Competing claims in work and family life have become essential features of our Western world. Many people feel torn between work and family not just because their households increasingly juggle competing responsibilities, but also because job expectations and parenting standards have stepped up. The focus of this book lies both on the causes of disturbed balances in people’s professional and private lives and on solutions households and organisations have chosen in order to harmonise work and family demands.

Competing claims have not only been topical in private conversations and in the media, but have also received increasing attention from scholars in the social sciences. Since 2000, the editors of this book participated in a research team from the Interuniversity Center for Social Science Theory and Methodology (ICS), in a comprehensive research program entitled ‘Time Competition: disturbed balances and new options in work and care’. Because of the importance of the topic and the
innovative approach, the research program was funded by the Netherlands Organisation for Scientific Research (NWO). Program leaders were Tanja van der Lippe from the Department of Sociology of Utrecht University and Arie Glebbeek from the Department of Sociology of the University of Groningen. The new perspective in this research program was to study the impact of governance structures within firms and households on time allocation decisions. With this perspective we aim to establish an integration of the flourishing research into the distribution of paid work and caring tasks and the long-standing field of organisational research.

In order to discuss the outcomes of the research program, an international workshop was organised at Utrecht University in 2004. For two days, experts from European countries as well as the United States and Australia presented their research. Competing claims were discussed intensely and studied from different angles, providing us with new views and insights which we believe are also valuable to a broader group of social scientists, students, and others interested in the subject.

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Tanja van der Lippe and Pascale Peters