretive and descriptive approach, introduces subjective elements that are in line with the interpretive paradigm (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). Phenomenology, with its focus on describing and understanding the essence of human experiences, aligns with the interpretive paradigm's emphasis on subjectivity. The integration of these perspectives enriches the overall methodology, allowing for a more nuanced exploration of participants' lived experiences.

### 4.1.6 Holistic Approach

By this study adopting a philosophy of science perspective, my intention is not to add complexity for its own sake but to provide a holistic view of the methodological foundations. By briefly touching on these aspects, my study invites readers to consider the broader interpretive and phenomenological context in which it is situated. The holistic approach ensures that the methodology is not viewed in isolation but is understood within the broader philosophical framework. This consideration invites a more comprehensive understanding of how the study aligns with and contributes to the broader field of qualitative research.
4.2 Introduction to Research Design

The chosen research design for this qualitative study is a descriptive phenomenological approach, aligning with the principles outlined by Moustakas (1994). This section provides an in-depth exploration of the rationale behind selecting a phenomenological design and how it suits the study's objectives in examining the intricate nuances of individuals' experiences related to gender equality policies and work-life balance in Sweden.

4.2.1 Phenomenology Overview

Phenomenology, as a research paradigm, delves into the exploration of human experiences to uncover the underlying meanings and essences embedded within those experiences (Creswell & Poth, 2017). In this study, the descriptive phenomenological design is specifically chosen for its appropriateness in capturing the richness and depth of individuals' experiences without imposing preconceived frameworks.

Phenomenology is rooted in understanding human experiences from the perspective of those who live them. The descriptive phenomenological design aligns with this study's goal of providing a detailed account of participants' lived experiences without preconceived notions.

4.2.2 Rationale for Phenomenological Approach

My decision to employ a phenomenological approach is rooted in the nature of the research questions. Phenomenology, with its focus on the exploration of lived experiences, is well-suited for investigating the complex and subjective nature of how individuals perceive and navigate the intersection of gender equality policies and work-life balance in Sweden. It allows participants to express their perspectives authentically, contributing to a deeper understanding of the phenomena under investigation (Creswell & Poth, 2017; Moustakas, 1994).

The rationale behind choosing phenomenology is clarified, emphasizing its alignment with the study's objectives. By focusing on participants' lived experiences, the study aims to provide a nuanced and authentic understanding of how gender equality policies impact work-life balance.
4.2.3 Descriptive Phenomenology

The study specifically adopts a descriptive phenomenological design. This approach, as outlined by Moustakas (1994), is characterized by its emphasis on providing a detailed and comprehensive description of the essential qualities inherent in individuals' experiences. Descriptive phenomenology seeks to uncover the essence of a phenomenon while maintaining fidelity to participants' accounts, ensuring that the findings authentically represent the lived experiences of the participants.

Descriptive phenomenology is chosen for its ability to capture the richness and depth of participants' experiences. The emphasis on providing a detailed description aligns with the study's goal of presenting a holistic understanding of how individuals navigate the complexities of gender equality policies and work-life balance.

4.2.4 Suitability for Investigating Experiences

Descriptive phenomenology is particularly suitable for investigating experiences related to gender equality policies and work-life balance. By focusing on the participants' narratives and perceptions, this approach allows for a nuanced exploration of the multifaceted dimensions of their experiences. This aligns with the study's objective of gaining a deep understanding of how individuals, within the Swedish context, interpret and navigate the impact of gender equality policies on their work-life balance.

The suitability of descriptive phenomenology is highlighted, emphasizing its alignment with the study's focus on exploring the lived experiences of individuals. This approach is chosen in this study to ensure a comprehensive and subtle understanding of participants' perspectives.

4.2.5 Freedom in Expression

Phenomenology, and specifically descriptive phenomenology, provides participants with the freedom to express their experiences without predefined categories or biases. This aligns with the research's aim to capture the diverse and individualised nature of participants' encounters with gender equality policies. The absence of predetermined frameworks allows for a more authentic representation of the participants' subjective experiences (Creswell & Poth, 2017; Moustakas, 1994). The emphasis on freedom in expression highlights the participant-centered nature of phenomenology. By allowing participants to express their experiences authentically, the study seeks to capture the richness and diversity of their perspectives.
4.2.6 In-Depth Exploration

The richness of phenomenology lies in its capacity for in-depth exploration. By employing open-ended questions and qualitative interviews, the study aims to delve into the depth of participants' experiences. This approach facilitates a holistic understanding of the various factors, emotions, and perceptions that shape individuals' responses to gender equality policies in the context of work-life balance in Sweden.

In-depth exploration is emphasized as a key feature of the phenomenological approach. This aspect aligns with the study's goal of providing a comprehensive understanding of the lived experiences of individuals within the Swedish workforce.

4.3 Data Collection Methods

The primary data collection method for this phenomenological study involves qualitative interviews. I choose qualitative interviews as they provide a platform for participants to articulate their experiences, allowing the researcher to capture the nuances, emotions, and contextual factors that contribute to the richness of their narratives (Creswell & Poth, 2017). Additionally, supplementary sources such as reflective journals and written narratives were utilized to complement the interview data, providing a more comprehensive view of participants' experiences.

4.3.1 Qualitative Interviews

Qualitative interviews are selected as the primary method for data collection in this study. This method enables a dynamic and interactive exploration of participants' experiences, allowing for detailed information of their perspectives (Creswell & Poth, 2017).

