How cultural elements are reflected in policy discourse regarding work-life balance: policy discourse as an indicator of Korean culture

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HOW CULTURAL ELEMENTS ARE REFLECTED
IN POLICY DISCOURSE REGARDING WORK-LIFE BALANCE:
POLICY DISCOURSE AS AN INDICATOR OF KOREAN CULTURE

by

Ji Sung Kim

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ABSTRACT

As the proportion of both working women and dual-income families has increased worldwide over the last few decades, employees’ value orientations related to their quality of life have changed considerably, in regard to both their work and personal lives. With these changes, a variety of work-life balance policies and practices have emerged to help employees manage their work and family responsibilities. In addition, policy discussions and public discourse regarding issues of work-life balance have expanded. In the Republic of Korea, the research context of this research, although there have been many efforts both from the legislature and government to promote organizational initiatives for work-life balance as a response to changes in the social context, there has been strong criticism of these policies, mostly often expressed from the users’ perspective. Focusing on work-life balance policies as public policy and on societal culture as policy context, this study examines public policy discourse that emerged in the legislative proceedings on the formulation of Korean work-life balance policies during the time period 2001-2011. Taking a new approach that focuses on culture at the macro-level and examining policy discourse as an indicator of culture in a society, this study shows how problems diagnosed and solutions prescribed have been framed and socially constructed in a specific cultural context. Linking the low birthrate and national competitiveness to the level of female economic activity, the dominant frames reflected underlying cultural assumptions that work-life policies are means of dealing with social problems, while social meanings regarding these policies have oriented toward economic goals. Moreover, gendered cultural norms and values reflected in the discourse, which focus on women’s dual roles in the workplace and at home, indicate work-life balance
policies preferentially used by working mothers might function as gendered practices that support existing gendered culture. Overall, the findings of this study indicate that more efforts from policy makers and government officials are needed to create the cultural conditions where work-life balance policies can be implemented effectively with practices that reflect values and norms that are necessary for the successful translation of these policies into the workplace.
DEDICATION

To my parents who always support me with endless love
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Chapter I: Introduction

Contemporary organizations are experiencing rapidly changing environments. With the impact of neoliberal economic policies and globalization, the external environments of organizations have become more turbulent (Crompton, 2006; Hearn & Michelson, 2006). At the same time, internal organizational changes such as downsizing, restructuring, and other change initiatives aimed at increasing organizational flexibility in response to external environmental changes have occurred in many organizations (Martin, 2005). In addition to changes in the workplace, there have been changes in the workforce. For example, changes have occurred in the average employee’s family structure, and diversity issues have become central to human resource management. Over the past three decades, around the world, more women have entered into the workplace. Statistically, the employment rates of women in the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) member countries have increased steadily from 49.4% in 1981 to 57.1% as of 2012¹. Consequently, the proportion of dual-income families has increased. At the same time, employees’ value orientations regarding their quality of life have changed and become more varied in comparison with traditional ways of working. Furthermore, the nature of employment contracts with organizations has changed as the number of employees holding part-time jobs has rapidly increased (Sheridan & Conway, 2001), and consequently hampered job stability of employees. Accordingly, both academic and management literatures have attempted to shed light on the effects of work-family policies as a vehicle to manage strategically employees’ conflicts between their work and family lives. Simultaneously, policy discussions and public discourse about this

¹ Female employment rates were calculated based on statistics provided on the OECD website (http://www.oecd.org/statistics/).
issue have expanded (Whitehead, Korabik, & Lero, 2008). Overall, work-life balance policies are seen as one type of response to shifts in the labor market structure and employees’ value orientations (Wang, Lawler, Shi, Walumbwa, & Piao, 2008).

**PROBLEM STATEMENT**

Work-life balance policies have been primarily regarded as a type of human resource management practice that are designed to enhance employees’ harmonization of their work and personal life. As Callan (2007) and Sheridan and Conway (2001) note in their studies, the rationale for adopting such policies is generally either framed in terms of the business case (Dex & Scheibl, 2002) or in terms of issues associated with equal opportunity and gender equity (Bailyn, 2003; Bailyn, Rapoport, Kolb, Fletcher, Eaton, Harvey, Johnson, & Perlow, 1996). Work-life balance policies such as flexible working arrangements and child care support have been given much attention in terms of their impact on organizational outcomes such as organizational performance or their impact on employees’ job attitudes, which have been found to be related to employees’ job performance. Overall, empirical findings from considerable work-family research point out that work-life balance policies can contribute to enhancing such job attitudes as job satisfaction (Anderson, Coffey, & Byerly, 2002; Saltzstein, Ting, & Saltzstein, 2001) and organizational commitment (Eaton, 2003; Thompson, Beauvais, & Lyness, 1999; Wang & Walumbwa, 2007), and to maintaining a stable workforce (Anderson et al., 2002; Wise & Bond, 2003). Moreover, several studies have shown that work-life balance policies improve employees’ work performance (Gray, 2002; Lee, Lee, & Han, 2008; Perry-Smith & Blum, 2000) while reducing their work-life conflict (Anderson et al., 2002; Behson,
2005), turnover intentions (Behson, 2005; Ngo, Foley, & Loi, 2009), and absenteeism (Anderson et al., 2002; Behson, 2005). If work-life balance policies are not established well in the organization, however, we cannot expect those positive effects.

The Republic of Korea (Korea, hereafter), the research context of this dissertation, is at the early stage of the implementation of work-life balance policies and, at this stage, there has been strong and continuous criticism of these policies, most often expressed from the users’ perspective. Through press releases, professionals from non-profit organizations such as the People’s Solidarity for Participatory Democracy have pointed out that existing male-dominant organizational cultures as well as social structures do not support employees who wish to take advantage of work-life balance policies; this is especially true for female employees who largely work in non-regular jobs. In addition, scholars have indicated that employees have difficulties in taking advantage of work-life balance policies in that current policies focus on maternity-related issues and so reflect the traditional male breadwinner model (Bae, 2006; Chang, Lee, Choi, & Kim, 2005; Chang, 2007; Kim, 2011).

In spite of the criticism, there have been many efforts both from the legislature and government to promote organizational initiatives for work-life balance as a response to changes in the social context and environment. In order to understand the problems that might be associated with policy implementation, this dissertation focuses on public work-life balance policies in Korea before their translation into the workplace. That is, in addition to trying to understand work-life balance policies as a human resource management policy in an organization, this study has an interest in examining work-life balance policies as public policy. More importantly, this study examines how socially and
culturally constructed meanings associated with work-life balance policies provide a broader context for the implementation of work-life balance policies at the organizational level. By focusing on policy discourse, as an indicator of culture at the macro level, this study examines how cultural elements are reflected in macro-level policy discourse.

WHAT WORK-LIFE BALANCE POLICIES ARE

This section presents a brief review of the conceptualizations and correlates of work-life balance policies presented in the extant literature, other than cultural issues, which will be reviewed in detail in the next chapter. As noted above, work-life balance policies are defined as formal or informal employer-sponsored human resource management policies or practices designed to enhance employees’ work-life harmonization (Glass & Finley, 2002; Ngo et al., 2009). These policies are also often referred to as work-family policies (e.g., Kossek & Ozeki, 1999; Perry-Smith & Blum, 2000), family-supportive practices (e.g., Anderson et al., 2003), and family-friendly policies (e.g., Grandey, 2001; Still & Strang, 2003) as well as other similar titles. The term “work-life balance” was initially used in the late 20th century (Roberts, 2007). It differs from terms focusing on “family-friendly” policies in that it emphasizes the “shift from work-family to work-life” (Still & Strang, 2003, p. 290), which connects work-family issues to a broader and more powerful managerial movement regarding employees’ quality of life.

Overall, in recent years, flexible working arrangements, leave arrangements including parental leaves and family leaves, and child care support have received the greatest attention as core elements of work-life balance policies. Employees take
advantage of these policies in order to manage demands from work and home, and to cope with their role conflict (Still & Strang, 2003). However, names, typologies and categories of work-life balance policies are very diverse and have not been used consistently across either the academic or trade literature (see Appendix A for a list of the types of work-life balance policies presented in recent work-family research).

In general, recent studies of work-life balance policies have focused on examining the impact of organizational-level policies in the work domain (e.g., Durst, 1999; Eby, Casper, Lockwood, Bordeaux, & Brinley, 2005; Lee & Kim, 2009; Saltzstein et al., 2001) and/or identifying objective individual and/or organizational predictors of the adoption or implementation of work-life balance policies (e.g., Davis & Kalleberg, 2006; Lee et al., 2008). Individual characteristics examined as antecedents associated with work-life balance policies have been mostly objective, demographic characteristics of employees such as gender, marital status, and parental status. Individual-level demographic characteristics of employees that might affect the implementation of work-life balance policies, such as the number of children employees have and dual career partnerships have generally been investigated as part of the organizational context or together with organizational variables (e.g., Blair-Loy & Wharton, 2002; Clark, 2001; Still & Strang, 2003). Studies that have paid attention to employees’ subjective characteristics have focused on the impact of employees’ perceptions of issues related to the implementation of work-life balance policies such as perceptions of the availability of policies (e.g., Budd & Mumford, 2006; Still & Strang, 2003; Wise & Bond, 2003) or perceptions of organizational justice (e.g., Grandey, 2001; Hegtvedt, Clay-Warner, & Ferrigno, 2002; Parker & Allen, 2001). In general, the effects of individual characteristics on the
implementation of work-life balance policies or work-life balance itself have been found to be modest in comparison with those of organizational-level variables (Still & Strang, 2003).

Besides organizational culture, the percentage of women in the organization, organizational size, and institutional pressures have been found to be the organizational characteristics that have the most significant effect on the likelihood of an organization adopting work-life balance policies (Davis & Kalleberg, 2006; Lee et al., 2008). In terms of characteristics within an organization, general findings from several studies indicate that organizations with more female employees (Davis & Kalleberg, 2006; Durst, 1999; Kim, 1998; Perry-Smith & Blum, 2000) and large organizations (David & Kalleberg, 2006; Sato, 2000) tend to be more likely have more work-life balance policies.

Using an institutional theory perspective, some studies have shown that institutional pressures that organizations confront have played an important role in increasing the likelihood that organizations will adopt work-life balance policies (David & Kalleberg, 2006; Dex & Scheibl, 2002; Lee et al., 2008; Budd & Mumford, 2006; Still & Strang, 2003). Institutional theory is one of the often cited explanations for why organizations adopt and use work-life balance policies. According to institutional theory, organizational efforts to decrease uncertainty or increase legitimacy result in organizational actions to mimic other organizations (David & Kalleberg, 2006; Kirby & Krone, 2002). In particular, organizations’ size; gender, race, and age distribution; degree of formalization; and the establishment of a human resource department have been investigated as organizational characteristics that are associated with institutional pressures (David & Kalleberg, 2006). From this perspective, an organization that sees
other organizations adopting work-life balance policies is more likely to adopt work-life balance policies in that adopting these policies increases the organization’s legitimacy. Overall, empirical findings have supported the theoretical explanation that institutional pressures influence organizations’ adoption of work-life balance policies.

With respect to outcomes of work-life balance policies, many management scholars have tried to assess the effects of work-life balance policies, examining the impact of work-life balance policies on such variables as attitudes of employees, e.g., job satisfaction (Anderson et al., 2002; Ezra & Deckman, 1996), organizational commitment (Eaton, 2003; Lee, Bang, & Oah, 2005; Saltzstein et al., 2001; Thompson et al., 1999; Wang & Walumbwa, 2007; Wang et al., 2008); work withdrawal, e.g., turnover and absenteeism (Anderson et al., 2002); organizational attraction (Honeycutt & Rosen, 1997); and organizational performance (Durst, 1999; Eaton, 2003; Gray, 2002; Lee & Kim, 2009; Ngo et al., 2009; Perry-Smith & Blum, 2000). As Eby and others (2005) pointed out, most outcome variables are related to the workplace, rather than the family, sphere. Overall, findings from current studies show that the existence of work-life balance policies is positively related to employees’ work attitudes and organizational performance (see, for example, Durst, 1999; Eaton, 2003), although several studies have findings that are not consistent with this general trend. For example, flexible scheduling programs were shown to be positively related to organizational outcomes in Eaton’s (2003) study, whereas they had a negative relationship in Lee and Kim’s (2009) study. The differences might result from differences in measurement and conceptualization of work-life balance policies and/or differences in cultural or social contexts of the research settings. Although relationships between particular programs and job-related variables are
not consistent across all studies, in general, relationships between work-life balance policies and consequence variables in the work domain such as organizational commitment and performance are positive.

**WORK-LIFE BALANCE POLICIES AS PUBLIC POLICY**

Recognizing that there has been increased attention to work-life balance policies globally, many governments have promoted work-life balance issues at the national level. As mentioned earlier, work-life balance policies have been identified as strategic human resource policies, and the majority of research regarding this issue has focused at the organizational level. However, when government promotes a work-life balance agenda at the macro level before such policies are adopted and implemented in local organizations, work-life balance policies can, in fact, be considered to be public policies. That is, when government promotes a work-life agenda, it generally involves public policies that mandate entitlements and force employers to modify organizational policies implemented at the workplace level (Lewis & Cooper, 2005). For example, legislative bodies can develop legislation that changes labor standards to include work-life balance issues, as well as expand their policy agenda to include national family care programs and thus set a good example by being model employers themselves (Mullen, Kelly, & Kelloway, 2008). Arguably, governments that have developed public policy in this area have made active decisions not to leave the implementation of work-life balance policies to employers’ discretion, and governments’ initiatives at the national level have been aimed at helping policy development at the organizational level (Lewis, 1997), as shown in examples of many European countries (especially Scandinavian countries) (Crompton,
Efforts by governments to change traditional norms, beliefs, and practices greatly influence employer policies (Lewis & Hass, 2005). As such, many scholars, especially sociologists, have placed much emphasis on understanding how culture impacts public policy and made efforts to understand how policy is “created and given meaning by culture” (Burstein, 1991, p. 346). Hence, in order to understand organizational policies regarding work-life balance, we first need to understand the cultural elements such as assumptions, values, beliefs and social norms that are embedded in the political/social context within which organizations exist, in that political/societal contexts play a critical role in shaping how organizations function. Clearly, as a part of a wider societal culture or regime, organizations react to their government’s actions with respect to the level of support for work-life balance policies (Kinnunen, Mauno, Geurts, & Dikkers, 2005).

Overall, it is important to understand the social/cultural context within which organizations are embedded (Crompton, 2006) and how government policies affect the cultural construction of work-life balance issues within the policy contexts at a societal level (Lewis & Hass, 2005; Widener, 2007).

In the United States, statutory measures such as the Family and Medical Leave Act (FMLA), passed in 1993, provide legal rights, and also support and raise the “public profile” of the work-life balance agenda (Wise & Bond, 2003, p. 20). Moreover, particularly in Europe, public policies regarding work-life balance include “entitlements to parental leave and leave to deal with family emergencies,” “rights for part-time workers, regulations of working time,” and “the right to ask for flexible working arrangements” (Lewis & Cooper, 2005, p. 11). As Lewis (1997) found, ideology with
regard to family and economic situations influences public policy. For example, in the United States and the United Kingdom, it is generally assumed that the family is an individual responsibility whereas in many European countries other than the United Kingdom, family is considered to be a collective responsibility (Stebbins, 2001).

Arguably, values of social justice will drive these initiatives at a societal level (Pemberton, 1995; Thomas, Jr., 1990). As a result, socially constructed and deeply embedded assumptions affect governments’ approach to work-life balance policies, which then contribute to employees’ ability to integrate work and family effectively (Lewis & Haas, 2005).

As Starrels (1992) pointed out, there are critical distinctions between public policy and organizational policies in that policies created by the government are based more or less on moral justifications such as gender equality and individual/familial well-being, whereas private companies are more likely to adopt policies based on their impact on organizational outcomes or economic cost-benefit analyses. As mentioned above, work-life balance initiatives developed by employers could be merely organization-specific programs without the existence of public policy (Harker, 1995; Hegewisch & Gornick, 2008; Hogg & Harker, 1992). Governments’ initiatives to help employees balance their work and life, however, play a critical role in encouraging companies to do more (Evans, 2002; Harker, 1995). That is, in most countries, public policies regarding work-life balance play a key role in steering employers’ policy implementation based on their government’s “valuable symbolic leadership” (Starrel, 1992, p. 267).

Overall, governments’ initiatives regarding work-life balance reflect cultural and social values. Moreover, the existence of well-established statutory support increases
employees’ sense of entitlement to work-life balance policies and thus affects the social construction of “what are rights or favors” (Lewis & Haas, 2005, p. 364, emphasis added) as well as awareness of public policy among members of an organization, which consequently contributes to the improvement of employees’ work-life balance. Thus, examining work-life balance policies in the public policy sphere is important in that these policies provide important clues about policy outcomes at the organizational level of analysis based on decisions made at the societal level (Lewis & Haas, 2005). That is, the effectiveness of policy at the societal level and the effectiveness of initiatives in the workplace are reciprocally related to each other.

CULTURE AS A POLICY CONTEXT

Key Concepts of Culture

The majority of previous studies conducted from a management perspective have focused on the relationship between work-life balance policies and outcome-related variables at the individual and organizational level (e.g., employees’ job attitudes, organizational performance). Although several empirical findings from work-family research have indicated that culture plays an important role when employees actually take advantage of work-life balance policies (e.g., Hass & Hwang, 1995; Kirby & Krone, 2002; Thompson et al., 1999), cultural characteristics have been given relatively little attention. However, as mentioned above, meanings associated with public policy are constructed through culture (Burstein, 1991); thus, exploring cultural issues associated with work-life balance policies as the context in which these policies are embedded is important.
In recent decades, there has been much scholarly work related to culture and, in general, although many scholars agree that culture is a very complex and elusive concept, scholars from different disciplines are not consistent in the ways that they define, conceptualize, and measure culture (Denison & Mishra, 1995; Earley & Gibson, 1998; Erez & Earley, 1993; McSweeney, 2002; Smircich, 1983, Triandis, 1972). In discussing several different definitions of culture, Schein (2004, p. 12) indicated that the “things that group members share or hold in common” is a common concept associated with different definitions. Hofstede (1984) defined culture as “the collective programming of the mind” and “a collective component shared in the minds of otherwise different individuals and absent in the minds of individuals belonging to a different society” (p. 82). These shared elements help members of one society discern themselves from members of another society. Although scholars conceptualize culture differently and the foci of their definitions are different, their definitions do consistently note that culture is shared by members of a society and that culture is an important basis for distinguishing people of one society from those of another. Overall, culture can be understood to be a set of shared meanings carried by individuals’ mental programs that guide their behaviors in a given context (Erez & Earley, 1993; Hofstede, 1980; Shweder & LeVine, 1984).

