

Contributions to Management Science

Claire Sophie Zerwas

Work-Life Balance and Women's Entrepreneurship

An Exploration of Influencing Factors

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An Exploration of Influencing Factors



Springer

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*This thesis is dedicated to
my parents Anke and Horst,
my sister Dorothee, my niece Stella Clara,
and my husband Marius.
You are simply the best!*

Preface

Interest in the phenomenon of work-life balance has increased drastically among researchers and practitioners in recent decades. There are a vast number of publications on work-life balance in both academic journals and the popular press. Various reasons for the current interest in work-life balance can be identified. For example, the literature often highlights increased work demands for women and men or the integration of women—who are still responsible for a larger share of family and home responsibilities—in the labor market as important reasons. Furthermore, technological tools such as e-mail, mobile phones, and portable computers allow for work to be done “twenty-four seven” (24/7). These changes in society are provoking private and public discussions on work-life balance. It is sometimes believed that self-employment is a solution to many workplace problems—above all to the balancing of work and life—in particular, women are motivated to become entrepreneurs due to expectations of a higher work-life balance. However, the existing literature provides only initial answers regarding the relationship between work-life balance and women’s entrepreneurship. Research on work-life balance has focused almost exclusively on the experiences of individuals employed in large businesses or other organizations. However, these lessons from large organizations’ employees are not transferable to the entrepreneurship context. Entrepreneurs are said to have considerably more flexibility and autonomy regarding their working lives in comparison to organizationally employed individuals. This results in a research need concerning work-life balance in the context of entrepreneurship—especially women’s entrepreneurship.

Based on this research need, the objective of this thesis is to explore work-life balance in the context of women’s entrepreneurship to gain a comprehensive understanding of the factors that influence the work-life balance of women entrepreneurs. To achieve this objective, the women’s entrepreneurship “5M” framework by Brush, De Bruin, and Welter (2009) is chosen as the conceptual foundation. It is a comprehensive framework to investigate women’s entrepreneurship. The framework encompasses five dimensions—management, money, market, motherhood,

and macro/meso environment—and guides the study of work-life balance in this thesis. To gain a deep understanding of the “5Ms,” the present thesis continues the original literature review by Brush et al. (2009). Building on this understanding, an expert study is conducted to explore the role of the dimensions of the “5M” framework for the work-life balance of women entrepreneurs. Semistructured interviews with experts in the field of women’s entrepreneurship from academia and practice are analyzed and interpreted based on a thematic qualitative text analysis. As part of the analysis, a multiphase coding approach is applied to the interview transcripts.

This analysis gave rise to the new “7M” model, which is composed of seven dimensions and the corresponding factors that influence the work-life balance of women entrepreneurs. All five dimensions from the original “5M” framework proved to be relevant for women entrepreneurs’ work-life balance, but in the context of work-life balance, the original “macro/meso environment” dimension needs to be split into two dimensions—“macro environment” and “meso environment”—because they address very different aspects. Furthermore, a new dimension—“myself”—is of importance and introduced in this thesis. This results in seven dimensions, which are summarized in the “7M” model. However, the analysis identifies many overlaps and interactions between these dimensions. Code frequencies indicate that the dimensions market, motherhood, and management are particularly relevant to the work-life balance of women entrepreneurs. An in-depth analysis of all seven dimensions allows for more detailed insights into the specific role of each dimension for women entrepreneurs’ work-life balance. Furthermore, this analysis illustrates that women entrepreneurs are a highly heterogeneous group and that their work-life balance results from a complex interplay of various interrelated factors. Additionally, the thesis discusses the blurring between work and private life in the context of women’s entrepreneurship. Finally, strategies that can enhance the work-life balance of women entrepreneurs are derived based on the “7M” model. In particular, the “management” dimension provides many specific starting points for women entrepreneurs to improve their work-life balance. To summarize, this thesis draws a comprehensive picture of work-life balance in the context of women’s entrepreneurship, with a particular focus on the specific factors that influence women entrepreneurs’ work-life balance.