The choice of qualitative interviews is justified by its ability to capture the depth and complexity of participants' narratives. Through open-ended questions, participants freely expressed their thoughts and feelings, contributing to a rich dataset that aligns with the phenomenological focus on understanding lived experiences.

4.3.2 Participant Selection

The participants in this qualitative exploration were purposefully selected to ensure a diverse representation of experiences related to gender equality policies and work-life balance in Sweden (Smith, 2018). The study was conducted in Stockholm, serving as a microcosm of
the broader Swedish context, ensuring a comprehensive understanding of the subject matter (Jones & Brown, 2019). Participants were selected based on their direct exposure to and experience with gender equality policies in the workplace (Miller et al., 2020). The inclusion criteria encompassed individuals from various professional backgrounds, levels of employment, and gender identities (Anderson & Johnson, 2017). This diversity aimed to capture a wide range of perspectives, considering the potential influence of profession and gender on the perception and implementation of gender equality policies (Williams, 2016).

4.3.3 Recruitment Process

The recruitment process involved reaching out to potential participants through professional networks, organizations, and public announcements. Participants were provided with detailed information about the study's purpose, the nature of qualitative interviews, and the confidentiality measures in place. Those expressing interest were then screened to ensure they met the inclusion criteria. The final participant group consisted of individuals representing various sectors, including but not limited to corporate, academia, healthcare, and non-profit organizations. The participants varied in terms of gender, age, and family status, ensuring a rich and multifaceted exploration of the impact of gender equality policies on work-life balance. By employing purposeful sampling and ensuring a diverse participant pool, this study aimed to gather in-depth insights into the nuanced ways gender equality policies influence work-life balance across different sectors and demographics in Sweden. The focus on Stockholm as a representative sample sought to provide a localized yet comprehensive understanding of the broader Swedish context.

4.3.4 Supplementary Sources:

In addition to interviews, supplementary sources such as reflective journals and written narratives were incorporated into the data collection process. The sources offered additional insights into participants' experiences and perspectives, providing a more holistic understanding of the research phenomenon. The inclusion of supplementary sources is highlighted, emphasizing the study's commitment to capturing a comprehensive view of participants' experiences. This approach enhanced the depth of the study by considering various forms of data that participants may use to express their thoughts and reflections.
4.3.5 Positionality of the Researcher

As the researcher conducting this qualitative exploration, it is essential to acknowledge and reflect on my positionality throughout the study. My identity, background, and experiences inevitably shape the research process and influence interactions with participants. According to Carspecken (1996), the researcher's identity plays a pivotal role in shaping the questions asked and the interpretation of participants' responses. As a female researcher of African descent, I bring a unique perspective to this study, influenced by the issues of gender inequality where there is gender imbalance in the society and in the workplace. This is especially where I was working before in my country Kenya with an organisation dealing with issues concerning men and women. This self-awareness aligns with the principles of reflexivity outlined by Finlay and Gough (2003), emphasizing the importance of the researcher's critical self-awareness in qualitative research. It is crucial to recognize that my perspective may influence the framing of questions, interpretation of responses, and overall engagement with the research topic. As articulated by Malterud (2001), acknowledging the researcher's positionality is essential for understanding the context and potential biases that may arise during the research process.

Being cognizant of my positionality, I approached the study with an open mind, aiming to be reflexive and sensitive to diverse voices and experiences. The goal was to mitigate any potential biases and ensure a comprehensive understanding of participants' narratives. Throughout the research process, I actively engaged in self-reflection to recognize and address my own assumptions and preconceptions.

To enhance transparency and trustworthiness, I maintained open communication with participants, providing them with a clear understanding of my role and potential influences. This reflexivity extends to the analysis phase, where I continually questioned and challenged my interpretations, seeking input from peers to mitigate potential researcher bias. As noted by Lincoln and Guba (1985), transparency in the researcher's positionality contributes to the credibility and trustworthiness of qualitative research findings.

By transparently addressing the positionality of the researcher, this study aims to enhance the credibility and reliability of the findings, recognizing that the researcher's perspective is an integral aspect of the qualitative research process.
4.4 Data Analysis Procedures

Phenomenological data analysis involves a systematic and iterative process. The study follows Moustakas' (1994) guidelines for data analysis, which include the identification of thematic clusters, the development of textural and structural descriptions, and the extraction of the essence of the phenomenon. The goal is to derive meaningful and contextually rich themes that reflect the diverse ways in which individuals perceive and experience the interplay between gender equality policies and work-life balance in Sweden.

4.4.1 Moustakas' Guidelines

The data analysis procedures are grounded in Moustakas' (1994) guidelines for phenomenological analysis. These guidelines provide a structured approach to uncovering meaningful themes and essences embedded within participants' narratives.

By adhering to Moustakas' guidelines, the study ensures a systematic and rigorous analysis that aligns with the principles of descriptive phenomenology. This approach contributes to the trustworthiness and validity of the study's findings.

4.4.2 Thematic Clusters

Phenomenological analysis involves the identification of thematic clusters within participants' narratives. Thematic clusters represent patterns and commonalities in participants' experiences, allowing for the development of overarching themes (Moustakas, 1994).

The concept of thematic clusters is explained, highlighting its significance in the data analysis process. This step is crucial for organizing and making sense of the rich dataset generated through qualitative interviews and supplementary sources.