Assumptions, values, norms, and practices are key concepts that scholars have used to understand culture. First, assumptions are taken-for-granted beliefs and ways of thinking, perceiving, and feeling that guide one’s actions (Schein, 2004). Although assumptions are the most elusive among the three key cultural elements (Schein, 2004), “their pervasiveness and importance” (p. 313) have been given much attention by many scholars as indicators for interpreting visible cultural elements (DiBella, 1993). Shared
cultural values, as a crucial source of variation among national groups, have been given considerable attention by many cross-cultural researchers (Tsui, Nifadkar, & Ou, 2007). Values are defined as “broad preferences for one state of affairs over others” (Hofstede, 1985, p. 347). Several models of culture, such as those developed by Hofstede (1984) and Rokeach (1973), are based on values and depend on the underlying principle that cultural manifestations are presented through the values held by members of the society. These approaches assume that work values affect individuals’ work attitudes, cognitions and behaviors (Erez & Earley, 1993) and that these values are qualitatively different across different cultural settings (Eby & Dobbins, 1997). A value system is not permanent, but is relatively stable because it includes a set of beliefs with regard to favorable modes of behavior (Erez & Earley, 1993; Rokeach, 1973). Overall, a number of models of culture centered on value systems show that values can be a crucial element for examining cultural similarities and differences.

Norms are internalized from values and beliefs shared by members of a group (Sathe, 1985), and provide a guide for employees with respect to expected behaviors (Cohen, 2001). Overall, norms influence the appropriateness of different social behaviors and vary across cultures (Earley, 1989; Triandis, 1972, 1995). In addition, cultures are composed of diverse and loosely-connected elements at multiple levels, only a few of which are explicitly articulated (Fiske, 2002; Schein, 2004). Specifically, at the superficial level, cultures are composed of practices, institutions, and artifacts. In general, most aspects of culture such as assumptions and values are unobservable and so are not easily recognized by an individual’s consciousness or explicit linguistic expression at a tangible level. Thus, people are usually not conscious of these aspects of culture and take
them for granted (Fiske, 2002).

With respect to the level at which cultures are studied, societal culture is associated with socially shared understandings that are at a richer and deeper level (Wilkins & Ouchi, 1983). According to Hofstede (2001), cultural elements such as formal practices, which are at a more visible level, are associated with the organizational level of culture, whereas assumptions and values, which are at a deeper level, are related to culture at the societal level, in that societal cultures differ mostly in values whereas cultural differences in the organization reside generally in practices.

Arguably, dimensions from Hofstede’s model (1984, 2001) of national culture provide the most widely accepted approach to describing national cultures in studies of management and organizational behavior. In his original work, Hofstede identified four value dimensions of culture—power distance, uncertainty avoidance, individualism/collectivism, and masculinity/femininity. Power distance reflects the extent to which members of a society accept unequal distribution of power within a culture. Uncertainty avoidance reflects societal members’ preference for structured situations in order not to face uncertainties in life. Individualism reflects the extent to which individuals pursue their own goals over those of their group, whereas collectivism reflects the opposite. Masculinity/femininity refers to the level of differentiation across society with respect to gender roles and the level of emphasis on competition and achievement. Subsequently, Hofstede (1991) added a fifth dimension—Confucian dynamism—which reflects long-term vs. short-term orientation.

With this overview of the general conceptualizations of culture, it is easier to understand cultural issues associated with the formulation and implementation of work-
life balance policies. Burstein (1991) indicated that ways of defining goals of public policy and drawing strategic alternatives for action are shaped by culture. Again, understanding cultural context is very important for this study in that work-life balance policies as public policy reflect cultural values and norms as they are socially constructed. Moreover, sometimes these policies could be constrained when they are implemented in the workplace by cultural elements associated with “how society works” (Burstein, 1991, p. 328); that is, focusing on culture can reveal how policy dynamics are associated with broader patterns of social context. If we do not consider these broader cultural contexts and social forces, we might ignore the level of complexity with which organizations must cope in dealing with policy-related issues (Burstein, 1991; Evans, 2002).

**Korean Culture as a Policy Context**

In that there have been relatively few studies of work-life balance policies in non-Western settings, it is important to examine what aspects of societal culture distinguish Korea from the United States and European countries as well as what aspects of societal culture distinguish Korea from other Asian countries such as Japan and China that share certain cultural values. According to Hofstede’s (2001) findings, Korea is a hierarchical (high power distance), collectivistic, and feminine society with high uncertainty avoidance and long-term orientations. In addition, societal culture in Korea, similar to societal cultures in China and Japan, is heavily influenced by Confucianism. A central value of Confucianism is filial piety, or respect for one’s elders, including ancestors. This has been extended to other hierarchical relationships, leading people in Korea to be loyal to the groups to which they belong as well as to accept existing hierarchical orders and
inherent inequalities in the society without further explanation (Kim & Faerman, 2013). As Hofstede and Bond (1988) pointed out, Confucianism heavily influences the cultural dimensions of power distance, individualism/collectivism, and masculinity/femininity, corresponding, respectively, with expected social behaviors toward seniors/juniors, toward the group, and toward gender roles. Similarly, Confucian values associated with the search for virtue, e.g., perseverance and patience, lead Korea to be characterized as having a long-term orientation (Hofstede, 2001; Hofstede & Bond, 1988).

Interestingly, Hofstede’s model identifies Korea as feminine because Korean people value quality of life over competition. Other researchers (e.g., Bae, 1997; Hundley & Kim, 1997), however, have noted that Confucian values, which have influenced Korean culture over 600 years of its history and have heavily influenced such Korean traditions as the clear distinction between men’s and women’s family roles (i.e., men as a bread winner and women as a primary caregiver for family), lead Korea to be male-dominated, and so have traditionally restricted women from holding various positions and engaging in social activities (Kim, 2005; Kim, 2008). Indeed, according to the United Nations Development Programme’s 2011 Human Development Report (UNDP, 2011), only 14.7 percent of parliamentary seats in Korea are held by women, and 50.1 percent of the women participate in the labor force, compared to 72.0 percent of the men. In addition, the report published by the Korea Labour and Society Institute (2012) notes that women on average earn 38.7% less than men in Korea as of 2012. This suggests that Hofstede’s characterization of Korea as having a feminine society might not be fully accurate, and that societal culture of Korea could be considered to be highly masculine, especially given the strongly gendered roles in Korean society. Furthermore, several
scholars note that recent trends toward globalization have led competing values prevailing in the Western societies such as individualism to coexist with the traditional Confucian values in these societies (Zhang, Lin, Nonaka, & Beom, 2005).

A comparison of Korean societal culture to societal cultures in China and Japan, countries that share common cultural heritage of Confucianism, using Hofstede’s five value dimensions, indicates that Korea appears to be much more collectivistic than Japan and much less masculine than Japan and China although, as noted above, other sources suggest that Korea is not as feminine as it is characterized by Hofstede. In terms of power distance and long-term orientation, Korea is very similar to the two countries, although China, where Confucianism originated, appears to have the highest power distance and long-term orientation amongst the three countries. Thus, while several East Asian countries such as China, Japan, Taiwan, and Korea share similar cultural roots with respect to Confucianism, the degree to which people in these countries endorse Confucian values and the types of values that prevail in each country carry subtle differences based on their different histories. As a result of these differences as well as globalization, it is clear that traditional values and newly adopted values compete and even conflict; and the national cultures of these countries, which share a number of similar cultural values still must be examined from the unique lens of each country’s specific history and culture (Kim & Faerman, 2013).

**WORK-LIFE BALANCE POLICIES IN THE KOREAN CONTEXT**

The majority of research on work-life issues has been conducted in Western settings, especially in the U.S. and European countries where relatively similar shared
values prevail (Lero & Lewis, 2008). It is thus important to investigate work-life balance polices in other cultural/societal settings in that such research would contribute to our understanding of how different cultural/societal contexts of organizations might affect policy implementation at the local level. Moreover, such research would enhance our understanding of how different or similar the relationships between the policy and various outcome variables (e.g., job attitudes, performance outcomes) are across countries if the policies are well-established.

According to OECD data, Korean employees’ annual working hours per person are highest among OECD member countries with a large gap between Korea and the Netherlands, the country with the lowest number of hours (OECD, 2010). In addition, the rate of fertility in Korea has very rapidly decreased. As of 2010, OECD data indicate that the Korean government is confronted with the lowest fertility rate and the fastest aging population among member nations. Although the Ministry that is in charge of work-life balance policies in Korea has undergone frequent changes as the Korean government has experienced continual reorganization, the government has exerted much effort to introduce and implement work-life balance policies in organizations over the last decade. In 2005, the Ministry of Gender Equality and Family developed several family polices to respond to the trend of low birth rates and the aging population in Korean society. In particular, the Framework Act on Low Birth Rate in an Aging Society was enacted. Also, the Presidential Committee on Low Birth Rate in an Aging Society was launched in 2005.

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2 When the Ministry of Gender Equality and Family was established in 2005, it took over the duties associated with gender, family, and infants. Based on the National Government Organization Act, revised in February 2008, family issues were transferred to the Ministry for Health, Welfare and Family Affairs with the inauguration of the Ministry of Gender Equality in 2009. Then, in 2010, the Ministry of Gender Equality and Family was re-established and it took over policies for women, family, youth, and children, and the Ministry of Health and Welfare was simultaneously established.
In addition, the SAEROMAJI\textsuperscript{3} 2010 plan and the SAEROMAJI 2015 plan, which include the government’s support for work-life balance, were enacted in 2006 and 2011, respectively. In 2007, the Equal Employment Opportunity Law, implemented by the Ministry of Employment and Labor, was changed to the Equal Employment Opportunity and Work-Family Balance Assistance Act. The history regarding important laws and corresponding policy contents associated with work-life balance is summarized in Table 1.1. Overall, specific policies such as gender policies, welfare policies, and labor policies have converged to support work-life balance of all employees over the last half decade.

At the same time, with respect to the implementation of policies at the organizational level, the government has taken the initiative to promote employees’ work-life balance. According to a report published in 2006 by the Ministry of Gender Equality and Family, the implementation of work-life balance policies was shown to be at the very incipient stage. To encourage full use of the policies, the Ministry implemented a program that certifies family-friendly workplaces once a year and has given benefits to highly-ranked organizations since 2008. The certifying program is based on the Family Friendly Index (FFI), which was developed by the Ministry of Gender Equality and Family in 2006, and is designed to be an indicator of whether an organization provides employees with programs or initiatives within the categories of work-life balance policies as well as organizational factors that facilitate or hinder the implementation of policies.

\textsuperscript{3} SAEROMAJI is a newly-coined word combining SAEROUM (which means newness) and MAJIMAK (which means an end). It represents the goal of the Korean government’s population/welfare policies: For happiness and hope of all, from newborn children to old people in their later years.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time</th>
<th>National Laws</th>
<th>Ministries Concerned</th>
<th>Main Policy Content</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2001</td>
<td>Labor Standard Act</td>
<td>Ministry of Labor</td>
<td>Revision of the laws associated with maternity protection: Maternity leaves expanded to 90 days with 30 days of payment; small- and medium-sized firms designated as the first priority of support</td>
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<tr>
<td>2005</td>
<td>Equal Employment Opportunity Law</td>
<td>Ministry of Labor</td>
<td>Revision of the laws associated with maternity protection: Parental leaves can be requested by workers who have pre-school children under full three years old (Expanded from children under one year old)</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Framework Act on Healthy Homes</td>
<td>Ministry of Gender Equality and Family</td>
<td>Master plan for healthy homes includes support for work-family balance, a promotion of family-friendly social atmosphere and the establishment of Healthy Family Support Centers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2006</td>
<td>Framework Act on Low Birth Rate in an Aging Society</td>
<td>Ministry of Health and Welfare</td>
<td>SAEROMAJI Plan 2010 (the first) includes the introduction of children’s allowance, expansion of national public childcare facilities in the medium to long term toward the level of 30% of children users and increased payment for parental leaves (from 400,000 Won to 500,000 Won)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Framework Act on Women’s Development</td>
<td>Ministry of Gender Equality and Family</td>
<td>Dynamic Women Korea 2010 (the first) includes strategically expanding diverse jobs for women, women’s ability development and expanding women’s employment opportunities as well as building up the foundation for work-family balance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2007</td>
<td>Equal Employment Opportunity and Work-Family Balance Assistance Act</td>
<td>Ministry of Labor</td>
<td>Enactment of the Equal Employment Opportunity and Work-Family Balance Assistance Act (Revised from former Equal Employment Opportunity Law, support for work-family balance is emphasized as a purpose of the legislation) includes paternity leaves for husbands for 3 days and reduction of working hours for the period of childcare which are newly provided in the law</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2008</td>
<td>Act on the Promotion of Creation of Family-friendly Social Environment</td>
<td>Ministry of Health, Welfare and Family Affairs</td>
<td>Program of certifying best family-friendly workplaces based on five categories of work-life balance policies and practices identified by the Ministry: Flexible time programs, child care programs, family care programs, employee assistance programs and family-friendly culture programs</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Despite the government’s effort to encourage organizations to adopt and implement work-life balance polices, many government reports, academic research papers, and government audit reports show that work-life balance polices in Korea have not been successfully established. According to the report submitted in 2009 to the Health and Welfare Committee of the National Assembly by the Ministry of Welfare and Health and the Ministry of Gender Equality and Family, only 34 organizations out of 2,845 private firms, government agencies, and schools have been certified as having a family-friendly workplace (Im, 2010), which is only 1.2 percent of the total. Even more surprising is that, among 35 central government agencies, only the Ministry of Health and
Welfare has been certified as having a family-friendly workplace as of 2012\(^4\). Moreover, the Ministry of Gender Equality and Family, which is in charge of the program certifying family-friendly workplaces, has not been certified. This is quite contrary to the idea that public sector organizations are women-friendly and are likely to offer more work-life balance policies than private sector organizations, which has been a theme in extant research (Crompton, 2006; Dex & Smith, 2002; Starrels, 1992).

Overall, many researchers have pointed out that work-life balance policies in Korea face heavy criticism from employees (e.g., Bae, 2006; Chang et al., 2005). Despite recent government and legislative efforts, Korea has been deficient in legal and government supports with respect to employees’ work-life balance at the national level. Furthermore, those efforts have been described as not sufficiently contributing to placing “work-life issues into the ‘mainstream’ of organizational policy” (Smithson & Stokoe, 2005, p. 149). It should be noted here that the United States, the United Kingdom and Japan have also been described as lacking in state supports and statutory protections in comparison with Germany and Austria (Crompton, 2006). In addition, in the former countries, employer-provided work-life balance policies are seen as critical for employees, given the lack of national attention. Nevertheless, as indicated earlier, cross-nationally comparative data show that employers’ voluntary provisions of work-life balance policies are generally deficient and do not supplement the lack in government supports in countries with low levels of statutory support and regulation (Crompton, 2006; OECD, 2001).

\(^4\) The Korea Customs Service was certified in 2009 but has not been re-certified in 2012.
CHAPTER SUMMARY

This dissertation investigates at the macro level how cultural elements such as assumptions, values, and norms are revealed through policy discourse regarding work-life balance. Examining cultural attributes at the societal level that influence cultural elements in an organization, this research aims to investigate how social meanings of work-life balance policies have been culturally constructed and negotiated in the public policy sphere, which might constrain the successful translation of these policies into the workplace.

In Chapter II, the theoretical background for this study will be discussed. After generally reviewing trends in studies associated with work-life balance policies, research gaps in the literature will be presented. Based on that review, research questions and a framework will be developed. In Chapter III, the method and data used in this study will be introduced. In Chapter IV, the results of the data analysis will be presented. In Chapter V, the implications for theory and practice will be discussed, as well as limitations and areas for future research.
Chapter II: Literature Review

Overall, work-life balance policies have received the most attention from researchers in the fields of sociology and management. Primarily focusing on organizational practices, the existing literature has placed more emphasis on the impact of organizational-level work-life balance policies on individuals’ behaviors/attitudes or job performance, that is, outcomes that are mainly associated with the work domain from a management perspective. While sociologists have tended to focus on the association between policies at the macro-level and gender equity, there have only been limited efforts to investigate wider social and cultural contexts that might be associated with the implementation of work-life balance policies at the organizational level.

As mentioned in the previous chapter, the aim of this study is to examine how cultural elements are reflected in the discourse of work-life balance policies at the macro level. Since cultural attributes underlying the formulation of work-life balance policies are the focus of this study, this chapter will begin by presenting trends in research examining cultural aspects of work-life balance policies. Then, studies that examine work-life balance issues and policies by focusing on how discourse reflects culture will be reviewed. Overall, culture has been studied at both the organizational and societal level from two different approaches. One approach assumes that culture is an internal variable, i.e., something that an organization or society has and can be changed, as in the corporate culture perspective summarized by Smircich’s (1983)\(^5\); the other approach assumes that culture is socially constructed and is how people in an organization or

\(^5\) Smircich (1983) reviewed different ways of approaching to culture in organization studies and summarized five research themes: Culture and comparative management, corporate culture, organizational cognition, organizational symbolism, and unconscious processes and organization. Corporate culture perspective in this study refers to “corporate culture as an internal variable” in her categorization.
society make sense of their world. Based on these two theoretical perspectives on culture, the two streams of literature on culture related to work-life balance policies will be compared and discussed in detail. This comparison suggests that examining discourse as an indicator of culture is an effective approach to understanding cultural influence on policy issues. The chapter concludes with the research questions of this study.

**TRENDS IN INVESTIGATING CULTURAL ISSUES ASSOCIATED WITH WORK-LIFE BALANCE POLICIES AND PROGRAMS**

In general, culture has not received much explicit attention in extant studies of work-life balance policies; however, several empirical studies have examined cultural elements associated with different types of work-life balance policies (e.g., Anderson et al., 2002; Clark, 2001). As discussed earlier, most current studies have been interested in this issue in terms of the business case and have focused on objective individual and/or organizational antecedents or outcome variables. However, social values and norms are reflected in organizational profiles regarding gender and marital status, which, as noted in Chapter I, have been found to be associated with the implementation of work-life balance policies. Arguably, the degree to which organizational demographic profiles affect the provision of work-life balance programs might differ based on cultural values that prevail in a society. Individuals’ perception of these programs may similarly differ. For example, their perceptions of the availability or accessibility of work-life balance initiatives would largely be based on cultural norms in the workplace that are likely to resonate substantially with broader cultural values and norms in a society. Overall, culture plays a role between the development of work-life balance policies and their successful or
unsuccessful implementation by providing social meanings underlying reality, i.e., what is actually happening with these policies and associated programs.

Although culture has not been a major focus in studies of work-life balance, attention to culture in the extant work-family literature has steadily increased and there have been several important studies focusing on cultural issues associated with these policies. This section focuses on these studies and discusses the existing research gap with respect to culture.