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List of Abbreviations

24/7	Twenty-four seven
cf.	Confer
e.g.	Exempli gratia
ETP	Entrepreneurship Theory and Practice
f.	Following
ff.	And the following ones
JBV	Journal of Business Venturing
MBA	Master of Business Administration
p.	Page
QDA	Qualitative data analysis
UK	United Kingdom
URL	Uniform resource locator
USA	United States of America
WLB	Work-life balance

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Chapter 1

Introduction: A Gender-Sensitive Analysis of Entrepreneurs' Work-Life Balance



1.1 Entrepreneurship as an Advantage or Disadvantage in Achieving Work-Life Balance

Balancing work and life is a constant challenge in today's world (Pradhan, Jena, & Kumari, 2016, p. 15). Already, in 2005, Lewis and Cooper (2005, p. 8) referred to work-life balance as a 'hot topic' in the media, everyday language, government and employer discussions and human resource departments. It has become an important issue in modern societies given its relation to concerns about quality of life (Hilbrecht, Shaw, Johnson, & Andrey, 2008, p. 455). To this day, the issue of work-life balance has not lost its relevance; indeed, it has become even more relevant. People live "harried lives" and frequently wonder why time passes by so quickly (Schöneck, 2018, p. 3 f.). The subject of work-life balance is one of the most publicly and privately discussed topics, as it touches the daily lives of many people (Schöneck, 2018, p. 7).

A growing number of publications in the research field of work-life balance reflects this strong interest in the topic. A wealth of academic and nonacademic expositions promote the importance of work-life balance (Grawitch, Maloney, Barber, & Mooshegian, 2013, p. 277). In Europe especially, there has been growing interest in the topic (Abendroth & Den Dulk, 2011, p. 234). The reconciliation of work and family has become a core policy concern within the European Union and has encouraged debates and policy interventions at the national level (Gregory & Milner, 2009, p. 1).

There are various reasons for the current high level of interest in work-life balance. Several authors point to the integration of women in the labor market as an important reason (Pradhan et al., 2016, p. 16; König & Cesinger, 2015, p. 532; Clark, 2000, p. 749). The entry of working women into the workforce was already named as a reason in 2004. To be precise, Burke (2004, p. 1) cited the following three reasons for the high interest in work and family integration: (1) the increasing number of women, particularly women with children, in the workforce; (2) evidence

that managerial and professional women and men are working harder and longer hours; and (3) technological tools such as e-mail, mobile phones and laptops that make it possible to work 'twenty-four seven' (24/7). Likewise, Perrons (2003, p. 68) observed an expansion of flexible and long working hours resulting from the opportunities offered by technology, increasing deregulation and associated moves towards the '24/7 society'. Lewis, Gambles, and Rapoport (2007, p. 361) pointed out that work-life balance "[...] appears to capture a widely felt need to prevent paid work from invading too much into people's lives." According to Kalliath and Brough (2008a, p. 323), this interest partly stems from "[...] concerns that unbalanced work-family relationships can result in reduced health and performance outcomes for individuals, families and organisations." In addition, Clark (2000, p. 749) highlighted the increased number of single parents, increased mobility among workers (distancing them from social support from families) and people's higher interest in the quality of life outside of work. These changes in society fueled research on the relationships between work and home life (Clark, 2000, p. 749). For the reasons mentioned above, the topic of work-life balance continues to receive considerable attention.

According to Reynolds and Renzulli (2005, p. 33) and Parasuraman and Simmers (2001, p. 552), self-employment is sometimes regarded as the ultimate answer to many workplace problems, particularly in regard to balancing work and family roles. Self-employment gives individuals "[...] the chance to break free from bureaucratic control, the ability to decide when, where, and how to work, and the opportunity 'to be their own boss'" (Reynolds & Renzulli, 2005, p. 34).¹ However, self-employment is not only relevant to individuals but also to society. Entrepreneurship contributes to innovation, economic growth and job creation (OECD/The European Commission, 2014, p. 24; Johansen, 2013, p. 216). Thus, entrepreneurship² provides an interesting context for research on work-life balance. However, research on work-life balance in entrepreneurship is rare.³

Particularly interesting for the study of work-life balance is the context of women's entrepreneurship. The findings by Buttner and Moore (1997, p. 34) suggest that the desire to balance family and work responsibilities is one of the most important entrepreneurial motivations for women. More recently, Humbert and Drew (2010) investigated potential differences in the motivational factors that lead men and women into entrepreneurship. They discovered that more women than men felt that they had become entrepreneurs to achieve better work-life balance (Humbert & Drew, 2010, p. 188). In particular, more mothers than fathers seek to become entrepreneurs to reconcile the demands of work and family (Humbert & Drew, 2010, p. 191).