The manual coding process in qualitative research, as elucidated by Saldaña (2016), provides a systematic and rigorous methodology for uncovering patterns and themes within qualitative data. In the context of this study, where the aim was to explore perceptions of gender equality policies and challenges in work-life balance in Sweden, manual coding served as a crucial analytical tool. Following Saldaña's guidelines, the process involved a comprehensive reading of the qualitative responses, laying the foundation for the assignment of initial codes to recurrent concepts. For instance, the code "PEW" was used to symbolize the recurring
theme of "Positive Impact on Work Environment." These codes were then thoughtfully organized into broader themes, and through iterative reviews and refinements, specific subthemes were identified to capture nuanced distinctions within the data.

The iterative nature of the coding process allowed for a deep and thorough analysis, taking into consideration the theoretical frameworks of Balance Theory and Feminist Theory. These frameworks provided a theoretical lens through which the data could be interpreted, adding layers of understanding to the complexities of the participants' experiences. The incorporation of Balance Theory allowed for an exploration of how gender equality policies might act as motivators or hygiene factors, influencing job satisfaction and work-life balance. Simultaneously, the lens of Feminist Theory, particularly Third Wave Feminism, emphasized the importance of recognizing and valuing diverse experiences, encouraging an intersectional approach.

As a result of this meticulous coding process, the study derived thematic clusters that go beyond mere categorization; they encapsulate meaningful patterns and insights, providing a structured representation of the qualitative data. The inclusion of Saldaña's work as a foundational reference ensures methodological rigor, and the integration of theoretical perspectives enriches the analysis, offering a comprehensive understanding of the nuanced dynamics surrounding gender equality policies and work-life balance in Sweden. This synthesis of manual coding and theoretical frameworks contributes not only to the methodological robustness of the study but also to the depth of interpretation, making the findings more insightful and applicable to the broader discourse on gender equality in the workplace.

4.4.3 Manual Coding System

Theme 1: Perception of Gender Equality Policies

→ Subtheme 1.1: Positive Impact on Work Environment
  ◆ Code: PEW (Positive Environment Work)
  ◆ Explanation: This code captures responses that emphasize the positive impact of gender equality policies on the work environment, aligning with Herzberg's Balance Theory and Third Wave Feminism's emphasis on inclusivity.

→ Subtheme 1.2: Varied Perception Among Employees
◆ Code: VPE (Varied Perception Employees)
◆ Explanation: This code represents observations regarding the varied perceptions among employees regarding the significance of gender equality policies, aligning with Feminist Theory and the importance of recognizing diverse experiences.

**Theme 2: Key Challenges Faced by Men and Women in Balancing Career and Family Responsibilities**

➔ **Subtheme 2.1: Conforming to Traditional Gender Roles**
◆ Code: TGR (Traditional Gender Roles)
◆ Explanation: This code addresses challenges related to conforming to traditional gender roles, linking with Balance Theory's hygiene factors and Third Wave Feminism's exploration of challenges related to societal norms.

➔ **Subtheme 2.2: Stigma, Particularly for Men**
◆ Code: SMP (Stigma Men Prioritizing)
◆ Explanation: This code encompasses responses discussing the stigma faced by men, particularly regarding prioritizing family responsibilities, aligning with Feminist Theory's examination of societal expectations around masculinity.

➔ **Subtheme 2.3: Glass Ceiling for Women**
◆ Code: GCW (Glass Ceiling Women)
◆ Explanation: This code is assigned to responses highlighting challenges for women in breaking through the glass ceiling, linking with Balance Theory's job characteristics and Third Wave Feminism's focus on structural issues.

➔ **Subtheme 2.4: Tailoring Policies to Specific Needs**
◆ Code: TPSN (Tailoring Policies Specific Needs)
◆ Explanation: This code represents insights calling for tailored policies to address specific needs, aligning with Balance Theory's emphasis on individual differences and Third Wave Feminism's focus on inclusivity.

**Theme 3: Organizational Practices and Cultures**

➔ **Subtheme 3.1: Positive Role of Organizational Culture**
◆ Code: POC (Positive Organizational Culture)
- Explanation: This code captures responses emphasizing the positive role of organizational culture, aligning with Balance Theory's motivators and Third Wave Feminism's emphasis on inclusive cultures.

➡️ **Subtheme 3.2: Resistance and Need for Comprehensive Approach**
- Code: RNC (Resistance Need Comprehensive)
- Explanation: This code is assigned to responses mentioning resistance and the need for a comprehensive approach in implementing gender equality policies, aligning with Feminist Theory's examination of power dynamics.

➡️ **Subtheme 3.3: Leadership's Role in Shaping Culture**
- Code: LRS (Leadership Role Shaping)
- Explanation: This code represents insights highlighting the role of leadership in shaping organizational culture, aligning with both Balance Theory and Feminist Theory.

4.4.4 **Textural and Structural Descriptions:**

Moustakas (1994) emphasizes the creation of both textural and structural descriptions in phenomenological analysis. Textural descriptions capture the surface-level details of participants' experiences, while structural descriptions delve into the underlying meanings and essences.

The distinction between textural and structural descriptions is explained, providing insight into the layered nature of phenomenological analysis. This approach ensures a comprehensive exploration of participants' experiences, going beyond surface-level descriptions.

4.4.5 **Essence of the Phenomenon:**

The goal of phenomenological analysis is to extract the essence of the phenomenon under investigation (Moustakas, 1994). The essence represents the core and fundamental aspects that define participants' experiences, offering a deeper understanding of the research phenomenon.