**Developing Family-Friendly Organizational Cultures**

Attention to organizational culture within the literature on work-life balance has grown recently in that some scholars have noted that the existence of formal work-life balance policies might not be sufficient to attain intended purposes without informal, that is, cultural, support (Starrels, 1992; Still & Strang, 2003). Several studies have also directly shown an interest in culture and its relationship to the implementation of work-life balance policies; most of these studies have been conducted at the meso level of analysis (e.g., Anderson et al., 2002; Callan, 2007; Clark, 2001; Grandey, 2001; Starrels, 1992).

Some scholars have examined the influence of family-friendly cultures, defined as “the shared assumptions, beliefs, and values regarding the extent to which an organization supports and values the integration of employees’ work and family lives” (Thompson et al., 1999, p. 394), on such variables as employees’ work-life balance/work-life conflict, job attitudes, and work performance (e.g., Lee et al., 2005; Masuda, Poelmans, Spector, & Allen, 2008; Park, Kim, Koo, & Park, 2007). These studies have
not necessarily included work-life balance policies as formal practices in their research models; rather, they have looked at informal family-friendly cultures. Findings from these studies, however, are not consistent, which might be related to differences in conceptualization and measurement of family-friendly culture or organizational contexts. For example, Masuda et al. (2008) found a positive relationship between family-supportive organizational culture and employees’ job satisfaction, whereas Park et al.’s (2007) findings showed family-supportive culture to be negatively associated with organizational effectiveness, as well as employees’ commitment and job satisfaction. While the issue might not specifically be the existence of a family-friendly culture, culture, in general, might be a missing link in the relationship between the implementation of work-life balance policies and job-related outcomes. Moreover, elements of both societal and organizational culture might be important antecedents of individuals’ intent to take advantage of work-life balance policies in cases where these policies are not well established in the organization.

Although not exploring a direct linkage between cultural attributes and policy implementation issues, several studies have shed light on cultural elements/facets and their relationships with work-life balance or on the relative influence of informal initiatives and formal policies on work-life balance. As Clark (2001) noted in her study, several scholars have focused on the development of a “family-friendly” organizational culture as a culture change that encourages a working environment that is generally more family-friendly, not one that just offers formal programs. Using Bailyn’s (1997) three characteristics of “family-friendly work cultures”—temporal flexibility, operational flexibility, and an understanding of family needs by organization leadership—Clark
(2001) investigated the effect of family-friendly work culture on employees’ individual capability to balance work and family. Her findings show that only operational flexibility, which is associated with flexible work processes such as altering one’s work, is significantly related to employees’ work-life balance and job satisfaction. In addition, Anderson et al. (2002), using the 1997 National Study of Changing Workforce (NSCW) data, which assessed family-friendly culture in terms of the degree to which employees’ efforts to balance their work and family life are related to career consequences, found that informal workplace practices, that is, lack of managerial support and negative career consequences, increase the level of employees’ work-life conflict, which negatively affects employees’ job attitudes. Noting suggestions from more recent studies that employees’ choices to use programs developed under these policies can be seen as a manifestation of a supportive culture, Anderson et al. (2002) emphasized the role of organizational culture as key to understanding work-life balance issues in that employees are not likely to take advantage of such initiatives if they can expect any disadvantages to result as a consequence.

There have also been some efforts to examine the direct relationship between organizational culture and the implementation of work-life balance policies. Grandey (2001), for example, noted that employees’ perceptions of fairness, in terms of the ability to use programs implemented as a result of work-life balance policies, are related to organizational culture, in that successful implementation of work-life balance policies depends on an organization’s values. Moreover, need-based norms, which support employees’ needs for dealing with family concerns, and gender bias embedded in workplace culture have been found to affect decision making associated with the
implementation of the policies (Grandey, 2001). In addition, findings from several studies (e.g., Callan, 2007; Grover & Crooker, 1995) have shown that the implementation of work-life balance policies has a reciprocally positive relationship with organizational culture, in that work-life balance policies can change certain attributes of organizational culture (e.g., Callan, 2007) and, at the same time, employees might perceive the existence of a policy as itself demonstrating managerial concern regarding employees’ well-being, even if they themselves cannot use it. Thus, a supportive culture can encourage employees to take advantage of work-life balance policies, and, in turn, might be reciprocated (e.g., positive job attitudes, extra-role behaviors) by employees who feel strong support from the organization.

Overall, the focus of recent attention to culture in work-family research has been located at the organizational level, although the conceptualization of culture has not been consistent across the literature. In some research, for example, work-life policies or practices have been treated as part of the organization’s culture and there is not a clear distinction between a so-called family-friendly culture, which encourages employees to balance their work and life, and work-life balance policies. Along this line, Clark (2001) identified a family-friendly culture as one where there is encouragement by supervisors with respect to employees’ use of work-life balance policies as well as a strategy that emphasizes policies that support the culture. She regarded flexibility, measured through actual organizational practices that support work-life balance policies, as an element of workplace culture. In addition, some scholars, such as Anderson et al. (2002), regard managerial support and career consequences, which are closely associated with cultural norms and beliefs in an organization, as a part of informal workplace practices, which are
elements of a family-friendly working environment that also includes formal initiatives such as flexible scheduling and dependent care. Overall, human resource management practices implemented as a result of work-life balance policies have been regarded as a part of family-friendly culture in some studies, but the boundary between work-life balance policies and cultures that encourage employees’ work-life balance is generally unclear. There have only been a few empirical studies that examine those relationships, and most of these studies have not made a distinction between formal aspects of work-life balance policies and informal aspects of family-friendly cultures, or distinguished between the impacts of the two on the employees’ work-life balance and other job-related variables (e.g., Anderson et al., 2002; Behson, 2005; Eaton, 2003).

Several scholars, both directly and indirectly, have made efforts to shed light on what they refer to as a family-supportive culture (or work-family culture) and its effects on employees’ utilization of programs initiated as a result of newly-established work-life balance policies (e.g., Behson, 2005; Kirby & Krone, 2002; Powell, Francesco & Ling, 2009; Thompson et al., 1999). Thompson et al. (1999), for example, developed a measure of work-family culture that includes three dimensions: managerial support, career consequences, and organizational time demands. Managerial support is associated with management’s sensitivity to employees’ need to attend to family responsibilities; career consequences are related to employees’ concerns that the utilization of work-life balance policies might harm their career path; and organizational time refers to organizational norms that suggest that employees’ visibility in the workplace makes them look more committed to the organization. Overall, findings indicate that family-friendly cultures are necessary to encourage employees’ use of work-life balance initiatives and to link values,
beliefs, and norms to managerial practices. However, theoretical assumptions and empirical findings regarding the relationship between organizational culture and organizational adoption of work-life balance policies and other work-related variables in recent studies are neither sufficient nor consistent, in general. Major components of family-friendly culture conceptualized in extant studies are summarized in Table 2.1. In general, family-friendly culture includes both informal and formal practices that move away from traditional norms of the “ideal worker” who emphasizes work over family and the importance of being visible for a longer time in the workplace.

**Table 2.1 Conceptualizations of family-friendly culture**

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<tr>
<td>• Career consequences resulting from attempts to balance work and family</td>
<td>• Flexibility of working hours • Flexible work processes • Supportive supervision</td>
<td>• Norms about organizational time demands • Perceptions of expected consequences resulting from taking advantage of work-life balance initiatives • Managerial support</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

While culture has not been a major focus in studies of work-life balance policies, the majority of studies that do consider culture regard managerial practices such as initiatives associated with work-life balance policies as cultural artifacts, and examine them as a means by which management values and beliefs are conveyed (e.g., Callan, 2007; Grover & Crooker, 1995; Lewis, 1997; Ngo et al., 2009; Sathe, 1983; Schneider, 1988). According to this perspective, the content of organizational culture is reflected in the artifacts (Mahler, 1997). That is, managerial practices can be regarded as a reflection
of an organization’s culture, in that they have internally enacted content themes (Denison & Mishra, 1995; Martin, 1992).

Lewis (1997), for example, argues that work-life balance policies can be examined as surface level indicators of managerial values. Similarly, as noted above, Clark (2001) defines aspects of family-friendly work culture in terms of formal policies related to such issues as flexible work scheduling and flexible work processes, which is based on Bailyn’s (1997) identification of flexible work arrangements as cultural facets. There are also several studies that have noted that work-life balance policies should be integrated sufficiently into the organizational culture to be implemented successfully (Blair-Loy & Wharton, 2002; Saltzstein et al., 2001). Thus, if organizations are not truly family-friendly, employees do not think they can actually take advantage of programs developed from work-life balance policies, which negatively affects the likelihood of achieving the anticipated effects (e.g., enhanced work-life balance, improved organizational performance) of the programs (Poelmans & Beham, 2008). The fact that employees cannot take advantage of existing programs or may not feel entitled to various options associated with these programs could negatively affect employees’ work-related behaviors and attitudes.

Arguably, from this perspective, many scholars assume that an organizational culture that is genuinely family-friendly can be created (Bailyn et al., 1996; Galinsky & Stein, 1990; Lewis, 1997; Poelmans & Sahibzada, 2004). Thus, the successful implementation of work-life balance policies depends on having supportive organizational cultures as “the key facilitator” in implementing these policies (Wise & Bond, 2003, p. 24). These ideas assume that an internal culture can be molded in
particular ways to be consistent with managerial intentions, and are associated with views of organizational culture that understand culture as a means to control the organization and to attain organizational effectiveness. Overall, the literature focusing on cultural aspects at the meso level considers culture as an internal phenomenon and describes organizations as attempting to create and recreate culture in order for work-life balance policies to be implemented effectively in the organization (Bornstein, 2000; Lewis, 1997; Pemberton, 1995).

**Call for Taking Cultural Elements of Society into Consideration**

Although the literature examining the relationship between culture and the implementation of work-life balance policies has been limited, the cultural concepts discussed in the previous section provide a foundation for investigating how cultural aspects are associated with the implementation of work-life balance policies. Discussions of the effectiveness of human resource management practices have consistently emphasized that those practices need to be congruent with both societal and organizational cultural contexts to be implemented successfully (Aycan, 2005; Peus & Traut-Mattausch, 2008; Schuler & Rogovsky, 1998). Specifically, in terms of the implementation of work-life balance policies, many scholars have suggested that the implementation of work-life balance policies and employees’ abilities to take advantage of programs developed from these policies may be influenced by both organizational and societal culture (Callan, 2007; Lewis, 1997; Saltzstein et al., 2001; Wood, de Menezes, & Lasaosa, 2003). Moreover, findings from several studies investigating both organizational culture and societal culture (Masuda et al., 2008; Wang et al., 2004) indicate the
importance of considering culture at both levels. In that the values held by members of
the society affect the values shared by organizational members in the society (Laurent,
1986), societal culture may affect indirectly, but not negligibly, the implementation of
work-life balance policies in an organization.

Many scholars have focused on how cultural values and norms, particularly those
at the societal level, are reflected in management practices. Those who emphasize culture
at the societal level argue that management policies that do not fit into societal culture
will result in reduced organizational effectiveness and failed policies (Aycan, Al-Hamadi,
Davis, & Budhwar, 2007; Gerhart & Feng, 2005; Kanungo & Jaeger, 1990). Moreover,
they argue that societal culture, as the macro context of an organization, has a strong
influence on norms and values, which in turn influence individuals’ behaviors as well as
organizational management practices (Lawler & Bae, 1998; Leat & El-Kot, 2007;
Newman & Nollen, 1996; Schneider, 1988; Stone, Stone-Romero, & Lukaszewski, 2007;

The impact of culture, as the macro context for an organization, on the
implementation of work-life balance policies has been examined by very few scholars
(e.g., Lawler & Atmiyanandana, 2000; Peters & Van der Lippe, 2007; Powell et al., 2009;
Won & Pascall, 2004). With respect to the relationship between national culture and the
implementation of work-life balance policies, several scholars have proposed or
hypothesized that people in collectivistic countries are likely to expect their organizations
to respond to their work-family needs (e.g., Aycan, 2005; Ngo et al., 2009; Stone et al.,
2007) and that collectivistic cultures would promote openness to work-life balance
policies (Wang et al., 2004; Wang & Walumbwa, 2007). For example, Raghuram, London,
and Larsen (2001) focused on differences with respect to flexible time systems including temporary work, part-time work, contract work, shift work and telework across a number of European countries. Their findings indicate that cultural differences across countries result in differences in organizations’ adoption of flexible time practices and that use of shift work in an organization is more prevalent in countries with national cultures with low uncertainty avoidance, high power distance and high collectivism. Furthermore, Lawler and Atmiyanandana’s (2002) case study of a Thai company showed that “two-way hierarchical relationships” (p. 22), in which supervisors play the role of big brothers or sisters and workers reciprocally follow their guidance, influence the creation of a particular type of workplace culture, and correspondingly affect the development and implementation of work-life balance policies in a hierarchical society such as Thailand. Won and Pascall (2004) focused on Confucian values that exist in Korean society and found that the gendered regime, which is heavily influenced by Confucianism, is negatively associated with women’s use of childcare policy initiatives.

In general, macro-level variables such as societal culture, labor market influences, and legislative systems have not been given much attention in the literature on work-life balance policies. However, understanding cultural elements of a society that are associated with the adoption and implementation of work-life balance policies is crucial, in that “old, deeply embedded, implicit assumptions” (Callan, 2007, p. 675) in a society might influence the development of public policy and its implementation at the organizational level. In particular, social norms related to such issues as gender equity and ideal types of employees are reflected in organizational beliefs, norms, and values, and are components of culture in an organization that can affect the implementation of
work-life balance policies (Callan, 2007; Lewis & Taylor, 1996). Overall, investigating the implementation of work-life balance policies at the macro level is important in that the adoption of the policies in an organization is arguably “a function of the macro context” (Poelmans & Sahibzada, 2004, p. 41). Research and empirical findings to date, however, have been limited.

A NEW APPROACH: STUDIES INVESTIGATING DISCOURSE OF WORK-LIFE BALANCE POLICIES

The majority of extant studies of work-life balance policies, especially from the management perspective, have been based on quantitative methods; however, this might not be the best way of understanding cultural aspects embedded in issues associated with the implementation of work-life balance policies. Although the survey methods that the majority of work-family studies have employed offer us practical information, in general, they have many limitations in terms of examining the content of cultural elements associated with work-life balance policies, especially what social meanings are attached to that content (Lee, 2004). Culture itself is a very elusive concept that is difficult to measure quantitatively, and, in some cases, it might be more effective to take a qualitative approach to get a “contextual understanding on the basis of rich, nuanced and detailed data” (Mason, 2002, p. 3). In this regard, discourse analysis provides a useful approach to studying culture embedded in public and organizational policies. In particular, the analysis of discourse regarding work-life balance policies can contribute to a better understanding of cultural barriers and expectations associated with employees’ limited use of initiatives associated with those policies. Moreover, social norms reflected in the
Discourse as an Indicator of Culture

There have been several studies, most often conducted from a sociological perspective, that have examined discourse associated with work-life balance issues. The focus of discourse studies has not been necessarily on policy issues per se, but research that has shed light on discourse as a subject of analysis provides important implications for studying policy implementation. Based on a review of the recent literature regarding work-life balance policies, and consistent with work by Allen (2001) and Kirby and Krone (2001), it is apparent that there is a need for a comprehensive theoretical framework for research on work-life balance policies and related issues in that conceptual models are inconsistent across the extant studies. Specifically, although many scholars explicitly acknowledge or implicitly suggest that culture plays a crucial role in the implementation of work-life balance policies, there is a lack of empirical evidence. Moreover, conceptualizations and foci of culture measures have not been consistent across studies. As Lewis (1997) indicated, discourses are “indicators of values and assumptions” (p. 18), which implies that discourse reflects cultural elements. In this regard, it would be useful to focus on policy discourse as part of the macro-level cultural context, specifically social values and norms that are emphasized in this discourse.
Discourse analysis has not generally been used as a primary method of cultural analysis (Davey & Symon, 2001). However, in that culture is associated with embedded and implicit value components, it would not easily be examined at the visible level (Gamble & Gibson, 1999). Analyzing discourse, however, can be an effective means for gaining a better understanding of culture, since discourse structures can reveal hidden meanings that reflect cultural values (Clyne, 1994). Moreover, discourse allows a rethinking of what is cared about and valued (Runte & Mills, 2004). From a social constructionist perspective, knowledge is regarded as being “historically and culturally specific” (Burr, 1995, p. 8). Moreover, individuals’ subjective experiences are reflected in discourses in which people are “culturally embedded,” and their hopes, desires and intentions are regarded as “the products of cultural discursive structures” (Burr, 1995, p. 59). As Phillips and Hardy (2002) pointed out, employing a nontraditional method can suggest newer ways to understand things that might have been underrepresented by the replication of the traditional methods. Thus, researchers using discourse analysis can bring new ideas, concepts, and challenges into and supplement extant theoretical works (Phillips & Hardy, 2002).

**Review of Extant Studies Examining Discourse Regarding Work-Life Balance Policies**

This study focuses on policy issues related to work-life balance, noting that employees’ individual efforts to deal with their dual commitment to their work and life are likely to have limitations without support through policy (Kirby & Krone, 2002). In that regard, examining discourse regarding work-life balance policies is important
because it uncovers socially/culturally constructed expectations and the meanings that policy makers and organizational members maintain with respect to work-life balance policies. In particular, because discourse analysis provides a new and different perspective from that which has been traditionally used to examine these policies, it can contribute to a stronger understanding of how cultural values or assumptions related to inequality, equity, and gender have been constructed (Burr, 1995; Phillips & Hardy, 2002), which are critical issues associated with the implementation work-life balance policies.

As Kirby and Krone (2002) indicated, discourse at the interpersonal, organizational and societal level regarding organizational policies has different levels of influence on policy implementation. In particular, societal and organizational discourse regarding work-life balance issues and policies are likely to have greater impacts than interpersonal interactions and individual interpretations in an organization, which might support or undermine the formal policies (Kirby & Krone, 2002).

Overall, existing studies on the discourse of work-life balance or work-life balance policies have paid more attention to organizational-level policies (e.g., Kirby & Krone, 2002; Runte & Mills, 2004; Smithson & Stokoe, 2005; Whittle, 2008). For example, Smithson and Stokoe (2005) focused on how employees interpret and engage in discourse and investigated the effects of these variables on enhancing gender equality in the organization. They indicated that examining how discourse relates to work-life balance policies highlights how people talk about their lives in the workplace (Smithson & Stokoe, 2005). In addition, Whittle’s (2008) study of employees’ sensemaking and engagement examined the discourse of work-life balance that is newly emerging; findings from that study show different ways in which employees interpret and negotiate the
discourse based on their own interests. For example, management consultants in the United Kingdom have shown different responses to work-life balance discourse; while some consultants have taken advantage of new government legislation regarding work-life balance in seeking to attract clients, others have denied the discourse and interpreted it as a misfit when they failed to convince clients (Whittle, 2008).

Based on in-depth interviews with French women scientists, Lewis and Humbert (2010) found that flexible working policies provide limited supportive effects with respect to female employees’ work-life balance due to gendered assumptions. That is, different discourses are adopted by men and women; and organizational silence, which reflects taken-for-granted male values deeply embedded in organizations and does not allow for discourse supporting gender equity or equality to surface, is prevalent and culturally constrains women employees from attaining balance between work and family through the policies offered. Overall, efforts investigating how discourse in the organization is related to organizational members’ descriptions of practices increase our understanding of “how the building blocks of fundamental cultural divisions are formulated and exploited as part of the local construction of social meanings” (Smithson & Stokoe, 2006, p. 153).

Although the main focus has not been on policy issues but on work-life balance or work-life conflict, analyses of discourse within organizations regarding work-life balance, which generally have been based on gender ideology, indicate that current discourse associated with work-life balance issues tends to disadvantage female workers. In addition, those analyses point out that work-life balance policies will not be effective without changing gendered norms and assumptions prevailing in the organization, such as,
assumptions about the incompatibility of work and family spheres (e.g., Lewis & Humbert, 2010; Runte & Mills, 2004).

There have been a few studies focused on language and discourse at a more macro level. For example, Davis (2006) noted that the discourse on work-life balance policies in the law and legislature leads people to appreciate work and family in particular ways; for example, it expands their understanding of how “individuals navigate boundaries” and the conflicts between the two realms (p. 531). Moreover, Davis (2006) pointed out that exploring legal concepts and terms associated with work-life balance policies can contribute to a clearer understanding of how meaning that is drawn from certain social contexts affects thinking about work-life balance policies. In addition, Sheridan and Conway (2001) compared two discourses regarding flexibility in the Australian research context, and examined differences between the business and the equal opportunity perspectives. From the former perspective, improving flexibility is a means to enhance productivity and competitiveness of an organization whereas the latter emphasizes whether flexibility contributes to enhancing basic needs (i.e., economic support, practical care and emotional care) of employees.

Several studies have focused on the discussion of work-life balance issues in legislative bodies. For example, Burstein, Bricher, and Einwohner (1995) examined congressional bills regarding regulations concerning employers’ actions in dealing with gender differences in employees’ family commitment. By analyzing relevant discourse, they identified three packages of policy alternatives regarding gender issues and family roles: the separate spheres package, the equal opportunity package, and the work-family accommodation package. First, the separate spheres package relates to the idea that
women and men are located in different spheres; women are seen as being located in the private sphere, where they do domestic work, and men are seen as being located in the public sphere where they do paid work. Second, the equal opportunity package tries to attain the same job opportunities for men and women, but it does not challenge the separation between family and work. Third, the work-family accommodation package challenges the separation between work and family and related roles between women and men, and insists that both women and men should be involved in family responsibilities. Their findings from a content analysis show that support for work-family accommodation has rapidly increased although equal opportunity has received the most support. Burstein et al.’s (1995) studies contribute to our understanding of the range of policy ideas in the legislature and the flows and exchanges of those ideas; however, their content analysis, which focused on the frequency of support for each package using a time dimension, does not provide deeper reflections or examine the social meanings underlying the changes in support for the three competing packages.

Overall, as indicated Table 2.2 below, there has been little research that has examined discourse associated with work-life balance policy, especially at the institutional level. While several scholars have paid attention to discourse in research on work-life balance or associated policies within organizations, the level of analysis of extant studies of work-life discourse has been located primarily at the organizational level, and few studies have examined policy discourse at the macro level. However, meso-level discourse is likely to be affected by macro-level discourse; thus, looking at the larger context in which the policy is embedded would help us to better understand how macro- and meso-level discourses are interconnected and sometimes constrained by each other
In general, findings from extant studies indicate that the discourse of work-life balance and discourse on work-life balance policies tend to be gender-neutral at the visible level (Runte & Mills, 2004; Smithson & Stokoe, 2006), but the focus has been heavily on women’s role in both (i.e., work and family) domains (Runte & Mills, 2004). Notably, findings from studies of discourse related to work-life balance issues show that the discourse, which is framed in terms of enhancing employees’ productivity and commitment, has played a role of reinforcing existing gender roles and inequity.

<Table 2.2 Studies of discourse regarding work-life balance policies>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Method of analysis</th>
<th>Focus of analysis</th>
<th>Level of analysis</th>
<th>Findings</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Burstein et al. (1995)</td>
<td>Content analysis</td>
<td>Congressional bills regarding work, family, and gender issues (1945-1990)</td>
<td>Macro level</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lewis &amp; Humbert (2010)</td>
<td>Case study</td>
<td>Employees’ comments about flexible working policies in the organization</td>
<td>Meso level</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Runte &amp; Mills (2004)</td>
<td>Discourse analysis</td>
<td>Discourses that are dominant in the extant literature of the domains of work and family/work-family conflict</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Smithson &amp; Stokoe (2005)</td>
<td>Postmodernist feminist analyses/membership categorization analysis</td>
<td>Employees’ comments about flexible working/work-life balance/gender in the organization</td>
<td>Meso level</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Although these studies assume that discourse reflects culture, most of them have not explicitly focused on the cultural contexts where issues of work-life balance policy are framed and debated; rather, they have emphasized gender ideology based on feminism.

**DIFFERENT PERSPECTIVES ON CULTURE REFLECTED IN EXTANT STUDIES**

Reviewing the literature examining work-life balance policies and culture, it is clear that there are two different ways of describing/examining culture in studies investigating the effects of organizational culture on the implementation of work-life balance policies and studies examining discourse associated with these policies as an indicator of culture (see Table 2.3). In particular, the former is based on what is referred to as a corporate culture perspective, while the latter uses a social constructionist approach to culture.

<Table 2.3 Different perspectives regarding culture in the work-family literature>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Work-family studies associated with cultural issues</th>
<th>Trend in current studies examining organizational culture</th>
<th>Trend in studies examining discourse as an indicator of culture</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Perspective</strong></td>
<td>Corporate culture</td>
<td>Social constructionanism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Ontological assumptions</strong></td>
<td>Culture as an internal variable, something that an organization has</td>
<td>Culture associated with social construction through symbolic discourse and sensemaking processes as knowledge and reality constantly change as culture evolves</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Epistemological approach</strong></td>
<td>Objective inquiry</td>
<td>Subjective and interpretative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Levels of analysis</strong></td>
<td>Organization</td>
<td>Organization, Institution</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Focus of analysis</strong></td>
<td>Cultural manifestations (norms, values, practices) in the workplace, focus on formal and informal practices</td>
<td>Discourse as social practices, shared social meanings attached to languages used that: - reflect and constitute cultural/social assumptions, norms, and values</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The majority of work-family research understands culture from a corporate culture perspective, which assumes that a strong culture based on consistent cultural contents and manifestations leads to better organizational performance, effectiveness and positive employee job attitudes. Corporate culture is defined in terms of the sociocultural dynamics developed in the organization (Smircich & Cálas, 1987). From this perspective, culture is considered as an organizational variable (Martin, 1992; Smircich, 1983) and an internal trait of an organization rather than as an external force (Erez & Earley, 1993). Moreover, researchers whose work reflects this perspective regard managerial practices as cultural artifacts and as a means by which management values and beliefs are conveyed (e.g., Lewis, 1997; Ngo et al., 2009; Sathe, 1983; Scheneider, 1988). That is, managerial practices can be regarded as part of an organization’s culture, in that they have internally enacted content themes (Denison & Mishra, 1995; Mahler, 1997; Martin, 1992).

Work-family research based on the corporate culture perspective argues that formal work-life balance policies can be considered to be surface level indicators of managerial values (Lewis, 1997), and work-life balance policies should be integrated sufficiently into the organizational culture to be implemented successfully (Blair-Loy & Wharton, 2002; Saltzstein et al., 2001). The research agenda stemming from this view focuses on how to mold internal culture in particular ways to be consistent with managerial intentions (Smircich, 1983). Research from this perspective sheds light on how critical organizational culture, as a predictable means to control the organization and enhance management practices, is with regard to performance and work well-being in the
organization. Overall, from this perspective, culture is considered as an internal phenomenon and organizations are viewed as attempting to create and recreate culture to improve performance in the organization (Lewis, 1997; Pemberton, 1995). The major focus of studies using this perspective has been on more tangible levels (i.e., artifacts), which is in line with Hofstede’s (2001) and Wilkins and Ouchi’s (1983) work, which presents societal culture as being associated with richer and deeper levels of understanding of cultural assumptions, values and norms that are socially shared and identifies cultural elements that are at a more visible level such as formal practices that are associated with the organizational level of culture. That is, studies driven by this perspective tend to somewhat overlook the general culture in which organizations are embedded, which must not be negated. Overall, studies from the corporate culture perspective are likely to be limited in that organizations do not possess cultures of their own; rather, they are formed as a function of societal culture.

In this regard, a new approach to examining work-life balance issues and culture understands discourse as an indicator of cultural values and assumptions, and views discourse as a more effective way to directly examine deeper levels of cultural elements by focusing on language used. From this perspective, culture is associated with socially constructed context-specific reality (Johnston & Klandermans, 1995), and discourse is regarded as social practice that both reflects and constitutes culture (Hearn & Michelson, 2006; Fine, 1995). Following Williams (1983), Barker and Galanskiński (2001) described culture as being “constituted by meanings,” (p. 3) and examined “how meaning is produced symbolically through signifying practices of language within material and institutional contexts” (p. 4) as a way of understanding culture. Moreover, Taylor and
Whittier (1995) pointed out that discourse is a means to understand “how culture is produced or shaped within social situations” (p. 182). In addition, Urban (2000) noted that discourse is the most significant concrete sign through which culture is localized.

Most studies considering the impact of organizational culture on the implementation of work-life balance policies using a quantitative approach have measured culture through its manifestation or content such as practices and have identified correlational patterns, which provide readers with useful general information for work-family studies. In that qualitative research, in general, generates hypotheses rather than tests them (Auerbach & Silverstein, 2003), it allows us to pay attention to atypical or silenced social phenomena that are not captured by existing theoretical models or typologies. In particular, it is expected that examining discourse regarding work-life balance policies will provide us rich information in terms of how social and cultural meanings have been constructed and attached to language used\(^6\) in policy discourse, which might explain some of the current criticism that work-life balance policies are facing. Moreover, in that studies that have examined organizational culture have found that culture might be a barrier that prevents employees from taking advantage of programs developed from new work-life balance policies, it is useful to try to examine culture at a more fundamental level, that is, cultural elements at the societal level.

Using discourse analysis, this study examines transcripts from the Korean National Assembly meetings including plenary sessions and standing committees’ meetings concerning work-life balance policies in Korea in order to explore cultural aspects of these discussions. The starting point of this study is ongoing criticism of work-

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\(^6\) Language use includes choice of words, lexicon, argumentation, interactional behavior, and so forth (Wodak, 1997).
life balance policies in the Korean setting that argues that these policies have not been sufficiently implemented and have ended up in mere rhetoric. The current research assumes that problems associated with the implementation of these policies are likely to have resulted from a lack of understanding of how cultural attributes existing in Korean society and organizations would affect the implementation of work-life balance policies, which would be reflected in discourse regarding these policies. Building on this assumption and related theoretical issues, Figure 2.1 was developed as research framework for this study. Based on this framework, this study aims to explore the following research questions:

*RQ 1. How has policy discourse regarding work-life balance policy issues emerged?*

*RQ 1a. How has discourse changed with time?*

*RQ 1b. How does discourse differ across policy actors (e.g., members of national assembly, government officials, representatives from private companies) in the legislative arena?*

*RQ 1c. How does discourse differ across the associated National Assembly Standing Committees?*

*RQ 1d. How have policy makers and other participants interpreted changes in context and policy issues associated with work-life balance?*

*RQ 2. What are the dominant themes in the policy discourse?*

*RQ 2a. What frames have been reflected in the discourse?*

*RQ 2b. How are social meanings and cultural elements including shared assumptions, values, and norms constructed, reflected and represented in
policy discourse?

<Figure 2.1 Research framework>

Note: Public policies associated with legislative initiatives include oral discourse and formal written policy. In this study, public policy discourse refers to oral discussions and debates related to public work-life balance policies in legislation. While taking formally written policy contents and their relation to oral discourse into consideration, the primary focus of the research is on oral discourse.

CHAPTER SUMMARY

A review of extant literature examining the role of culture in the implementation of work-life policies shows that culture has not been given much attention, and that conceptualizations of culture are not consistent. Nevertheless, findings from the studies that focus on discourse show that cultural assumptions, norms, and values influence the implementation of work-life balance policies, specifically in terms of employees’ intent.
to take advantage of programs developed from these policies. However, those findings indicate that change initiatives that focus on managerial practices without changing more fundamental cultural elements such as values and assumptions will not be effective. Since organizational norms, values, and assumptions resonate with cultural elements in a society, examining cultural aspects at the broader level can be a good starting point for examining underlying problems and issues that might be associated with the implementation of work-life balance policies and ultimately being able to develop more effective alternatives. For this reason, it can be useful to explore the discourse at the national level that is expressed in the legislative forum, and which creates legitimacy for organizations that set up goals for work-life balance policies that are consistent with legislation (Hearn & Michelson, 2006).

The research focus of this study is public policy discourse regarding work-life balance issues as an indicator of macro-level cultural assumptions, values and norms (letters in bold in Figure 2.1) and as a context of organizational work-life balance policies. Again, meaning is culturally and historically context-specific (Barker & Galasiński, 2001); as Sheridan and Conway (2001) pointed out, work-life balance policies might have different meanings depending on different contexts. In this regard, context-specific cultural elements reflected in policy discourse when work-life balances policies were formulated might affect social meanings attached to policy issues related to work-life balance as they are implemented. Moreover, examining how text, discourse, and context interplay (Phillips & Hardy, 2002) can help us to understand how the broader reality associated with work-life balance policies has been constructed and experienced.
Chapter III: Methods

This chapter presents data sources and describes how data used in this study were analyzed. The goal of this research is to explore cultural elements embedded in parliamentary policy discourse regarding work-life balance policies in Korea. The focus of analysis of this research is on macro-level policy discourse embedded in the Korean cultural context, specifically what assumptions, social values and norms were emphasized when the work-life balance policies were formulated at the National Assembly. That is, this study examines the social and cultural meanings that have been socially constructed and attached to the issues associated with work-life balance policies.

The ontology of this study, i.e., the “assumptions about the nature of reality” (Lundberg & Young, 2005, p. 39), is rooted in social constructionism in that discourse is multiply associated with texts, ideas and practices in the socially constructed reality (Grant, Keenoy, & Oswick, 1998) and those carriers can demonstrate cultural influences (Johnston, 1995). Thus, this study assumes that reality is socially constructed, and constituted through social interactions (Davey & Symon, 2001) and symbolic processes based on the medium of languages, labels, actions, and routines (Lundberg & Young, 2005). Moreover, this study assumes that discourse is mutually related to culture and society (Ainsworth & Hall, 2006; Phillips & Jørgensen, 2002; Phillips & Hardy, 2002; van Dijk, 1993), i.e., it assumes that values and assumptions existing in an organization and a society influence as well as reflect various socially constructed norms in the workplace such as norms regarding characteristics of the ideal type of worker and commitment to an organization (Lewis, 1997). Discourse analysis emphasizes “the construction of a broader social reality” (Phillips & Hardy, 2002, p. 6), which differs

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from several other qualitative methods that focus on identifying meanings of concepts in context but consider the concept as given. Thus, discourse analysis is suitable to this study in that this study is interested in examining not only cultural meanings associated with work-life balance policies in Korean cultural context but also how those meanings have been constructed through policy discourse.

**DATA SOURCES**

Policy discourse in this study includes a variety of public accounts and statements regarding work-life balance policies (e.g., provisions of alternative work arrangements and other initiatives for employees’ integrating work and life) raised in the National Assembly, which include policy discussions and conversations among policy actors and statements by policy actors that have emerged in the text. The main data sources for this study are verbatim transcripts, as primary legislative texts, from the National Assembly of the Republic of Korea between 2001 and 2011. As a legislative arena, the Korean National Assembly functions as the institutional field for debating policy issues (Rein & Schön, 1991), and the legislative policy forum is a critical context for the formation of public policy discourse (Gamson & Modigliani, 1989).

Transcripts from the National Assembly of the Republic of Korea include every statement made during the proceedings as well as all the details associated with the Assembly plenary sessions and committee meetings, as determined by the National Assembly Act (Chapter VII: Minutes). Transcripts are available from the following types of meetings: National Assembly plenary sessions, National Assembly Standing Committee meetings, special committee meetings, inspections of the government offices,
investigations of government conducted by government offices, subcommittee meetings, and public hearings. All transcripts that reference issues related to work-life balance policies are used as data for this research. As Phillips and Hardy (2002) pointed out, actors’ interpretations of broader social discursive context can be identified and examined through actors’ descriptions of the context in archival materials. In this regard, transcripts from the National Assembly can be an important subject of analysis in that they reflect policy makers’, practitioners’, and other policy actors’ interpretations of social phenomenon, which could affect policy strategies, designs, and implementation. Moreover, overarching themes reflected in macro-level policy discourse can be considered as reflecting general cultural standards (Alvesson & Karreman, 2000).

This study examines the discourse associated with the legislative proceedings on the formulation of Korean work-life balance policies during 2001-2011 (between this period, the discourse regarding work-life balance policies began to increase with the inauguration of the Ministry of Gender Equality in 2001 and the major legislative initiatives related to work-life balance issues were actively debated and implemented). Using the National Assembly information system7, this study searched for proceedings associated with work-life balance policies. Key words were selected based on the literature review and were associated with core and relevant elements of work-life balance policies such as “work-life balance,” “work-family balance,” “female workforce,” “work and family,” “dual-income,” “maternity leave,” “parental leave,” “flexible time arrangements” and so forth. Relevant verbatim transcripts including policy discussions associated with issues of work-life balance policy included a total of 397 pages (single-spaced in Korean). The list of meetings that referenced work-life balance

7 The URL address for the system is: http://likms.assembly.go.kr/record/index.html
policy issues is included in Appendix B.

DATA ANALYSIS

Discourse Analytic Approach

Discourse is constructed through language, and meanings associated with each discourse rely on the context within which the discourse is used. Each different discourse has a different focus, issues to be considered and implications for further action (Burr, 1995). In this respect, discourse can be regarded as a “frame of reference” on which interpretations are based. As van Dijk (1993) argued, we might need to closely examine how social representations play a role in the social actors’ mindset in order to link discourse and broader society and culture. Overall, discourse analysis has been understood as a way to reveal values and assumptions reflected and encoded in documents and speeches (Hearn & Michelson, 2006).