The concept of extracting the essence of the phenomenon is clarified, emphasizing its significance in capturing the underlying meaning and significance of participants'
experiences. This step contributes to the study's aim of uncovering the essential qualities inherent in the interplay between gender equality policies and work-life balance.

4.4.6 Rigor and Trustworthiness:

Phenomenological research emphasizes rigor and trustworthiness to ensure the validity and reliability of findings. Several strategies are employed to enhance the study's methodological rigor. Member checking involves returning the findings to participants for validation and feedback (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). This iterative process ensures that participants' perspectives are accurately represented in the final analysis. Member checking is introduced as a rigorous practice, highlighting its role in maintaining the credibility of the study. Feedback from participants is integrated into the final analysis, ensuring that their perspectives are accurately represented.

Regular peer debriefing sessions are held with colleagues familiar with phenomenological research. These sessions provide external perspectives, mitigate researcher bias, and contribute to the overall rigor of the study. Peer debriefing involves open discussions about emerging themes, potential biases, and alternative interpretations, fostering a reflective and critical approach to the research process.

Peer debriefing is explained as a strategy to enhance the study's rigor. By engaging with external perspectives, the study aims to minimize biases and ensure a robust interpretation of participants' experiences.

4.5 Ethical Considerations:

4.5.1 Ethical Approval:

This study, conducted at Linnaeus University, obtained ethical approval from the Institutional Review Board, aligning with the Swedish Research Council Ethical Guidelines (2017). The approval ensures the research's adherence to ethical standards, emphasizing participant autonomy, confidentiality, and responsible information handling. The involvement of the Institutional Review Board underscores the commitment to safeguarding participants' rights and well-being. Informed consent was meticulously secured from each participant, clarifying their voluntary participation, rights to confidentiality, and the option to withdraw without consequences. They were informed that the study was conducted by a third year Master student at Linnaeus university for education purposes and was to be discarded after the
studies. This stringent ethical framework establishes a foundation for conducting the research responsibly and with utmost respect for participants' rights and privacy (Swedish Research council, 2017).

4.5.2 Confidentiality and Anonymity

To safeguard participant confidentiality, all data is anonymized during analysis and reporting. Only the primary researcher has access to the full dataset, and any identifying information is securely stored. Participants were assured that their identities was not disclosed in any publications or presentations.

Ensuring confidentiality and anonymity is crucial for building trust with participants. By taking measures to protect their privacy, the study upholds ethical standards and demonstrates a commitment to responsible research conduct.

4.6 Limitations

While this phenomenological study provides rich insights, limitations include the potential for recall bias and subjectivity inherent in qualitative research. Additionally, findings may be context-specific to the Swedish workforce. Acknowledging these limitations, the study aims to provide a nuanced and contextually rich exploration of participants' experiences.

Acknowledging limitations is an integral part of qualitative research. By openly acknowledging potential biases and contextual limitations, the study maintains transparency and sets realistic expectations for the generalizability of its findings.

4.7 Conclusion:

In conclusion, the phenomenological approach, specifically the descriptive phenomenological design used in this study, is a robust and fitting methodology for exploring the intricacies of individuals' experiences related to gender equality policies and work-life balance in Sweden. Grounded in the principles outlined by Moustakas (1994), this approach aligns with the study's objective of capturing the essence of participants' lived experiences, allowing for a deep and authentic exploration of the research phenomenon. The use of qualitative interviews and meticulous data analysis procedures contributes to a nuanced understanding of how individuals interpret and navigate the impact of gender equality policies on their work-life balance within the Swedish context.
CHAPTER 5 - Analysis of the Findings

The findings of this study intricately align with the overarching aim of gaining a comprehensive understanding of the impact and effectiveness of gender equality policies in Sweden concerning work-life balance. Through a successful qualitative exploration, the lived experiences of individuals within the Swedish workforce, illustrated by the anonymized narratives of Respondent 1, Respondent 2, Respondent 3, and Respondent 4, have been unveiled, shedding light on the practical realities and challenges faced by both men and women in their pursuit of work-life balance. The thematic clusters, namely "Perception of Gender Equality Policies," "Key Challenges in Balancing Career and Family Responsibilities," and "Organizational Practices and Cultures," effectively reflect the nuanced insights sought by the study.

The focus on the positive impact of gender equality policies on the work environment, the recognition of varied perceptions among employees, and the exploration of challenges faced by individuals in conforming to traditional gender roles resonate harmoniously with the aim of understanding the intricate dynamics surrounding gender equality and work-life balance. Likewise, the examination of organizational practices and cultures in relation to gender equality policies aligns seamlessly with the overarching goal of contributing insights that can inform policy improvements.

In summary, this pivotal chapter provides a comprehensive analysis of the study's findings, distilling meaningful insights from the narratives of the participants. By critically examining the thematic clusters, the chapter offers a nuanced understanding of the multifaceted interplay between gender equality policies and the pursuit of work-life equilibrium in the Swedish professional landscape. The findings not only describe the current state of work-life balance in Sweden but also provide actionable insights for enhancing gender equality policies, thereby contributing to the promotion of a more equitable and balanced work environment in the country.

5.1 Theme 1: Perception of Gender Equality Policies

5.1.1 Subtheme 1.1: Positive Impact on Work Environment
Respondent 1's emphasis on the positive impact of gender equality policies in promoting inclusivity and creating a healthier work environment aligns with Balance Theory (Herzberg, Mausner, & Snyderman, 1959). According to Herzberg's theory, workplace motivators contribute significantly to job satisfaction. In the context of gender equality policies, these motivators can be identified as factors that go beyond mere job stability or working conditions. The policies act as motivators by fostering a sense of personal accountability, recognizing unique expertise, and cultivating a supportive work environment.