Theoretical assumptions on which empirical research using discourse analysis is based are very diverse (Phillips & Hardy, 2002). According to Phillips and Hardy’s (2002) framework, there are four different approaches to discourse analysis defined along two dimensions: context vs. text and constructivist vs. critical. The former is associated with “the degree to which the emphasis is on individual texts or on the surrounding context.” whereas the latter refers to “the degree to which the research focuses on power and ideology as opposed to processes of social construction” (p. 18). Based on these dimensions, four different analytic approaches to discourse emerge (see Figure 3.1).

First, interpretive structuralism addresses how discourse supports social context (e.g., organizational, institutional context) and contributes to understanding changes in
macro-level discourse over time (Phillips & Hardy, 2002). Second, critical discourse analysis, largely influenced by Foucault’s (1972, 1977, 1979, 1988) work, focuses on “unequal power relations” (Phillips & Hardy, 2002, p. 25) that are constituted and sustained through discursive activities and how the context advantages certain actors while it disadvantages others. Third, social linguistic analysis focuses on individual micro-level texts and aims to shed light on the organization and construction of the text through a close reading of the text, which contributes to our understanding of “how texts work to organize and construct other phenomena” (Phillips & Hardy, 2002, p. 22). Lastly, critical linguistic analysis focuses on how power dynamics are reflected in individual texts and linguistic strategies (Phillips & Hardy, 2002).

<Figure 3.1 Four types of discourse analysis>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Context</th>
<th>Interpretive Structuralism</th>
<th>Critical Discourse Analysis</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Constructivist</td>
<td>Social Linguistic Analysis</td>
<td>Critical Linguistic Analysis</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Text**

Note: Adopted from Phillips and Hardy (2002, p. 20)

Phillips and Hardy (2002) noted that these two dimensions are not simple dichotomies but, rather, represent continua. While focusing on policy actors’ interpretation and discursive elements of the broader policy context rather than text, the approach of this research is located between critical discourse analysis and interpretive structuralism but more toward the latter. This research corresponds most closely to
interpretive structuralism in that it analyzes texts in order to identify how they both reflect and continue to reproduce the context in which they are located, and explores how reality associated with issues of work-life balance policies has been socially and culturally constructed through policy discourse. In addition, this research has a critical aspect that aims to understand who is advantaged or disadvantaged by this reality and examine how inequalities are reflected in policy discourse.

**Frames and Discourse**

Frames are employed as a conceptual tool for analyzing discourse in this study. According to Apthorpe (1996), “framing is one of the dominant discursive activities faced in discourse analysis” (p. 17). In addition, discourse analysis offers “a general framework for problem-oriented social research” (Wodak, 2008, p. 2), and it is argued that “policy discourse analysis must examine the framing of problems to be tackled” (Gasper & Apthorpe, 1996, p. 8). In this study, we assume that certain frames are used in diagnosing and prescribing solutions for policy problems associated with work-life balance policies and are reflected in policy discourse.

In general, frames are seen as a lens or perspective used for understanding certain events (Chreim, 2006) and as interpretative schemes through which the meaning and understanding of reality is shaped (Verloo, 2005). According to Goffman (1974), frames are associated with individuals’ subjective participation and social interaction in defining a situation based on governing events in organizations. As Chreim (2006) pointed out, many definitions of frames/framing have emphasized micro-level cognition and interpretation (e.g., Goffman, 1974; Snow, Rochford, Jr., Worden, & Benford, 1986;
Weick, 1995), although framing has also been examined as a managerial discursive activity for defining the meaning of events (Fairhurst & Sarr, 1996).

Rein and Schön (1991, 1996) pointed out that framing also occurs at the policy-making level\(^8\), and described frames as “strong and generic narratives” that are “diagnostic/prescriptive stories” regarding “what needs fixing and how it might be fixed” (Rein & Schön, 1996, p. 89). Thus, frames suggest a way of thinking about policy issues and proposing alternatives for dealing with the issue. More importantly, values are integrated within frames, and frames are associated with norms that reflect cultural attributes in a society (Rein & Schön, 1996). Benford and Snow (2000) and Snow et al. (1986) also pointed out that cultural elements at the societal level include values and practices through which frames are developed and interpreted. Similarly, Gamson and Modigliani (1987) suggested that frames using language and ideas in a package that resonated with “larger culture themes” would be more favored. That is, culture plays a critical role in shaping how goals of public policy are set based on how the problem is diagnosed and what action strategies are offered (Burstein, 1991).

Overall, frames contribute to analyzing discourse in that they shed light on discursive dynamics (Chreim, 2006). In that frame reflection is closely associated with reflection on context, frames are an effective tool linking discourse to the larger context (Rein & Schön, 1991) and help identify general themes that show how an event or even an individual statement is imbued with social meanings (Gamson & Modigliani, 1987).

\(^8\) According to Rein and Schön (1991), framing occurs at three levels: personal life, scientific or scholarly inquiry, and policy making.
Grounded Theory Method

Burr (1995) pointed out that discourse analysis is “an approach to research” rather than a methodological technique. This study aims to find “recurrent themes for coherent sets of phrases” (Burr, 1993, p. 168) that appear in policy actors’ accounts associated with work-life balance policies. The focus of analysis of this study is policy discourse; however, to analyze discourse as data, coding strategies based on a grounded theory approach were applied to the data.

The grounded theory method was developed as a means to generate theory (Strauss & Corbin, 1990, 1997, 1998) and theoretical insights (LaRossa, 2005). Three phases of coding—open coding, axial coding, and selective coding (Strauss & Corbin, 1990, 1998)—have been most widely used (LaRossa, 2005). According to Strauss and Corbin (1998), open coding is “the analytic process through which concepts are identified and their properties and dimensions are discovered in data” (p. 101), and involves constant comparisons for similarities and differences (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Axial coding is associated with linking categories to their subcategories. Selective coding refers to “the process of integrating and refining the theory” by identifying core categories (Strauss & Corbin, 1998, p. 143).

The data from the transcripts from the National Assembly meetings were analyzed using the following procedures. To find dominant themes in the policy discourse of work-life balance policies that reflect meaning construction associated with issues of work-life balance policies, open coding was applied to each concrete word, phrase, and sentence of accounts related to work-life balance policies. Then, axial coding was used to link those themes to different levels of properties and dimensions (e.g., time, different policy actors).
Based on analytic choices with regard to what is central to this research, particular attention was paid to themes that are related to the focus of this research. Once central themes were identified, selective coding was used to identify themes related to the research questions of this study in order to explicate “the story line” (Strauss & Corbin, 1990, p. 116). Following these analysis processes, the transcript data were used to examine particular research concerns: cultural elements reflected/represented in policy discourse and frames reflected in policy discourse associated with problem analysis and prescriptions that are linked to cultural elements.

Since all transcripts are in Korean and Korea’s culture differs substantially from Western culture, this research adopted the translation/back-translation procedure in order to confirm linguistic equivalence. Due to the large scale of the data, however, transcripts were only partially translated/back-translated. Selective illustrative statements, accounts or conversations in the transcripts were quoted to represent emerging themes that reveal the essence of discourse. Those discourse fragments were translated from Korean to English by the author and then translated back from English to Korean by an independent bilingual doctoral candidate in order to confirm the appropriate translation.

The transcripts were entered into NVivo 10. NVivo was used for coding and analyzing data. CAQDAS (Computer Assisted Qualitative Data Analysis Software), such as NVivo and ATLAS.ti, is recommended for a qualitative study using a large corpus of data (Flick, 2007; Saldaña, 2009). As Bazeley (2007) indicated, NVivo can assist data analysis through coding the central discourse as well as by considering the construction of the account where a grounded theory approach to coding is relevant. Of equal importance, while coding the data, the researcher tried to surface why certain work-life

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9 NVivo 10, the newest version, was released in June 2012.
balance policies have been denied or repressed by focusing on what is missing in the meeting discussions. Through this process, the same concept-indicator (i.e., word, phrase, or sentence) might be coded with different themes in discourse analysis, which is different from content analysis, which applies one coding strategy (Burr, 1993). That is, the ongoing flow of the researcher’s subjective interpretations was involved when interpreting emerging themes in that “the nature of discourse analysis itself is subjective and interpretative” (Burr, 1995, p. 163). The coding scheme, which includes relevant themes and categories that emerged while coding the data is provided in Appendix C.

**CHAPTER SUMMARY**

To explore cultural elements in policy discourse on work-life balance policies occurring in the Korean National Assembly, this study takes advantage of discourse analysis, which is based on ontological assumptions of social constructionism. This discourse analysis examines transcripts that referred to work-life balance policy issues from meetings of the Korean National Assembly during the time period 2001-2011. Frames that offer strong diagnostic and prescriptive narratives for policy problems were utilized as a conceptual tool for analyzing the data. Three coding strategies—i.e., open, axial, and selective—based on grounded theory approach were applied to the data, and NVivo 10 was used for coding and analyzing data.
Chapter IV: Findings

When the Ministry of Gender Equality was inaugurated in 2001, discourse regarding work-life balance policies in Korea began to emerge. Over the course of the next decade, policy discourse rapidly increased and expanded in scope as the low fertility rate and aging of the population became increasingly politicized issues in Korean society. This research focuses on how this discourse emerged and how social meanings and cultural elements including shared assumptions, values, and norms are reflected and represented in policy discourse. This chapter presents findings from the data analysis that address the research questions of this study.

OVERVIEW OF THE HISTORY OF DISCOURSE ON WORK-LIFE BALANCE POLICIES

This section addresses Research Questions 1a through 1d, which focus on how policy discourse regarding work-life balance policy issues has emerged. In particular, these questions examine how policy discourse associated work-life balance policies has changed over time, how discourse has differed across policy actors including different standing committees and government officials in the National Assembly, and how policy makers and other participants have interpreted changes in the policy context and environment.

Changes in Discourse over Time

Based on key legislation and policy, the decade following the initial emergence of work-life balance policies has been divided into three periods. First, during the time
period 2001-2004, a broad base for policy discourse regarding work-life balance policies was developed in connection with social issues. Second, from 2005 to 2007, issues of work-life balance policy were heavily discussed as critical legislative efforts were made. Third, from 2008 to 2011, the discourse continued to expand in scope. Table 4.1 presents a summary of how policy issues and the policy context changed over the time period, as well as some sample quotes from policy makers regarding these policies.

**Introductory period (2001-2004)**

After the Ministry of Gender Equality was inaugurated in 2001, discourse regarding work-life balance policies began to form and receive attention in the legislative arena. The early discourse was mainly associated with issues related to maternity protection and the revision of the Equal Employment Law and the Infant Care Act. In this period, work-life balance policies were not directly identified as a central policy agenda. Rather, work-life balance policies focusing on childcare—such as maternity leaves—were discussed as policy tools to solve the problems associated with women’s career discontinuity resulting from pregnancy and childbirth, and employers not hiring women, which ultimately was needed to enhance women’s economic activity rates and to strengthen national competitiveness based on global standards such as International Labour Organization (ILO) Conventions.

In addition, issues related to social responsibility for maternity protection (i.e., childbirth and childrearing), which had generally been considered to be a private choice with responsibility within the family domain, were frequently mentioned as concern over the low birthrate and aging population began to increase. During this period, there was a
call for attention to the social reality that the burden of parenting is placed disproportionately on women as the sole childcare givers, but, ironically, only women were mentioned as policy targets for taking advantage of work-life balance policies. Overall, during this period, the term, “work-life balance” was not frequently used. Although work-life balance policies were not a major policy agenda, closely-related policy issues such as women’s career discontinuity and utilization of women resources began to call attention to work-life balance policies. This period can be regarded as a time where there was a build-up of a broad base for work-life balance policy discourse.

Developing period (2005-2007)

During this next period, policy issues associated with work-life balance were heavily discussed as three critical bills related to work-life balance policies were enacted/amended: the Equal Employment Opportunity and Work-Family Balance Assistance Act (amended from the Equal Employment Opportunity Law in 2007), the Framework Act on Low Birth Rate in an Aging Society (enacted in 2005), and the Act on the Promotion of Creation of Family-friendly Social Environment (enacted in 2007). In 2005, the total fertility rate, i.e., the average number of children to which a woman in the age range of 15-45 is expected to give birth, was 1.08, and was the lowest among OECD member countries as well as the lowest in Korean history. This low birthrate was considered to be a national crisis and national disaster in society and, during this time, work-life balance policies were essentially discussed as a major policy area for attaining critical policy goals in the context of enhancing the national birthrate and improving women’s economic participation, with the ultimate goal of securing national
competitiveness. Among various types of work-life balance policies, maternity leaves and parental leaves were mentioned and discussed most often, whereas other policy initiatives such as flexible time policies and job-sharing policies were rarely discussed. More importantly, issues associated with gender equality and quality of people’s life, which are the part of the major goals of these three laws and associated initiatives, were recognized consistently by several national assembly members and outside professionals in several public hearings, but were not given much attention as a focus of policy discourse.

**Maturing period (2008-2011)**

During this time period, policy discourse regarding work-life balance focused on how to modify existing laws and activate associated policy initiatives that had been implemented. Some policy makers shed light on the exclusion of various groups such as non-regular female workers, full-time homemakers, and women in farming and fishing communities during policy implementation. In particular, greater attention began to be paid to small and medium-sized enterprises and temporary female employees were beginning to be recognized more often in the discourse. In addition, while women were still addressed as the main policy target and leaves for childcare were most frequently discussed, policy discourse began to expand by including concerns about the reality that men were not using parental leaves. Other policy arrangements, especially flexible time policy initiatives, which had not been a policy focus, were included in the discourse during this period. Moreover, concerns began to be raised that initiatives developed from legislation and policies regarding work-life balance might excessively interfere with
decisions that should be made in citizens’ private lives as well as infringe on the rights and autonomy of managers of private corporations in their personnel policies.

Overall, a broad base for policy discourse regarding work-life balance policies was developed in connection with social issues such as women’s career interruption and women’s economic activity in the early 2000s. As critical legislative efforts that included work-life balance as a major component were made to address these issues through this period, issues of work-life balance policy were heavily discussed in the mid-2000s and the discourse has continued to expand in scope.

<Table 4.1 Policy discourse regarding work-life balance over time >

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<tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Policy focus</strong></td>
<td>Maternity protection such as childcare (e.g., childcare facilities, maternity leaves)</td>
<td>Childcare facilities, Leave policies (maternity leaves, parental leaves)</td>
<td>Childcare facilities, Parental leaves (Additionally, men’s use of paternity/parental leaves), Flexible time policies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Policy context</strong></td>
<td>Low fertility and aging, Low level of women’s employment in comparison with other OECD countries</td>
<td>Low fertility, especially as the total fertility rate reached 1.08, the lowest in Korean history</td>
<td>Low fertility and aging, Issues associated with gender segregation in the labor market</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| **Sample quotes**    | “Our country has a birthrate of 1.42 and is becoming an aging society as aging people over 65 are 7.3% of the general population. Women’s employment needs are increasing, whereas we are not institutionally supporting them, and the child care issue has become the biggest block against women’s employment.” (Committee member, Special committee on Women’s Affairs, October 2001) | “The fact that young women worry seriously about choosing between children and work worsens the low fertility. Through selecting and supporting family-friendly companies...” (Committee member, Gender Equality and Family Committee, April 2007) | “In this era of low fertility and aging, the labor shortage in the society is getting worse. At this point, we all are feeling sympathy...” (“When it comes to parental leaves, giving more leave to men does not make sense. I am sorry.” (Vice-minister of the Ministry of Employment and Labor, Environment and Labor Committee, December 2011)) | “Flexible working is for women to balance their work and family, and for job creation for women, right? ...
“A severe shortage of childcare facilities impedes women from entering the workforce and encourages a tendency toward avoiding childbirth. Currently, our country has a birthrate of ‘1.3 per women,’ the lowest among OECD member countries...” (Committee member, Health and Welfare Committee, April 2003) that the core motive for economic growth is the female labor force... To utilize the female labor force effectively, we establish the bases for women’s work-family balance as well as...” (Personnel planning official of the Ministry of Gender Equality and Family, Gender Equality and Family Committee, October 2007) Also women should not be discriminated because they use these policies.” (Committee member, Gender Equality and Family and Committee, October 2010)

**Differences in Discourse across Policy Actors**

Participants in the policy discourse regarding work-life balance in the legislative arena include public officials from the ministries in charge of the implementation of work-life balance policies and associated programs (i.e., the Ministry of Gender Equality and Family, the Ministry of Health and Welfare, the Ministry of Employment and Labor\(^\text{10}\), members of National Assembly including committee members of the National Assembly Standing Committees, professionals from research institutes and non-profit organizations who are invited to provide advice on policy issues associated with work-life balance, and representatives of private firms and interest groups. Discourse regarding work-life balance policies has been formed largely in standing committee meetings with oversight responsibilities for each ministry (i.e., the Health and Welfare Committee, the Gender Equality and Family Committee, the Environment and Labor Committee) and presented publicly in Plenary sessions held for the purpose of confirming the policies.

\(^{10}\) As explained earlier in Chapter I, Footnote # 2, family affairs related to the implementation of the program that certifies family-friendly organizations, have been transferred between the Ministry of Gender Equality and Family and the Ministry of Health, Welfare and Family according to a series of revisions of the National Government Organization Act in 2008 and 2010.
Overall, basic frames used by policy actors over the three time periods to understand and interpret issues of work-life balance policies are very similar. In all three time periods, the discourse associated with implementing work-life balance policies to enhance women’s economic activity was embedded in the broader policy context of trying to achieve such policy goals as strengthening national competitiveness and overcoming the social crisis associated with the low fertility rate and aging population—and the consequent labor shortage problem. However, predictably, stakeholders such as private firms and women’s organizations interpreted work-life balance policies according to their own expected costs and benefits, i.e., adopting work-life balance policies in an organization was considered to be a burden and cost, even an extravagance (sa-chi in Korean), for private firms, while these policies were regarded as not providing sufficient benefits by women’s organizations.

Representatives of the Ministry of Gender Equality and Family, and committee members of the Gender Equality and Family Committee, which are in charge of policies related to gender equality, and representatives from the Korean Women’s Association United (an interest group for women’s rights) focused on social responsibility and the need to attain gender equality. These groups emphasized the idea that both men and women should be encouraged to take advantage of leave policies for childbirth and childcare and outwardly called for attention to the need to change family culture so that women and men have equal responsibility for caregiving as well as the need to create family-friendly organizational cultures in the workplace.

Nevertheless, most policy actors who participated in the policy discourse focused on women’s use of these policies to ultimately make full use of women in the workforce.
In particular, several representatives of the Ministry of Employment and Labor made explicit statements that work-life balance policies are likely to impede choices made between husbands and wives in the family domain. Within the National Assembly, there were few differences among the different standing committees with respect to their understanding and interpretation of policy issues regarding work-life balance policies, although members of the Gender Equality and Family Committee made more efforts to explicitly bring the issue of gender equality into the discourse. Table 4.2 presents a summary of the different foci taken by policy makers, government officials and interest groups involved in the policy discourse, as well as some sample quotes regarding these policies.

<Table 4.2 Policy actors and discourse regarding work-life balance policies>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Policy focus</th>
<th>Interest groups</th>
<th>Sample quotes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Childcare support, Maternity leaves and parental leaves for working mothers</td>
<td><em>Korean Women’s Association United (KWAU)</em>: Enhancing culture and environment where all women employees, including temporary workers, can use leave policies</td>
<td>“When we see the findings from the research showing that the time women spend on housework in the dual-income families is much greater than the time spent by men, it is necessary to promote a family living culture that allows for couples to equally share caring labor as well as to create family-friendly corporate cultures.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low fertility and aging, Low women employment</td>
<td><em>Korea Employer’s Federation (KEF)</em>: Ways of implementing WLB policies should be encouraging, not punishing (i.e., it should not be too much of a burden for private firms)</td>
<td>“It is problematic to lay a burden on private firms.” (Representative of KEF, Gender Equality and Family Committee, April 2007)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(See the quotes in the following section)</td>
<td>Status of female employees, Occupational gender segregation, Gender pay gap</td>
<td>“Private companies should not take all responsibilities for work-life balance. Efforts from individual workers are also needed...” (Representative of KEF, Gender Equality and Family Committee, April 2007)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Interpretation of Changes in Policy Context

Overall, the analysis across the three time periods shows that policy participants recognized serious issues that called for the implementation of work-life balance policies in current Korean society. A review of the history of discourse associated with work-life balance policies reveals crucial issues related to the implementation of work-life balance policies that have been associated with changes in policy context: low birthrate, national competitiveness, and women’s economic activity. Again, policy actors’ interpretations of the changes in the policy context associated with work-life balance were noticeably anchored by both the low fertility rate that results from increasing female employment and the need to increase female employment in order to maintain national competitiveness. These issues clearly possess interpretative irony. Interestingly, policy actors believed that it was important to address the current Korean female employment rate, which was seen as deficient in comparison to the female employment rate of other developed countries, but recognized that increasing women’s economic activity would, paradoxically, likely further lower the birthrate. Ultimately, for the majority of policy actors, work-life balance policies were recognized to be needed both to enhance women’s economic activity and to increase the nation’s fertility rate by helping women employees to cope with any conflict between work and life and to stay in the workforce.

Policy actors paid particular attention to the low birthrate and regarded it as being connected in complicated ways to changes in demographic characteristics and family structures, socio-economic changes, and environmental changes of employment when
they called attention to the need for work-life balance policies. A broad range of changes in the policy context (e.g., changes in labor market structure, demographics) were linked to and converged on the low birthrate. For example as in the quote below, in the policy discourse, policy actors consistently noted changes in value orientations and emphasized that increased female employment results in a lower fertility rate, and a low fertility rate induces abnormal changes in demographic characteristics.

“All things change fast in this country. The pace of aging may be the fastest in the world. The need for childbirth is desperately increasing... we need to recognize these issues as part of a national agenda, in the realm of national crisis management.” (Committee member, Special Committee on Low Birth Rate in an Aging Society, August 2005)

Overall, the increased female employment rate was regarded as still being insufficient to enhance national competitiveness, while the low birthrate and aging population in current Korean society were interpreted as abnormal changes and crises that needed to be addressed and overcome. Policy makers and other participants understood work-life balance policies as a means to solve the broader social problems and ramifications (i.e., labor shortages, threats to national competitiveness) and interpreted changes in the broader policy context as the primary motivation for implementing work-life balance policies.

CULTURAL ELEMENTS REFLECTED IN DISCOURSE OF WORK-LIFE BALANCE POLICIES

This section addresses Research Question 2 including subquestions 2a and 2b. To answer the questions, this section examines what frames are reflected in the dominant
policy discourse regarding work-life balance and how social meanings and cultural elements have been constructed and reflected in this policy discourse.

**Dominant Frames Reflected in Discourse: Diagnosis of and Prescriptions for Addressing Problems**

**Social construction of public problems associated with work-life balance policies**

*Focusing on low birthrate and work-life balance policies as the means to increase women’s economic activity:* As mentioned above, the problem that has been addressed by work-life balance policies as reflected in the discourse has been low female participation in economic activity resulting from childbirth and childcare. As low fertility and aging became critical policy issues and were considered to be national crises, women’s increased participation in the workforce (although still much lower in comparison with male participation in the workforce) ironically emerged as the diagnosis of the core problem that was at the root of the country’s weakening national competitiveness.

Discourse on work-life balance policies has greatly emphasized the low fertility rate and the aging of Korean society as critical motives for these policies rather than gender equity or equality or employees’ quality of life, which are also nominally included as important goals in the purpose section of the legislation and relevant policy plans. By continuously emphasizing low birthrates and the aging population as serious social problems, the goals and purposes of the policies, as reflected in the discourse, have leaned toward increasing the female workforce to cope with expected future shortages of employees. For example, the Master Plan for Healthy Homes (based on the Framework
Act on Healthy Homes) and policy initiatives based on the Equal Employment Opportunity and Work–Family Balance Assistance Act address both the need to increase women’s participation in the workforce and the need to facilitate employees’ work-life balance, thereby helping to reduce problems associated with women employees’ career breaks and encouraging gender equality in the workplace.

However, in the policy discourse, as quoted below, work-life balance policies appear to be aimed mainly at increasing female economic activity rate in the short run.

“To relax the current trend of a low fertility rate and to prevent national competitiveness from decreasing due to a declining labor supply, it is the first priority to make full use of female human resources.... To do this, it is really urgent to establish a social support system to make women’s work and family balance possible.” (Committee member, Inspection of the Government Offices, Gender Equality Committee, October 2002)

“In this society with low fertility and aging, it is very urgent to secure the labor force and enhance the quality of labor; that is, family-friendly policies that promote women’s economic activities and thereby let them give birth are in need.” (Committee member, Special Committee on Low Birthrate in an Aging Society, September 2005)

Kim Sang Hee (Committee member): Isn’t this [expanding parental leaves] a good way for government to talk to citizens? We are doing this actively to cope with the low fertility problem...

Kim Jae Yun (Committee member): When we draft this bill, we can argue that the Environment and Labor Committee is actively dealing with the low fertility problem. (Environment and Labor Committee, December 2009)

The frame focusing on low fertility and national competitiveness deployed in the discourse has depicted women as a reserve army of labor to meet national labor market needs resulting from declining fertility and the rapidly aging population. Public policy interest in female employees thus has an underlying concern with the social costs associated with a decreasing economically active population. While the problem has been
presented as a social crisis of low birthrate, it reflects a political crisis as policy makers struggle to respond to rapidly changing demographics and labor market structure as well as the composition of society.

Emphasizing global standards, while relatively deemphasizing existing inequality problems within labor market: Overall, policy discourse regarding work-life balance is more of a recognition of what is needed than of how it can be fixed. Several policy actors called for attention to the fact that female employees have been disadvantaged in the labor market. However, as much more attention turned to the expected labor shortage problem resulting from the low birthrate, discourse regarding work-life balance policies has not paid as much attention to issues related to the strict gender segregation of the Korean labor market as it has paid to global economic indices. Moreover, women’s right to work, their parental rights, and/or their working conditions, which are issues deeply linked to employees’ utilization of work-life balance policies, have neither been a major topic nor discussed in depth. As a consequence, policy issues associated with gender equality in the family and in the workplace, major policy goals included in the relevant legislation and policy initiatives, have not been addressed as a primary motivation for work-life balance policies in the policy discourse.

Taking a comparative approach, the majority of discussions among policymakers and government officials concerning work-life balance policies have been in reference to global standards, and the primary focus of work-life balance policies has been on the numbers to be attained. That is, the framing of problems related to work-life balance policies has drawn primarily on economic/social indicators and has been tied to global
standards. For example, the discourse of work-life balance policies often includes policy discussions about work-life balance policy issues in reference to international statistics and economic indicators, such as those provided by the OECD or ILO. Thus, discourse on work-life balance policies has largely been approached from an economic perspective. The following quotes from policy actors provide examples of how the purposes of work-life balance policies have been framed in the policy discourse via such economic rationales as securing national competitiveness and dealing with such societal crises as low fertility rates and an aging society.

“Actually, the biggest and most chronic problem of Korean employment structure is the low female economic activity rate, and our country joining the ranks of advanced OECD countries. At least until achieving the average female economic activity rate of OECD member countries, it could be an option to practicing this law [Act on Promotion of Economic Activities of Career-interrupted Women, one of legal bases of work-life balance policies] for a limited time.” (Outside professional, Gender Equality and Family Committee, Public hearing, October 2007)

“The Act on the Promotion of Creation of Family-friendly Social Environment we resolved today, ... will contribute to joining advanced countries. Enhancing women’s economic activities is an alternative with economic growth potential for how our country faces low fertility and aging. Korean economic growth will be accelerated when we prevent women’s career breaks and provide opportunities and an environment where competent women employees are able to work hard.” (Committee Chair, Gender and Family Committee, November 2007)

This aspect of discourse related to work-life balance policies frames increasing female participation in the workforce as a means of coping with the social crisis represented by a low fertility rate and an aging society that will ultimately help secure a more viable national socio-economic status. Those two social problems, permeating the diagnosing frame reflected in the discourse from the very beginning, are the most
frequently referenced issues and are generally associated with references to international economic statistics in discussions concerning the motivation for work-life balance policies. In the current policy discourse on work-life balance policies, these policies are needed to facilitate the active use of women in the workforce and to enhance the birthrate towards at least the average of OECD member countries’ birthrate. The following quotes summarize the emphasis on the number of employees in the workforce:

“As the size of the workforce decreases, the people who are at work or are economically active will decrease, with a peak of 36.5 million people in 2016. Thus, there is an urgent need for expanding female and senior employment.” (Committee member, Special Committee on Low Birthrate in an Aging Society, September 2005)

“If we achieve the average standard of OECD in terms of female labor force population, it [Act on Promotion of Economic Activities of Career-interrupted Women] can be naturally repealed.” (Government official from the Ministry of Gender Equality and Family, Gender Equality and Family Committee, Public hearing, October 2007)

In addition, the criteria that will be used to measure the success of work-life balance policies have been associated with increasing birthrates and/or securing national competitiveness, while no implications or outcomes of work-life balance policies associated with employees’ quality of life, their family or such organizational-level outcomes as increased productivity or decreased turnover have been examined and discussed.

Overall, problem definitions associated with work-life balance policies have been framed by focusing on social problems at the national level rather than on organizational- or individual-level problems. Although some policy makers have recognized female workers as a disadvantaged group, social equity concerns has rarely been presented in depth in policy discourse regarding work-life balance policies. As a result, issues
associated with workers’ actual use of work-life balance policies and expected consequences of the policy implementation have rarely been phrased in terms of other important relevant policy outcomes rhetorically mentioned among the policies’ purposes such as gender equality and employees’ quality of life, and hardly address women’s working rights or status or such family issues as the division of domestic labor.

Ways of prescribing solutions for problems diagnosed

Focus on women’s dual commitment and absence of the men’s role in the family domain: Overall, there have been efforts to use a gender-neutral lexicon and terms (e.g., work-life balance, work-family balance, family-friendly, purple jobs) in describing and presenting issues; however, the ways of prescribing solutions for problems diagnosed have clearly been framed through traditional gender roles. For example, the term for domestic work in Korean is “caring labor” (dol-bom no-dong in Korean), and this work appears as the sole province of women in the discourse. Even though the work domain, which has traditionally been considered men’s territory, has now begun to be shared with women in line with increasing female employment and the rise of dual-income families in Korean society, the extent to which the family domain is shared with men is barely recognized. Nevertheless, discourse on work-life balance policies was based on existing and prevailing socially prescribed gendered roles that prevail in Korea society, indicating that female employees are those who should primarily take advantage of work-life balance policies. Indeed, men/fathers as a policy target and men’s use of work-life balance policies have not entered into the mainstream of discourse.
Even though several committee members, usually female members of the Committee of Gender Equality and Family, recognized this issue and representatives from the women’s interest group tried to appeal to other policy makers that this issue be highlighted, this effort did not resonate with others. Even in a few cases in which a lack of men’s use of work-life balance policies was pointed out, most policy actors, especially government officials of the Ministry of Employment and Labor, which is also in charge of work-life balance policies, focused on the increased rate of men’s utilization of parental leaves rather than on the total number of men who took advantage of leaves, which is quite small (e.g., 1.2% in 2008, 2% in 2010, and 2.8% as of 2012\textsuperscript{11}). As seen in the quotes below, the few efforts that were made to fix problems related to social conventions that assign childcare to women and to shed light on or enhance men’s role in the family through work-life balance policies were discouraged.

Won Chang Hee (Expert advisor): ... It is a bill from Hong Young-pyo (Committee member) about enlarging male employees’ opportunities to take advantage of paternity leave...
Son Bum Kyu (Committee member): Veto.
Jung Jin Sub (Committee member): Explicit veto. Not even a “careful consideration.”

... Lee Ki-Kweon (Vice-minister, the Ministry of Employment and Labor): It seems that it is not right to give more chances to men in terms of taking advantage of parental leave... (Environment and Labor Committee, December 2011)

Jung Jin Sub (Committee member): ... We are encountering opposition saying that parental leaves should be given more to women who give birth, not men.
Lee Mi Kyung (Committee member): It is not an abnormal thing at all.
Hong Young-pyo (Committee member): It is not abnormal.
Rhee Bum Kwan (Committee Chair): It is not normal. The leaves should be given more to women. How could we give them more to men? Put the bill

\textsuperscript{11} Statistics are based on the Unemployment Insurance Data Base provided from the Employment of Labor Statistics of Korea, retrieved from http://laborstat.moel.go.kr.
[regarding the quota system for male users of parental leaves] on the shelf. (Environment and Labor Committee-Subcommittee for bill inspection, December 2011)

Although traditional assumptions that (1) work and family domains are separate and (2) work needs must come before family needs have become less absolute, a review of the terms and reference points used in policy discussions indicates that male involvement in “caring labor” for the family has been largely absent in discourse on work-life balance policies. Rather, the emphasis has been on the consequences of working mothers’ dual commitment to work and family, whereas issues related to fathers’ participation in the domestic sphere have received little attention. In particular, discussions regarding parental leave have been heavily weighted in favor of maternity protection, which potentially fails to reflect changes in value orientations regarding fathers’ roles and also fails to support those who want to take advantage of work-life balance policies in order to take on additional family responsibilities.

Interestingly, as the discourse regarding work-life balance policies has expanded, there has been more emphasis on social responsibility for childcare to help working mothers harmonize their work and family. However, the focus has been on policies related to monetary support such as enhancing the amount of paid parental leaves and increasing the number of public childcare facilities. In spite of the importance of men’s roles in the family domain for women to ultimately make their work-life balance work, the policy discourse located the choice of “who will take advantage of parental leaves” in the private domain and failed to address this as core policy content.

Kim Sun Mi (Committee member): ... How about adopting a quota system for male users of parental leaves? When we look at current users of parental leaves, most of them are female, and male users are 181, 2% of total users.
... I think it is based on social conventions that caring for a child is a role of women.

Kim Dae-Hwan (Minister of Labor): ... Yes, but it is desirable that who, between a husband and a wife, will take parental leave is decided autonomously in a family domain. It would be better to reconsider this issue when we form a social consensus about it while implementing this policy in the medium and long term. (Special Committee on Low Birth Rate in an Aging Society, September 2005)

As seen in the quote above, discourse on work-life balance policies consistently indicates that couples (parents) themselves ultimately should negotiate among themselves and choose who should be the primary care provider and thus who preferentially should take advantage of work-life balance policies (e.g., parental leave, family leave), even though it has been consistently recognized that social responsibility for childcare is in need to enhance women’s work-life balance. Moreover, during such discussions, it has generally been assumed that women employees should be the ones who commit to the family even though they work as much as male employees. Even though both women and men are formally entitled to use programs that emerge from work-life balance policies in an organization, female workers are regarded as the more appropriate family member to take advantage of policies that allow family members to attend to family issues.

Focus on women with higher education and underrepresentation of women of lower status: Women employees, specifically working mothers, still endure a lower status in the labor market, and often serve as temporary workers and in lower-paying positions. However, the dominant frame reflected in discourse regarding work-life

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12 According to the 2012 survey on the employment type and working conditions published by the Ministry of Employment and Labor, 53.4% of irregular workers were women. Moreover, 49.7% of women (in comparison with 30.6% of men) were engaged in temporary employment positions such as day labor, which receives lower payment.
balance policies to overcome low fertility rate and increase economic activity of women has focused on women with higher education and the need to develop alternatives for attracting them into the labor market, while women with lower education and lower social status have been excluded as policy targets in the discourse. The quotes below show how women, who are typically in low social status positions, have been silenced in the discourse on work-life balance policies when they are mentioned as policy targets.

“It is not virtuous that women with two children, who are high-quality human resources and have had higher education, are staying comfortable at home. Whether they have one child or two children, their spare time after caring for children and doing domestic work should be utilized for enhancing national competitiveness.” (Committee member, Finance and Economic Committee, April 2001)

“In particular, it is a great loss in terms of national competitiveness that highly-educated females in the workforce quit their jobs before and after pregnancy and childbirth.” (Committee member, Gender Equality and Family Committee, April 2007)

“Above all, although Korea is a well-educated society, employment of highly-educated females is lowest level among OECD member countries. It is a total waste for the country for a lot of well-educated women to stay outside the labor market.” (Outside professional, Gender Equality and Family Committee, October 2007)

Interestingly, as discussed above, the majority of statistical evidence calling for the enhancement of women’s economic activity through the implementation of work-life balance policies has been derived from global standards (e.g., statistics from OECD) based on data from developed countries. However, statistics indicating the structural disadvantages confronting women, such as the status of female temporary workers and the domestic division of labor, have rarely been addressed in depth. This gap suggests that discourse on work-life balance policies tends to emphasize national economic goals rather than the promotion of the status of women, although labor statistics concerning job
types that keep women’s jobs separate from men’s jobs reflect a gendered labor market structure that places women workers at a disadvantage.

Overall, discourse on work-life balance policies has not positioned female workers on the same footing as male workers. Rather, women have been positioned as secondary breadwinners, with many women employed as part-time or temporary workers with lower incomes. In comparison to the well-educated women who were frequently mentioned in the discourse, women of lower economic status and women with lower paid jobs were almost never represented in terms of the policy content.

In addition, the absence of discourse on fathers’ roles in the family and the embeddedness of women in a gendered labor structure are very closely associated with the underlying issue on which the need for work-life balance policies is based. That is, although terms associated with work-life balance policies can be seen as phrased in gender-neutral ways, policy discourse rarely has addressed men’s roles in the family domain and, instead, has emphasized women’s dual roles (i.e., both as a primary care provider at home and as a secondary income earner) and their dual commitment, a discrepancy that implies that women might experience much more severe role conflicts. Thus, existing perceptions of gender roles arguably favor inequities in gender roles currently embedded in both the work and family domains.