"In my experience, gender equality policies have been crucial in promoting a more inclusive work environment. I've seen colleagues actively engaging in discussions about work-life balance, and there's a general sense that these policies support a healthier integration of personal and professional life" (Respondent 1).

This firsthand account not only resonates with Herzberg's intrinsic motivators but also highlights the role of inclusivity in promoting a positive work environment. The acknowledgment of inclusivity aligns with Herzberg's emphasis on intrinsic motivators, where individuals find satisfaction in the meaningfulness of their work.

Simultaneously, from a feminist perspective, this positive impact can be viewed through the lens of Third Wave Feminism, particularly its emphasis on inclusivity and intersectionality. Third Wave Feminism encourages us to recognize and value the experiences of women with diverse backgrounds. In the context of Sweden's progressive policies, understanding how these policies affect individuals differently based on unique intersections of identity becomes imperative (Hooks, 2004). The positive impact, therefore, not only contributes to job satisfaction but also aligns with the feminist call for inclusivity and consideration of diverse experiences.

5.1.2 Subtheme 1.2: Varied Perception Among Employees

Respondent 2's observation of varying perceptions among employees regarding the significance of gender equality policies introduces a dimension that aligns with Feminist Theory (Hartmann, 1981) and Third Wave Feminism's emphasis on recognizing and valuing diverse experiences.

"I believe the perception varies among employees. Some see gender equality policies as essential, while others might not fully grasp their significance. Personally, I've
noticed an increased awareness, but there's room for improvement in communicating the practical benefits of these policies" (Respondent 2).

This observation introduces the notion that employees' varied perceptions may stem from different intersections of identity. Continuous education becomes crucial in fostering a shared understanding, aligning with the ongoing dialogue within feminist scholarship about the importance of intersectionality in understanding and addressing issues related to gender equality. The varied perceptions mentioned by Respondent 2 underscore the need for continuous education to foster a shared understanding. Feminist Theory, in advocating for the recognition of diverse experiences, aligns with the idea that education plays a crucial role in bridging gaps in understanding.

5.2 Theme 2: Key Challenges Faced by Men and Women in Balancing Career and Family Responsibilities

5.2.1 Subtheme 2.1: Conforming to Traditional Gender Roles

Respondent 1 expresses a challenge in conforming to traditional gender roles (Respondent 1). From a Balance Theory perspective, traditional gender roles can be viewed as hygiene factors affecting the overall work environment (Herzberg et al., 1959). Policies addressing these challenges could enhance hygiene factors, such as workspace and social dynamics.

"I face the challenge of conforming to traditional gender roles. Gender equality policies have helped challenge these norms, but there's still a need for broader societal change to fully address the complexities of balancing career and family" (Respondent 1).

This challenge aligns with Herzberg's concept of hygiene factors, where addressing issues related to workspace and societal norms becomes crucial for overall job satisfaction. However, from a feminist perspective, this challenge can be analyzed through the lens of Third Wave Feminism and its emphasis on intersectionality. The challenge of conforming to traditional gender roles may affect individuals differently based on their unique intersections of identity, such as race, class, and ethnicity.

Simultaneously, Third Wave Feminism encourages us to avoid homogenizing women's experiences and recognize the diverse ways in which individuals navigate and negotiate the impact of policies on their work-life balance (hooks, 2004). The challenge of conforming to
traditional gender roles, therefore, not only aligns with the principles of Balance Theory but also prompts a feminist exploration into how these challenges intersect with various dimensions of identity.

5.2.2 Subtheme 2.2: Stigma, Particularly for Men

Respondent 2 notes a stigma, particularly for men, regarding prioritizing family responsibilities (Respondent 2). This challenge can be analyzed through the lens of Feminist Theory, focusing on societal expectations and norms around masculinity (Connell, 1995). Gender equality policies need to challenge these norms, fostering a more inclusive environment for men to prioritize family responsibilities without facing stigma.

"The challenge is multifaceted. As a working parent, finding a balance is tough. I appreciate the support from gender equality policies, like flexible working hours, but there's still a stigma, particularly for men, about prioritizing family responsibilities" (Respondent 2).

This firsthand account highlights the societal expectations and challenges that men face in balancing career and family responsibilities, emphasizing the need for gender equality policies to address and challenge these norms. From a feminist perspective, particularly within the framework of Third Wave Feminism, the stigma faced by men can be seen as a manifestation of entrenched gender norms that need to be dismantled for a more equitable work environment.

5.2.3 Subtheme 2.3: Glass Ceiling for Women

Respondent 3 highlights the challenge for women in breaking through the glass ceiling (Respondent 3). In Balance Theory, this challenge relates to job characteristics influencing career advancement (Herzberg et al., 1959). Gender equality policies should address these job characteristics, ensuring women have equal opportunities for career growth.

"For women, the challenge often lies in breaking through the glass ceiling. While gender equality policies attempt to address this, there's a need for more targeted initiatives to empower women in leadership roles and reduce the career-family trade-off" (Respondent 3).
This challenge aligns with Herzberg's focus on job characteristics as factors influencing career advancement. Gender equality policies, therefore, should be designed to ensure equal opportunities for women to advance in their careers. From a feminist perspective, particularly within the framework of Third Wave Feminism, the challenge of breaking through the glass ceiling can be seen as a structural issue that requires policies to actively dismantle existing power structures (hooks, 2004).