*Focus on work-life balance policies that remove women in the workplace:* The accounts policy actors provide for work-life balance policies have focused on leave policies, specifically on maternity leaves and working mothers’ parental leaves as a means of their work-life balance. Women who use leave to give birth to and raise children
necessarily lose a connection to their workplace for a period of time, which puts them at a disadvantage in terms of promotion and mobility. However, within the policy discourse, there has been a lack of attention to other work-life policies that could help employees remain connected to their job rather than needing to take leaves. In addition, the distrust expressed by private sector employers that employees might abuse flexible policies has led policy makers to avoid or delay the decision regarding the implementation of other policy options such as flexible working arrangements. Since 2009, the Minister of Gender Equality and Family named policies associated with flexible working arrangements as *purple (color) jobs* to promote employees’ use of these policies. However, in legislation, many policy makers exchanged skeptical responses in terms of policies related to flexible working arrangements, as quoted below.

“Taking advantage of flexible working arrangements is for women to balance their work and family and also, through this, we can create jobs for women... Then, those who use these policies should not be discriminated against, but it is not the case... These policies create temporary workers and make employees’ jobs complicated... You should recognize the limitation of flexible working initiatives and switch the policy...” (Committee member, Gender Equality and Family Committee, October 2010)

Hong Young-pyo (Committee member): Not a chance for flexible working arrangements and leave policies using saved extra working time... I object to these policies. It is not worth discussing long, you know well.
Lee Mi Kyung (Committee member): Still, Korea has longer working hours, these policies can make them much longer.
Lee Ki-Kweon (Vice-minister of the Ministry of Gender Equality and Family): We think it will work in a reducing way.
Hong Young-pyo: It’s going to be a long story, so we object. Let’s count out this issue and talk about it later...It is controversial and we cannot talk about it right now...
Lee Ki-Kweon: To reduce working hours, we see it is better to work when employees have work to do and to be off when they do not have work to do. It is not possible to reduce working hours if they should come to work...
although they do not have work to do and work extra time if they have much to do.

Hong Young-pyo: ... I do not agree. You know, we have objected for several months. It is classified as unjust law... (Emphasis added, Environment and Labor Committee, December, 2011)

Although the intentions of policy makers were to prevent employers from abusing flexible working arrangements by making employees working hours longer, the policy discourse has not supported policy users having more policy alternatives that could help them to remain connected to their work. Consequently, women who are the primary user of leave policies have lost their connection to work while they were on leave, which often results in negative career consequences in terms of promotion and evaluation.

**Cultural Elements Embedded in Frames and Discourse**

Based on the findings regarding the diagnosing and prescribing frames reflected in the discourse regarding work-life balance policies, we can identify cultural elements that reveal socially constructed meanings. This section presents underlying cultural norms and assumptions that are embedded in the discourse regarding work-life balance policies that are socially constructed and so reflect what is valued in the Korea society.

**Economic value orientation**

In terms of diagnosing and defining problems, the dominant frame through which policy makers interpret problems associated with work-life balance policies reflects underlying assumptions that these policies are a means of dealing with the social crisis represented by the low fertility rate and aging population in Korean society by helping female workers deal with dual roles and by securing women’s participation in the labor
force. That is, in the current policy discourse on work-life balance policies, these policies are needed to facilitate the active use of women in the workforce and to enhance women’s fertility; whereas social meanings regarding work-life balance policies that have prevailed in legislation have rarely been constructed with regard to the protection of women’s labor rights or the promotion of their status even though these aspects are specified as one of policy goals. Overall, the discourse shows that the national socio-economic status has been highly valued in Korean society.

Several efforts made by policy makers (usually female members of the Gender Equality and Family Committee and representatives of women’s organizations) have attempted to highlight gender inequality issues rooted in the society that might seriously impede irregular female employees’ actual use of these policies and thus need to be fixed as a precondition for the implementation of work-life balance policies. Nevertheless, the discourse shows that economic growth and associated indices based on global criteria have been more valued than gender equality issues in the discourse. Overall, during the time period between 2001 and 2011, the discourse regarding policy and social issues related to work-life balance has been strongly interpreted through a frame that values economic concerns at the national level.

**Gendered assumptions, norm constructions, and work-life balance policies as gendered practices**

Again, attaining gender equality through the implementation of work-life balance policies, which is specified as a policy goal in relevant laws, has been rarely mentioned in the discourse, which indicates a gap between the rhetoric supporting women through
legislation and the reality of cultural and structural barriers that is rarely discussed by policy actors in their discourse. Overall, the gendered culture has been clearly reflected in the macro-level policy discourse regarding work-life balance policies. Cultural elements that are most frequently found in the discourse regarding work-life balance policies are assumptions and norms associated with traditional gendered roles. Although terms describing the policy content related to work-life balance policies appeared to be gender-neutral, certain meanings reflected in the discourse have clearly been constructed based on gendered assumptions and norms, which consequentially shape work-life balance policies as gendered practices.

The policy discourse indicating that female employees are those who should be the primary users of work-life balance policies and that couples (parents) themselves ultimately should negotiate among themselves and choose who should be the primary care provider taking advantage of these policies reflects socially/culturally constructed norms that prevail in Korea. That is, discourse regarding work-life balance policies has not located female workers in the same position as male workers, but rather has positioned women as secondary breadwinners. Moreover, in the policy discourse, women were consistently assumed to be the primary individual employed as part-time or temporary workers who earn lower incomes. In particular, it was assumed that it is women who primarily take responsibility for domestic work even when they are engaged in work to provide financial support for their families. In addition, the discourse has designated, in a real sense, the female employees, specifically, working mothers, as those who will preferentially take advantage of work-life balance policies. Moreover, gendered norms reflected in the discourse reinforce traditional gendered roles that have been
supported by wider social expectations in Korean society, that is, that men are the main family earners and women are the primary care-provider, which means employees’ choices are likely to be socially constrained with these norms.

These gendered assumptions and norms resonate with existing Korean culture. In the discourse regarding work-life balance policies, cultural elements related to gender are rather distinct, and can be associated with Korean Confucianism as well as characterized using Hofstede’s (2001) cultural dimensions as valuing high masculinity. Based on gendered norms, women and men are expected to conform to strong gender roles based on Confucian values. Although gender norms seem to have changed in the work domain, with increasing female economic participation, in that mothers are now expected to earn an income outside of the home, the gendered assumptions and norms reflected in the discourse regarding work-life balance policies implies that gender roles have changed little in the family domain, where women still do much of the work in caring for the family, which ultimately results in women having more difficulty in finding their work-life balance.

Discussions around the implementation of work-life balance policies in legislation serve as a dominant discourse in which women are disadvantaged relative to men, given that the work domain is privileged over the family domain, while caring labor is unappreciated. Findings clearly reveal that the dominant discourse regarding work-life balance policies presents policy issues in gender-neutral ways, but serves to disadvantage women who are embedded in the established gendered structure in the labor market. For example, the analysis of the discourse reveals how policy actors negotiated and constructed the implementation issues of work-life balance policies as vehicles to help
women with childcare responsibilities. Ironically, one assumption behind using gender-neutral terms to describe work-life balance policies should be that society as well as workplaces are no longer gendered anymore, and that both women and men have equal choices and opportunities with respect to participation in work and family commitments. While the rhetoric in the discourse suggests that responsibilities for caring labor in the family domain should be shared equally by men and women, in this case, the choice of how to share these responsibilities has been left to the couples (parents) themselves. In this context, negotiations between parents are likely to follow established gendered roles and identities, and work-life balance policies preferentially taken up by working mothers might function as gendered practices that support the existing gendered culture in Korea.

CHAPTER SUMMARY

Based on frames of diagnosing and prescribing social problems associated with work-life balance policies, the data analysis shows that the policy discourse related to legislation has reflected strongly gendered assumptions and norms and economic value orientations existing in the Korea society. Discourse has developed since the early 2000s in connection with social issues regarding low women’s economic activity, and it has been discussed at great lengths, with many critical legislative efforts in which work-life balance policies have been the major component since mid-2000s. Despite steady efforts by several policy actors, including members of the Gender Equality and Family Committee and representatives of women’s organizations, to draw attention to the need for men to use work-life balance policies and to issues of gender inequality, which must be addressed as an integral part of women’s ability to take advantage of these policies, in
the dominant discourse, policy actors have primarily identified women as the policy target. Ultimately, the emphasis has been on increasing fertility rates and policy discussions have focused on maternity/parental leaves among various work-life balance policies. Overall, the discourse has been mainly framed by policy actors focusing on the low birthrate and national competitiveness when diagnosing problems related to work-life balance policies, and the continuing/worsening low fertility and aging population in the society were interpreted as serious and abnormal changes in the policy context by policy actors.

Through the diagnosing frame focusing on low fertility and women’s low economic activity, the social meanings associated with the implementation of work-life balance policies were constructed as the means to increase economic activity while enhancing fertility rate. In addition, global statistics and standards were underscored, while existing structural/cultural gender inequality were rarely addressed in the discourse. In regard to prescriptions for the diagnosed problems, women’s dual roles in the family and the work domain were emphasized, whereas men’s role were mostly suppressed. Only women with higher education were highlighted as a major policy target of work-life balance policies and women of lower social/economic status were rarely represented in the discourse. Moreover, among work-life balance policies, leave policies that were most heavily discussed were those that would likely mean that women would lose their connection to their job and workplace.

Findings show underlying cultural aspects reflected in the discourse. The discourse regarding work-life balance policies reveals that economics-related goals were much more valued over the gender equality policy goal in the legislative policy forum.
Furthermore, gendered assumptions and norms reflected in the discourse show the gap between the policy rhetoric that nominally supports gender equality and the reality of cultural/structural inequalities women face. Overall, taken-for-granted gendered assumptions and norms have socially constructed work-life balance policies as gendered practices.
Chapter V: Discussion and Conclusion

This chapter presents a discussion of the findings reported in the previous chapter. It begins with a review of findings from Chapter IV. Next, implications for theory and implications for practice are discussed. Then, limitations of this study and suggestions for future research are presented. The chapter ends with a concluding statement that summarizes the research presented here.

**REVIEW OF FINDINGS**

Noting considerable criticism regarding the implementation of work-life balance policies, largely reported from the users’ perspective, this study focused on work-life balance policies developed as public policy, before these policies were translated into organizational-level policies, and examined societal culture as a policy context and environment that might affect the implementation of these policies within the workplace. In particular, discourse in the legislative arena regarding work-life balance policies has been examined in this study as an indicator of Korean societal culture. Findings show that during the time period from 2001 to 2011, although there were increasing efforts by policy actors affiliated with the ministries in charge of these policy issues, related standing committees, and women’s organizations to shed light on gender inequality in Korean society, the dominant discourse permeating policy discussions regarding work-life balance policies were framed in terms of national economics-related concerns: overcoming social problems and securing national competitiveness.

Overall, the dominant discourse has interpreted the current low birthrate and low female economic activity rate as national crises, and has constructed meanings associated
with work-life balance policies in terms of the need to overcome low fertility rates and secure national competitiveness through the implementation of work-life balance policies and, consequently, the enhancement of female employment. Although promoting gender equality in the workplace and in the family domain is one of the stated major policy goals of work-life balance policies, statements or accounts of policy actors that focus on gender equality rarely entered into the mainstream of discourse. Moreover, the policy discourse emphasized societal-level problems of the low fertility rate, aging population, and weakening national competitiveness, but did not focus on individual-level or organizational-level effects or outcomes of the implementation of work-life balance policies.

Overall, the dominant frames reflected in the discourse, which focus on numeric and economic standards while undervaluing gender equality indices and suppressing discussion of men’s roles in the family domain, show underlying gendered cultural assumptions, values, and norms, which are reflected in Hofstede’s (2001) masculinity-femininity dimension and Korean traditional Confucian values. Moreover, findings show that while work-life balance policies in Korea have functioned as gendered practices; they still do help women deal with dual commitments to work and family within these cultural contexts.

**IMPLICATIONS FOR THEORY**

The traditional approach of management studies regarding work-life balance policies has been to focus on the effects of these policies at the organizational-level, examining such issues as organizational performance and employees’ attitudes. Instead,
this study has focused on culture as an important policy context, which has not been a major focus of work-family research. In particular, this study has examined policy discourse produced by policy actors in developing legislation, where public values associated with public policy are projected and discussed, as an indicator of societal culture. This section presents implications for theory that are suggested by this study.

First, this study suggests that societal culture is an important variable to examine in studies of the implementation of work-life balance policies. In the existing literature, culture has generally not been a major focus, and societal culture has been given relatively little attention. However, the findings of this study show how existing traditional cultural assumptions, norms, and values are reflected in ways of talking and language used in public policy discourse. In particular, aspects of gendered culture in Korean society that emerge from its traditional Confucian culture and are reflected in Hofstede’s (2001) masculine culture—in particular, gendered assumptions and norms associated with traditional gender roles—were found in the discourse regarding work-life balance policies, implying that, regardless of the rhetoric in statutory language, there is pressure for both men and women to conform to certain expectations in terms of gender roles that exist in the Korea society.

These findings indicate that the impact of societal culture on the implementation of work-life balance policies should be considered as a policy context. Moreover, the findings of this study imply that if these legal requirements and relevant policy initiatives are not consistent with the national culture, they will not be effectively translated into organizational policies and practices that provide the expected benefits for the organization as well as for employees (Kim & Faerman, 2013). For example, although
legal regulations state that initiatives developed as a result of work-life balance policies are intended to be used by both men and women, the policy discourse regarding these policies implies that, based on gender norms, women are preferentially expected to be the target of these initiatives. These findings are consistent with those of Peus and Traut-Mattausch (2008) in their study of women managers in the United States and Germany, and those of Schuler and Rogovsky (1998), in their study of compensation practices in 21 countries, indicating that the impact of societal culture on organizational policies should receive greater attention by researchers.

Overall, the majority of a few existing studies that have examined societal culture or conducted cross-cultural research have focused on Hofstede’s collectivistic dimension, which might be expected to be compatible with the values associated with work-life balance policies. However, cultural aspects in the discourse regarding work-life balance policies in Korea have rarely reflected collectivistic values. In particular, this study found, in contrast to work by Wang and colleagues (Wang et al., 2008; Wang & Walumbwa, 2007), who proposed that collectivist cultures would be more open to and supportive of work-life balance policies, that other cultural factors may be more dominant in a society. Although emphasis on social responsibility for childcare has increased in Korea, the discourse regarding the use of work-life balance policies indicates that the decision should be made within a couple, which places the negotiation regarding parental leave in a situation where cultural norms regarding traditional gender roles likely prevail.

Moreover, consistent with Won and Pascall’s (2004) findings, it appears that although strong gender roles, also based on Confucian values, appear to have changed somewhat in the work domain, they have essentially remained the same in the family domain. That
is, although gendered norms have changed to some degree in the work domain as mothers
are expected to earn an income outside of home, they have changed little in the family
domain, where women still do much of the work in caring for the family, which results in
women having more difficulty in finding work-life balance. Overall, findings of this
study contribute to a better understanding of the macro Korean societal context in which
organizations are embedded, although it provides limited empirical evidence of what
actually occurs at the organizational level.

Second, this study sheds light on the importance of discourse analysis as an
important research approach for understanding cultural attributes that exist in a society.
Although this study examined work-life balance policies at the macro-, rather than meso-
level, the data analysis presented here supports findings of previous studies (e.g., Lewis
& Humbert, 2010; Runte & Mills, 2004; Smithson & Stokoe, 2005), which have
indicated that discourse concerning work-life balance or work-life balance policies tends
to be gender-blind at the visible level, although its actual focus has been heavily on
women’s dual commitment, thus resulting in a reinforcement of existing gender roles and
inequity.

Although several scholars have paid attention to societal culture, they have
generally used existing value dimensions [e.g., those proposed by Hofstede (2001)] and
used quantitatively-based measures and data analytic approaches. However, focusing on
discourse allows greater contextual understanding of the social meanings attached to the
content of cultural elements reflected in the discourse regarding work-life balance
policies. In addition, by examining the discourse, researchers can uncover socially
constructed expectations and the meanings underlying policy actors’ intentions with
regard to work-life balance policies in a specific cultural context. Although the link between societal culture and employees’ insufficient use of work-life balance policy initiatives was not empirically investigated, gendered cultural assumptions and norms shown in the findings suggest how these assumptions might play a role as cultural barriers undermining legal requirements and formal policies.

Although our data do not provide organizational-level evidence, findings related to cultural assumptions and norms that reflect economic value orientations and traditional gender roles suggest that working mothers might have difficulty balancing their dual roles, i.e., their commitment to workplace and home, and that women in lower-status jobs, in particular, might have much more difficulties in balancing work and family in that they may not be legally entitled to take advantage of these policies or that taking advantage of these policies might mean losing their jobs.

Overall, the existing literature that has examined discourse regarding work-life balance issues has taken a sociological perspective, while the scholarship of public administration and public policy has rarely paid attention to discourse. In general, the field of public administration has preferred positivism and “explanation over interpretation or critical analysis” (Ospina & Dodge, 2005, p. 148). Our findings suggest, however, that discourse as a subject of analysis can provide important insights for the study of policy implementation and policy translation in that discourse reveals what issues are silenced and the related hidden meanings that reflect cultural values. Following prior research by Farmer (1995), Fox and Miller (1995), and White (1999), which has shed light on language used, social meanings, and deconstruction of taken for granted assumptions in public administration research, this study can be regarded as an attempt to
fill a gap that exists in the mainstream of public administration research. The findings indicate that the stated policy goals and the targets of these goals were not completely aligned with the actual policy goals and targets, which focused solely on overcoming the low fertility rate and securing national competitiveness by stabilizing as well as enhancing female employment through the implementation of work-life balance policies. Overall, the analysis of the discourse revealed that what needed to be fixed was frequently discussed, while discussions related to how it could be fixed carried biases related to gender and women’s social status by devaluing references to existing inequalities embedded in structure and culture in the Korea society.

Third, this study examined how frames reflected in policy discourse regarding work-life balance policies emerged and how those frames were utilized by policy actors in meetings in the legislative arena. The findings of this study suggest that frames can be a useful conceptual and analytical tool when analyzing discourse. As Rein and Schöning (1991) pointed out, frames are a convincing tool for analyzing discourse in that they provide a bridge from the specific discourse into the larger cultural context. Moreover, by providing diagnostic and prescriptive policy narratives, frames reflected in the discourse provide strong stories regarding what needs to be fixed and the ways in which it might be fixed (Rein & Schöning, 1991, 1996). By examining diagnosing and prescribing frames reflected in the discourse regarding work-life balance policies, this study was able to identify what is valued and is cared about by policy makers (Runte & Mills, 2004) as well as what is unappreciated and undervalued.