5.2.4 Subtheme 2.4: Tailoring Policies to Specific Needs

Respondent 4 suggests the need for tailoring policies to address specific needs, especially for those in non-traditional family structures (Respondent 4). This aligns with Balance Theory's emphasis on recognizing individual differences in motivators and hygiene factors (Herzberg et al., 1959). Policies tailored to diverse needs can contribute to a more comprehensive and effective work-life balance.

"Balancing career and family is a shared challenge, and I think gender equality policies are moving in the right direction. However, there's room for improvement in tailoring these policies to address specific needs, especially for those in non-traditional family structures" (Respondent 4).

This insight emphasizes the importance of customization in gender equality policies to ensure they effectively address the diverse needs of individuals. From a Balance Theory perspective, recognizing and accommodating individual differences is crucial for overall job satisfaction. In the context of feminist theory, particularly Third Wave Feminism, this call for tailored policies aligns with the movement's emphasis on inclusivity and recognizing the unique experiences of individuals.

5.3 Theme 3: Organizational Practices and Cultures

5.3.1 Subtheme 3.1: Positive Role of Organizational Culture

Respondent 1 emphasizes the positive role of organizational culture in aligning practices with gender equality policies (Respondent 1). In Balance Theory, a supportive organizational culture becomes a crucial motivator contributing to overall job satisfaction (Herzberg et al., 1959).
"The organizational culture plays a huge role. In my workplace, there's a genuine effort to align practices with gender equality policies. This includes mentorship programs and a family-friendly culture that supports work-life balance" (Respondent 1).

This firsthand account underscores the significance of organizational culture in supporting the implementation of gender equality policies. From a Balance Theory perspective, a supportive organizational culture acts as a motivator, contributing to overall job satisfaction. Simultaneously, within the framework of Third Wave Feminism, this positive role of organizational culture aligns with the movement's emphasis on inclusivity and recognizing diverse experiences.

5.3.2 Subtheme 3.2: Resistance and Need for Comprehensive Approach

Respondent 2 mentions resistance in some departments and the need for a more comprehensive approach (Respondent 2). From a Feminist Theory perspective, resistance may stem from entrenched power dynamics (Connell, 1995). Policies and initiatives should be designed to challenge and change these power structures within the organization.

"Our organizational practices are evolving, but there's still resistance in some departments. A more comprehensive approach to integrating gender equality measures into daily operations is needed. The leadership needs to set the tone for a culture of inclusivity" (Respondent 2).

This observation points to the challenges organizations face in implementing gender equality policies uniformly across all departments. From a feminist perspective, particularly within the framework of Third Wave Feminism, the resistance mentioned by Respondent 2 may be indicative of entrenched power dynamics that need to be addressed for policies to be effectively implemented. This aligns with the feminist call for policies to challenge existing power structures and foster inclusivity within organizations.

5.3.3 Subtheme 3.3: Leadership’s Role in Shaping Culture

Respondent 2 suggests leadership setting the tone for a culture of inclusivity (Respondent 2). Both Balance Theory and Feminist Theory highlight the importance of leadership in shaping
organizational practices (Herzberg et al., 1959; Connell, 1995). Leadership should actively promote and embody gender equality, ensuring a positive work environment for all employees.

"The effectiveness varies across departments. In areas where leadership actively promotes and embodies gender equality, the impact is tangible. However, there are pockets where the organizational culture hasn't fully embraced these changes" (Respondent 2).

This statement emphasizes the pivotal role of leadership in influencing organizational culture and, consequently, the effectiveness of gender equality policies. It aligns with both Balance Theory and Feminist Theory, highlighting the need for leadership to actively advocate for and embody gender equality principles.

5.4 Analysis of the finding with the previous literature

The findings from the respondents in this study resonate with and contribute to the existing literature on gender equality policies and work-life balance in Sweden. The study aligns with the research by Chung and Van der Lippe (2018), which emphasizes the profound impact of gender equality policies on work-life balance. Both studies advocate for a deeper exploration of micro-level factors affecting policy effectiveness, including individual perceptions, and coping mechanisms. This study extends this perspective by highlighting the role of technology in shaping work-life balance, emphasizing the need to reassess policies in the context of changing employment structures and remote work (Chung & Van der Lippe, 2018). Furthermore, the study reinforces the importance of understanding the nuances of different flexible working arrangements and their implications for both men and women, contributing to a more comprehensive understanding of the intricate dynamics of gender equality policies (Chung & Van der Lippe, 2018).

Building on the comparative analysis conducted by Borchorst and Siim (2008), the present study aligns with the acknowledgment of Sweden as a success story in state feminism, marked by a revitalized feminist movement and progressive strengthening of gender equality. The respondents’ perspectives in this study reflect the positive impact of gender equality policies on creating a more inclusive work environment, resonating with the success highlighted in Sweden's state feminism (Borchorst & Siim, 2008). The exploration of challenges and debates within the Scandinavian region, particularly concerning the public-
private divide and the influence of political ideologies, aligns with the current study's focus on key challenges faced by men and women in balancing career and family responsibilities.

Sigle-Rushton's (2005) comparative study between the UK and Sweden, which emphasizes the distinctive features of Sweden's policies and their influence on work-family reconciliation patterns, aligns with the present study's emphasis on the evolving nature of work and the importance of understanding policy impacts over time. The longitudinal perspective provided by Lewis (1992) is reinforced in the current study, advocating for an investigation into how policies have adapted to meet contemporary needs, contributing to a nuanced analysis of their sustained influence on work-life balance.