Fourth, while the majority of research has focused work-life balance policies at the organizational level, this study highlighted these policies as public policy. Arguably,
organizational (HRM) policies are a reflection of public policy when legislation and
government policies promote work-life balance initiatives at the societal level before
these policies have been adopted by local organizations. Moreover, as Burstein (1991)
pointed out, culture creates and gives meaning to public policy, and traditional cultural
norms and beliefs held by policy makers and practitioners affect policy development and
implementation at the societal level and indirectly influence relevant policy
implementation at the organizational level. Findings of this study indicate that cultural
elements specifically associated with traditional gender roles were manifested in the
discourse produced by policy actors in legislation. These cultural assumptions, values,
and norms are embedded in the social context in which Korean organizations exist, and
one would expect that these organizations would react to policy makers’ actions regarding
the level of support for the implementation of work-life balance policies, which might
reveal that work-life balance policies’ intention to promote gender equality in the
workplace is more rhetoric than actual values. In this regard, this study sheds light on the
link between public policy and organizational policies by focusing on discourse related to
legislation enacting work-life balance policies as public policy and viewing this policy as
the policy context for organizational policies.

**IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICY AND PRACTICE**

Overall, findings show that legislation and policy discourse regarding work-life
balance policies do not reflect the reality that employees face in Korean society, which
suggests several practical implications for policy makers and policy practitioners. As
mentioned in Chapter I, the implementation of work-life balance policies has been
criticized by employees in spite of recent government and legislative efforts. Why do employees feel that legal and government supports with regard to work-life balance policies are not sufficient? As shown in the legislative history (see Table 1.1), during the period this study investigated, there were continuous and increasing efforts to adopt and implement various types of work-life balance policies. Moreover, the terms and language used in the discourse and legislation appeared on the surface to be gender-neutral. Findings of this study show, however, that the assumptions, norms, and values reflected in the policy discourse were heavily gendered. For example, even though the stated policy target was defined as all employees and stated policy goals included enhancing gender equality in the organization, the discourse revealed that women and working mothers in particular, were most frequently mentioned as the appropriate policy targets. Men’s roles with respect to domestic work were rarely a focus of the discourse; and when issues such as men’s use of paternity or parental leaves were raised by several policy actors as policy content, strong objections were raised. Thus, policy actors’ recognition of structural gender inequalities that exist in Korean society was not placed into the mainstream of policy discourse even though fixing these inequalities is a necessary condition for the successful implementation of work-life balance policies. Overall, in the current cultural and structural context, programs and initiatives emerging from the work-life balance policies are not likely to be used as policy intends in spite of legislative efforts and relevant government initiatives.

Moreover, policy makers have not focused on the structural context as a precondition for the implementation of work-life balance policies and have instead focused on global standards. In the discourse, many policy makers focused on
international standards, as well as successful efforts at the societal level in advanced countries such as France and Sweden to overcome low birthrates through work-life balance policies. However, these policy makers appear to have overlooked the differences between Korean and these advanced countries with respect to the social/cultural context in that Korean cultural norms do not allow cohabitation before marriage as well as out-of-wedlock childbearing. Furthermore, as relevant statistics reviewed in the previous section indicate, the Korean labor market is seriously gender-segregated. Female employment is much lower than male employment, in general, and it is particularly low for women in their 30s, the time period when women get married and give birth, resulting in many women workers experiencing severe career-interruptions. Moreover, the gender pay gap in Korea is much greater than it is in other OECD member countries; and a large portion of women employees work in temporary jobs where they receive low payment. More importantly, according to statistics based on the Unemployment Insurance Data, the payment for compensating parental leaves is covered by unemployment insurance, and only 3% of non-regular employees are eligible to collect unemployment insurance. This means that most irregular employees cannot be paid when they take parental leaves even though wages during parental leaves have generally been increased through a series of revisions of related laws. It is worth noting that policy makers focused on individual choices and differences, and attributed women employees’ role conflicts and career breaks to women’s work motivation, rather than to a labor market in which women are disadvantaged. Thus, in considering the potential for work-life balance policies to be successful, it is necessary to consider the Korean labor environment, in which a comparatively large number of stay-at-home mothers and working mothers who work
irregular hours are not recognized by unemployment insurance. Under these conditions, female irregular employees might assume that they are not able to take advantage of work-life balance policies.

Overall, even though the ability to use leaves and other benefits associated with work-life balance policies is required by law, female employees who do not have job stability—which involves a large number of female employees—are not likely to take advantage of these policies, because they would risk their jobs if they did. In this regard, current work-life balance policies, which are embedded in the gendered cultural context combined with the existing structural gender inequality might be viewed as a gendered practice. In particular, suppressing discussions of men’s role in the family domain and emphasizing working mothers’ use of parental leaves, as shown in the policy discourse regarding work-life balance legislation might affect employers’ and employees’ recognition of these policies and, as a result, it might be expected that male employees will not take leaves when their wives take advantage of these policies. Especially, in situations where one of the major purposes of the law is to address gender inequalities that are part of the societal culture, as in the case with work-life balance policies, more efforts need to be made to ensure that policies are implemented through practices that reflect values that are needed to “fix the problems”. Unless policy makers truly address existing problems, the legislative support and work-life balance policies will be of limited value for women employees, in that these policies may help women manage their dual roles, but will not ease the total amount of their labor or the fact that they expect negative consequences when they take advantage of these policies.
Even though policy makers have placed a great emphasis on overcoming Korea’s low birthrate, these policies might not contribute to solving this problem unless work-life balance policies also address existing gender inequalities. Moreover, problems related to unstable employment of women and the gender pay gap, which are critical reasons for women avoiding childbirth, need to be addressed. To date, the dominant policy discourse has focused on enhancing employees’ use of leave policies, which exacerbates the problem by putting employees in a situation where they lose connections to their jobs. Instead, more options such as flexible working arrangements and job sharing practices, which keep employees connected to the workplace, might be necessary. However, as several policy makers asserted, in the current cultural and structural context, flexible working arrangements lead to greater job insecurity. Unless the current situation—where women avoid marriage and childbirth due to job insecurity—can be resolved, policy makers might not be able to achieve the goal of overcoming the low fertility rate and securing national competitiveness. Again, the findings of this study show that issues of gender inequality and inequity have been silenced in policy discourse regarding work-life balance policies in Korea. At the organizational level, Rapoport et al. (2002) indicate that pursuing a dual agenda that involves both gender equity and organizational effectiveness through work-life balance policies can contribute to significant improvement in employees’ personal lives and organizational performance. By expanding this finding to the societal level, we would suggest that when policy makers pursue both gender equity/equality in a society and certain public policy goals through work-life balance public policies, as in the case of Sweden’s work-life balance policies (Chang et al., 2005), these policies can provide win-win strategies for a society.
Overall, this study allowed us to investigate how social meanings associated with work-life balance policies have been constructed in the public policy forum in the Korean cultural context. As Smithson and Stokoe (2005) pointed out, changing terms to make them more gender-neutral may not be effective without changes in deep-seated cultural elements such as norms and assumptions in the wider society. Thus, if socially constructed and deeply embedded assumptions underlying a government’s approach to work-life balance policies do not reflect values needed for the implementation of these polices, the translation of these policies into the organizational policies and practices will not be successful, given that the values and assumptions in the workplace are affected by those of the wider society in which organizations are embedded. That is, the effectiveness of policy at the societal level and the effectiveness of initiatives in the workplace are reciprocally related to each other.

LIMITATIONS

When interpreting the findings of this study, several limitations should be considered. First, transferability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) or the applicability of the findings to other contexts needs to be examined. That is, Korea may have a unique societal culture and economic situation, which ultimately limits the transferability of this study’s finding to other settings. In addition, given that there have been few studies looking at such discourse, especially at the macro level, more empirical evidence is needed to confirm the existing findings, even in the specific context.

Second, this study conducted discourse analysis that examined language used in developing legislation, and adopted the translation and back-translation procedure in
order to confirm linguistic equivalence. Nevertheless, in that the original text for all verbatim transcripts is in Korean and the societal culture of Korea is distinct and substantially different from Western culture, words specifically used only in Korea and their nuances might not be perfectly translated in terms of their meanings.

Third, based on Lewis’s (1997) argument, this study examined public policy discourse as an indicator of cultural elements existing in the Korea society. The findings show that societal values have been projected through frames constructed by policy actors. It is assumed that public values, cultural assumptions and norms, which are closely attached to public policy, are actively portrayed in the legislative arena. Although we can assume that cultural elements are embedded in the policy discourse so that policy discourse is an indicator of culture, the discourse might not capture every complex element existing in Korean society, which should be considered in interpreting findings. Moreover, considering the individual level, it is important to recognize that individual attitudes might differ from general societal culture as well as organizational culture. Although individuals are affected by the societal and organizational cultures in which they are embedded, it should be recognized that individuals might not follow nor accept societal values, expectations and norms.

Fourth, this study focuses on work-life balance policies as public policy and assumes the social/cultural context in which public policy is embedded is associated with the implementation of work-life balance policies in the workplace. The findings show that current work-life balance policies are being developed and implemented within a gendered culture and, arguably, this might affect the implementation of work-life balance policies in the organization in negative ways, which resonates with the robust criticism
from users’ perspective. Nonetheless, our findings do not address the implementation of policies at the organizational level.

**AREAS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH**

The limitations of this study and several issues from the findings suggest areas for future research. First, given that there have been few studies focusing on discourse related to work-life balance policies, especially at the macro level, more empirical evidence is needed to confirm the present findings. In addition, as this study did not examine this issue at the organizational level, further studies could focus on organizational-level discourse. Moreover, we would benefit from studies that examine multiple levels of discourse, that is, studies that include other institutional-level discourses such as media discourse, as well as meso-level and/or micro-level discourse (i.e., interpersonal discourse) reflecting individuals’ interpretation of and attitudes toward work-life balance policies; such studies could compare patterns and dynamics among discursive activities at three different levels of analysis. Investigating how various levels of discourse constrain or support each other would contribute to more effective implementation of work-life balance policies by revealing connections and disconnections among the cultural elements underlying the policy issues. In particular, to directly link work-life balance policies as public policy to policies at the organizational level, it is necessary to conduct studies that investigate how public policy discourse resonates with or differs from organizational discourse. Frames can be a good tool to link multiple levels of discourse (Chreim, 2006; Johnston, 1995). In addition, as Starrels (1992) indicated, there might be sectoral differences in regard to organizational discourse.
regarding work-life balance policies in that private sector organizations are more influenced by economic cost-benefit analyses, while public sector organizations are more influenced by meeting needs of citizens. Our findings also indicated that private firms tend to interpret work-life balance policies as a burden for them. In this regard, future studies may compare how discourse emerges in organizations in different sectors.

In comparison to other advanced countries, the history of public policy discourse regarding work-life balance policies in Korea is rather short. The scope of policy issues is still expanding and, as we found, there are increasing efforts to shed light on different types of work-life balance policies and to call attention to and address existing gender inequality issues. With time, the discourse will develop and dynamics underlying the discourse might become more complex. During this time, frames might be changed, and new frames might even be created. As time passes and work-life balance policies are more fully established, a longitudinal study examining the ongoing discourse regarding these policies may contribute to a better understanding of changes in frames, discursive dynamics, and macro-level discourse ecology.

To expand our findings and explore relationships between societal culture and the implementation of work-life balance policies in greater depth, comparative studies using a cross-cultural perspective that compares different dimensions of societal cultures as a policy context are needed. Interestingly, cultural elements reflected in the policy discourse regarding work-life balance policies in Korea are shown to be very similar to organizational norms and assumptions found in some empirical studies conducted in the European countries (Lewis & Humbert, 2010; Smithson & Stokoe, 2005), which are known to have very different societal culture from Korea. How different cultural
elements in different societies create similar situations in the workplace might be an interesting topic to be examined for future study.

CONCLUSION

This study is an exploratory study that has taken a new approach to the study of work-life balance in that it focused on culture at the macro-level and examined policy discourse as an indicator of culture in a society. Findings from this study show us how issues associated with work-life balance policies have been socially constructed in a specific context. In Korea, by linking the low fertility rate and aging population to low economic activity by women, policy makers have framed the goals and measures of implementing work-life balance policies within these social problems. Although promotion of gender equality has been included in related Acts and policy initiatives, the prescribing frame reflected in the discourse has rarely addressed existing gender inequalities in the labor market that could impede female employees’ ability to take advantage of these work-life balance policies. Although terms used in legislation and discourse were not necessarily gendered, cultural elements reflected in the discourse was clearly gendered.

This study does not negate economic factors faced by the nation. Maintaining a productive population and securing labor force are among the most critical issues in running the country. However, the data analysis of this study found that, in the development and implementation of work-life balance policies, the focus was not on work-life balance, but rather on these economic elements, reflecting the gendered Korean societal/cultural context in which these policies were developed.
For successful translation of work-life balance policies into the workplace, it is necessary to understand how ideas are constructed and framed, and the cultural elements that may affect the implementation of these policies at the local level. As Davis (2007) noted, investigating language used by policy makers in a legislative body provides us with clues about how work-life balance policies will actually be implemented, that is, what individuals will and will not be able to do. Overall, the findings of this study contribute to our understanding of how the dominant discourse of work-life balance policies has been framed, and how the shared norms and assumptions embedded in the social and cultural contexts of these policies contributed to, rather than reduced, existing gender inequality. To conclude, more efforts from policy makers and government officials are needed to create the conditions where work-life balance policies can be implemented effectively with practices that reflect values and norms that are necessary for employees to truly be able to take advantage of these policies.
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Perry-Smith, J. E., & Blum, T. C. (2000). Work-family human resource bundles and


Behavior, 54(3), 392-415.


# APPENDICES

## A. Types of Work-Life Balance Policies

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Types of work-life balance policies</th>
<th>Authors</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Flexible working arrangements</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Leave arrangements</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Dependent care support</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Elder care assistance</td>
<td>Perry-Smith &amp; Blum (2000)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Financial Support</strong></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Policies in general</td>
<td>Magoshi &amp; Chang (2009), Yoo &amp; Choi (2009)</td>
</tr>
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</table>
### B. The List of Meetings from which Minutes Used

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>National Assembly</th>
<th>Parliamentary Session</th>
<th>Session within the Parliamentary Session</th>
<th>Date (Month/Day/Year)</th>
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</thead>
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<td>240th</td>
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<td>304th</td>
<td>Subcommittee for Bill Inspection (1st)</td>
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<td><strong>Gender Equality and Family Committee</strong></td>
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<td>Committee</td>
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<td>284th</td>
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<td>Environment and Labor Committee</td>
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<td>Subcommittee for Bill Inspection (2nd)</td>
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<td></td>
<td>304th</td>
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<td>Subcommittee for Bill Inspection (2nd)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Special Committee on Low Fertility and Aging Society</td>
<td>17th</td>
<td>255th</td>
<td>2nd</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>256th</td>
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<td></td>
<td>304th</td>
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<td>4th</td>
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<td>Inspection of the government offices</td>
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<td>N/A</td>
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*Note:* The committee was named the Special Committee on Women’s Affairs in 2001.

**Note:** Gender Equality and Family Committee held on April 26, 2007 includes the public hearing on the legislation associated with family-friendly environments.
C. Coding Scheme

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Basic nodes related to RQs</th>
<th>Examples of child nodes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Policy Actors I: government officials</td>
<td>Ministry of Gender Equality and Family (MOGEF), Ministry of Health and Welfare (MW), Ministry of Labor and Employment (MOLE), Ministry of Strategy and Finance (MOSF)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Policy Actors II: national assembly members from different standing committees</td>
<td>Gender Equality and Family Committee, Health and Welfare committee, Environment and Labor Committee</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Policy Actors III: interest groups</td>
<td>Korean Women’s Association United, Korea Employer’s Federation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Policy Actors IV: professionals</td>
<td>Professors, Researchers, HR managers from companies with outstanding performance in the implementation of work-life balance policies</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| Changes in context | Changes in laws  
| | Changes in policy contents  
| | Changes in societal characteristics |
| Policy actors interpretation of changes in policy context | Negative: crisis, abnormal  
|Neutral |

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Basic nodes related to RQs</th>
<th>Associated essential nodes and child nodes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| RQ2 Frame I: diagnosis    | Economic concerns  
|                           | - National competitiveness  
|                           | - Current status of women’s economic activities  
|                           | - Labor shortage  
|                           | Gender issues  
|                           | - Labor market structure  
|                           | - Employment structure  
|                           | Focus  
|                           | - Low fertility  
|                           | - Aging  
|                           | - National competitiveness  
|                           | - Labor shortage |

13 In Nvivo, a node can be considered as a category. A linguistic unit, from a letter to a whole document can be coded as a node. Parent node and child node are terms used in Nvivo’s node system; a child node is the next lower hierarchical node in relation to its parent node (Edhlund, 2011).
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Policy goal settings associated with problems</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>- Low fertility focused</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Short-term oriented</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ways of diagnosing</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>- Global statistics</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Foreign cases</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Inequality indices</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Fame II: prescription</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Work-life balance policies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Parental leaves</td>
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<tr>
<td>- Maternity leaves</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Childcare support</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Paid leaves for nursing family</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Program certifying family-friendly workplaces</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Reduction of working hours during childcare</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Job sharing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Flexible working time system</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Purple color</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Relevant laws/regulations</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>- Policy purpose</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Reasons for bill proposals</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Focus</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>- Women as a main policy target</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Women’s dual roles</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Women with higher education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Leave policies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Maternity protection</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Promoting female employment</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ways of prescribing</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>- Ways of depicting women</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Absence of men as users</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Absence of father’s role</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Use of gender-neutral terms</td>
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<tr>
<td>- Social responsibility vs. individual responsibility</td>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Concerns</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>- Burden for private companies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Reverse discrimination against men</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| Cultural elements I: assumptions | Gendered assumptions  
- Women are mainly responsible for caring labor  
- Women as the primary individuals employed part-time with lower incomes [women-friendly jobs]  
Conflicts with the assumptions associated with the utilization of work-life balance policies  
- Equal society with no gender gap  
- Equal opportunity/choice between men and women |
|-----------------------------|---------------------------------|
| Cultural elements II: values | Economic value orientation  
- Securing women’s participation in the labor force  
- Enhancing fertility rate with helping women deal with family and work responsibilities  
- Women as a means  
Equality value orientation |
| Cultural elements III: norms | Norms of gendered roles  
- Traditional gendered roles (women as homemakers/ men as breadwinners)  
- Women as a secondary breadwinners  
- Strengthen through negotiations between couples themselves |
| Cultural elements IV: practices | Gendered practices  
- Women [working mothers] specified as main policy target  
- Increased total amount of labor  
- Women’s work-life balance at the cost of their career  
Conflicts between values and practices |
| Notes | |

- Exclusion from work-life balance policies

Rhetoric