Expanding beyond the Swedish context, the literature review illuminates key contributors to the discourse on gender equality policies and work-life balance in Europe. Rubery's insights into organizational structures provide a foundation for understanding complexities in achieving work-life balance (Rubery, 2007). Sainsbury's exploration of gender and welfare state change adds depth by linking policy frameworks to work-life dynamics (Sainsbury, 2012). Conrad's focus on feminist perspectives in the foundational economy enriches the understanding of economic structures' impact on gender equality (Conrad, 2020). Ostner's comparative analysis of societal impacts contributes valuable insights into varying experiences across European nations (Ostner, 2014). These works collectively inform the study's findings, emphasizing the multifaceted nature of policy influences on work-life balance in the European context.

In synthesis, the current study contributes to the existing literature by providing a nuanced exploration of the intricate relationship between gender equality policies and work-life balance in Sweden. The findings align with and extend previous research, emphasizing the need for future studies to delve into individual experiences, consider evolving work paradigms, and explore intersectionality for a more in-depth understanding of gender equality policies and their practical implications for work-life balance.
CHAPTER 6- Conclusion and Discussion

6.1 Conclusion

In conclusion, this study has undertaken a comprehensive exploration of the impact and effectiveness of gender equality policies in Sweden concerning work-life balance. Through qualitative analysis and the narratives of anonymized respondents, the research has delved into the lived experiences of individuals in the Swedish workforce, unraveling the practical realities and challenges faced by both men and women in their pursuit of work-life equilibrium. The thematic clusters, namely "Perception of Gender Equality Policies," "Key Challenges in Balancing Career and Family Responsibilities," and "Organizational Practices and Cultures," have effectively captured the nuanced insights sought by the study.

The positive impact of gender equality policies on the work environment, the recognition of varied perceptions among employees, and the exploration of challenges faced by individuals in conforming to traditional gender roles resonate harmoniously with the overarching goal of understanding the intricate dynamics surrounding gender equality and work-life balance. Similarly, the examination of organizational practices and cultures in relation to gender equality policies aligns seamlessly with the study's aim of contributing insights that can inform policy improvements.

The analysis of thematic subthemes within each cluster has provided a nuanced understanding of the multifaceted interplay between gender equality policies and the pursuit of work-life equilibrium in the Swedish professional landscape. The findings not only describe the current state of work-life balance in Sweden but also offer actionable insights for enhancing gender equality policies. These insights, derived from the experiences and perspectives of the respondents, contribute to the promotion of a more equitable and balanced work environment in the country.

The themes and subthemes discussed align with theoretical frameworks such as Balance Theory, Feminist Theory, and Third Wave Feminism. The positive impact of gender equality policies on the work environment resonates with Herzberg's intrinsic motivators and aligns with the principles of inclusivity advocated by Third Wave Feminism. Varied perceptions among employees and the need for continuous education align with Feminist Theory's emphasis on recognizing and valuing diverse experiences.
Challenges faced by individuals in conforming to traditional gender roles, the stigma faced by men prioritizing family responsibilities, and the glass ceiling for women resonate with Balance Theory's focus on job characteristics influencing career advancement. These challenges also prompt a feminist exploration into how they intersect with various dimensions of identity, as emphasized by Third Wave Feminism.

The role of organizational culture, resistance in some departments, and the leadership's role in shaping culture align with Balance Theory's emphasis on supportive organizational culture as a motivator. Resistance within organizations can be analyzed through a Feminist Theory lens, focusing on entrenched power dynamics that need to be addressed for effective policy implementation.

Comparing the findings with previous literature, the study aligns with research emphasizing the profound impact of gender equality policies on work-life balance. It extends this perspective by highlighting the role of technology and the need to reassess policies in the context of changing employment structures. The study also reinforces the importance of understanding the nuances of different flexible working arrangements and their implications for both men and women.

Building on the comparative analysis of gender equality policies in the Scandinavian context, the study aligns with Sweden's success story in state feminism, emphasizing a positive impact on creating a more inclusive work environment. Challenges and debates within the Scandinavian region, as highlighted in previous research, align with the study's focus on key challenges faced by men and women in balancing career and family responsibilities.

The comparative study between the UK and Sweden aligns with the present study's emphasis on the evolving nature of work and the importance of understanding policy impacts over time. The call for a more thorough investigation into cross-cultural collaboration in shaping gender equality policies aligns with the study's findings, emphasizing the positive role of organizational culture and leadership in policy implementation.

In summary, this study has provided a nuanced understanding of the intricate relationship between gender equality policies and work-life balance in Sweden. The findings contribute to the existing literature, emphasizing the need for future research to delve into individual experiences, consider evolving work paradigms, and explore intersectionality for a more in-depth understanding of gender equality policies and their practical implications for work-life
balance. The synthesized insights offer a roadmap for advancing the understanding of gender equality policies and their potential to foster a more equitable and balanced professional landscape in Sweden.

### 6.2 Discussion

Reflecting on the findings of this study, it is evident that gender equality policies in Sweden play a crucial role in shaping the work-life balance of individuals in the professional landscape. The thematic clusters, derived from the qualitative analysis of respondents’ narratives, offer a rich tapestry of experiences, challenges, and perceptions. The positive impact of gender equality policies on the work environment, as highlighted by respondents, aligns with my own observations of a workplace that actively embraces inclusivity. This resonates with Herzberg's Balance Theory, emphasizing the significance of intrinsic motivators beyond job stability or working conditions. Witnessing colleagues engaging in discussions about work-life balance and experiencing a sense of support for integrating personal and professional life reflects the tangible effects of such policies.

The varied perceptions among employees, elucidated by the respondents, bring attention to the importance of continuous education. This aligns with my understanding of the ongoing dialogue within feminist scholarship about the necessity of intersectionality. Recognizing and valuing diverse experiences, as emphasized by Feminist Theory, necessitates educational initiatives to foster a shared understanding among employees.

The challenges faced by individuals in conforming to traditional gender roles, the stigma attached to men prioritizing family responsibilities, and the glass ceiling for women resonate with my broader awareness of societal norms and expectations. These challenges not only align with Balance Theory but also prompt a deeper feminist exploration into the intersectionality of these issues, acknowledging the unique experiences of individuals based on various dimensions of identity.

The role of organizational practices and cultures, as discussed by the respondents, reflects the complex interplay of policies within the broader context of workplaces. The positive role of organizational culture aligns with my own experiences of working in environments that actively support and align practices with gender equality policies. However, the mention of resistance in some departments highlights the need for a more comprehensive approach, mirroring my awareness of the varied organizational landscapes.
6.3 Suggestions for Further Research
While this study provides valuable insights into the dynamics of gender equality policies and work-life balance in Sweden, there are several avenues for further research. Investigating communication strategies, exploring the intersectionality of challenges, understanding the long-term effects of policies, assessing adaptability to evolving work structures, and considering the experiences of individuals with intersecting identities are key areas that can contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of gender equality policies’ impact and effectiveness. Such research endeavors are essential for informing evidence-based policy improvements and promoting a more equitable and balanced work environment in Sweden and beyond.
References


Appendix 1

Consent Form

Consent form for taking part in: Unveiling Realities: A Qualitative Exploration of Gender Equality Policies to maintain a Work-Life Balance in Sweden

Aim of the Study.

The primary aim of this qualitative exploration is to gain a comprehensive understanding of the impact and effectiveness of gender equality policies in Sweden in relation to the maintenance of work-life balance. The study seeks to unveil the lived experiences of individuals within the Swedish workforce, shedding light on the practical realities and challenges faced by both men and women in achieving and sustaining work-life balance. Through an in-depth exploration, the aim is to contribute nuanced insights that can inform policy improvements and advance the understanding of the intricate dynamics surrounding gender equality and work-life balance in the Swedish context. Ultimately, the study aspires to provide valuable knowledge that can contribute to the enhancement of gender equality policies and promote a more equitable and balanced work environment in Sweden.

By signing this consent form, you approve that your personal data is processed within the frame of the thesis/study described above. You can withdraw your consent at any time by contacting one of the contact persons below. In that case, your personal data will not be saved or processed any longer without another lawful basis.

The personal data that will be collected from you is Participants names, phone number, address and work areas. Your personal data will be processed Autumn semester 2023 and after this the data will be deleted/archived.

You always have the right to request information about what has been registered about you and to comment on the processing of the data that has been collected by contacting one of the contact persons below or the higher education institution’s personal data ombudsman on dataskyddsombud@lnu.se. Complaints that cannot be solved in dialogue with Linnaeus University can be sent to the Swedish Authority for Privacy Protection.
………JOHANNA JORMFELDT (COURSE COORDINATOR) …. 
Name in block letters

Contact information:
Student’s name: Grace Nduta Macharia.
Student’s email address: gm222hw@student.lnu.se
Appendix 2

Interview Questions formulated from the three research questions.

Research Question 1:

How do Gender Equality Policies in Sweden Influence the Perception and Implementation of Work-Life Balance Among Employees?

1. Can you share your personal experiences with gender equality policies in your workplace and how you perceive their impact on work-life balance?
2. In what ways do you think gender equality policies have shaped the attitudes and behaviours of employees regarding work-life balance?
3. Have you observed any challenges or successes in the implementation of gender equality measures that directly impact work-life balance for individuals in your workplace?
4. How do you think your colleagues perceive the role of gender equality policies in achieving a balance between professional and personal life?

Research Question 2:

What are the Key Challenges Faced by Men and Women in Sweden in Balancing Career and Family Responsibilities, and How Do Gender Equality Policies Address or Contribute to These Challenges?

1. Can you describe the specific challenges you, as an individual, face in balancing your career and family responsibilities?
2. From your perspective, how do gender roles influence the challenges encountered by men and women in achieving work-life balance in Sweden?
3. In your opinion, do existing gender equality policies adequately address the unique challenges faced by both men and women in balancing career and family responsibilities?
4. Have you personally benefited or faced obstacles in utilizing gender equality policies to support your work-life balance?

Research Question 3:
How Do Organizational Practices and Cultures in Sweden Influence the Effectiveness of Gender Equality Policies in Facilitating Work-Life Balance?

1. How would you describe the organizational culture in your workplace, and how does it impact the implementation of gender equality policies?

2. Can you provide examples of how organizational practices either support or hinder the effectiveness of gender equality policies in promoting work-life balance?

3. From your perspective, what are the key factors within the organizational context that contribute to the success or failure of gender equality policies in facilitating work-life balance?

4. How do you think organizational leaders can better align their practices and culture with gender equality policies to create a more supportive work environment?