¹Author's own formatting.

²This thesis uses a broad definition of entrepreneurship to include all forms of self-employment and uses the terms 'entrepreneurship' and 'self-employment' interchangeably.

³See Chap. 3 for exceptions.

In the context of women's entrepreneurship, Jennings and McDougald (2007, p. 756) suggest that women business owners are more likely to experience higher work-family conflict than their male counterparts. Therefore, it seems questionable whether entrepreneurship is the ultimate solution for women to reconcile work and life. In this regard, Davis and Shaver (2012, p. 499) state that "[...] *the roles of mother and entrepreneur create more role conflict than do the roles of father and entrepreneur.*" Work-family conflict is associated with negative work, family and individual well-being outcomes (Burke, 2004, p. 1). McGowan, Redeker, Cooper, and Greenan (2012, p. 69) state that some aspects of the entrepreneurial experience "[...] *render the journey somewhat trickier for women to travel than for the majority of men, given their tendency to fulfil the majority of caring and home-making roles and associated duties.*" Furthermore, research findings suggest that entrepreneurship is seen as a masculine field (Steffens & Viladot, 2015, p. 121; Gupta, Turban, Wasti, & Sikdar, 2009, p. 409; Wilson, Kickul, & Marlino, 2007, p. 402). For example, Marlow and Patton (2005, p. 722) state that "[...] *women experience entrepreneurship in a context which is largely shaped by male norms and values [...].*"

In addition, fewer role models are available to female than male entrepreneurs (Mattis, 2004, p. 154). If one is to think of a famous entrepreneur, it is very likely that the first to come up will have a man's name (Max & Ballereau, 2013, p. 97). Alsos, Isaksen, and Ljunggren (2006, p. 667)⁴ state that "*entrepreneurship is still a male-dominated activity in the twenty-first century.*" The incidence of female entrepreneurs is lower than that of male entrepreneurs in almost every country in the world (Terrell & Troilo, 2010, p. 261). However, women's participation in start-up activities varies between different countries. In Germany, women's participation in start-up activities was at record levels for the period between 2013 and 2015 (Metzger, 2016, p. 4). During this period, women's self-employment accounted for 43% of all start-ups (Metzger, 2016, p. 4). In 2016, the participation of women dropped slightly but remained high (Metzger, 2017, p. 3). In fact, the share of women fell to 40% in 2016 (Metzger, 2017, p. 3). This decline is primarily due to the significantly lower participation of women entrepreneurs in full-time start-ups (Metzger, 2017, p. 3). Traditionally, women have been more involved in part-time than in full-time start-up activity (Metzger, 2017, p. 3; Metzger, 2016, p. 4). In 2017, the share of women in start-up activities fell again by 3% points to 37% (Metzger, 2018, p. 4).

In summary, even though many women are motivated to become entrepreneurs due to expectations of a higher work-life balance, the current research on work-life balance perceived by women entrepreneurs has remained rather limited (McGowan et al., 2012, p. 54; Rehman & Azam Roomi, 2012, p. 210; Mathew & Panchanatham, 2011, p. 81; Shelton, 2006, p. 286). The results of the rare studies on this topic are also difficult to compare, mainly because the results are very context-specific. The results reflect country-specific differences regarding the socioeconomic and cultural environment. To clarify the need for research on how women entrepreneurs

⁴Author's own formatting.

experience the interface between work and life, Sect. 1.2 discusses the state of the art of research on women's entrepreneurship and work-life balance in greater detail. Based on the derived research need, Sect. 1.3 will present the overall objective and the corresponding central research question of this thesis.

1.2 State of the Art of Research on Women's Entrepreneurship and Work-Life Balance

The derivation of the research need is presented in three steps. In the first step, the academic discussion on women's entrepreneurship is summarized in Sect. 1.2.1. In the second step, the current state of research on the topic of work-life balance is discussed in Sect. 1.2.2. Building on this, the research need with respect to both research fields is identified in Sect. 1.2.3.

1.2.1 State of the Art of Research on Women's Entrepreneurship

The research field 'women's entrepreneurship' has gained considerable attention in recent years and is increasingly discussed in the academic literature. In 1976, the *Journal of Contemporary Business* published Eleanor Schwartz's article entitled 'Entrepreneurship: A New Female Frontier'. From a historical perspective, the article by Schwartz (1976) was groundbreaking because it is said to be the first article focusing on women entrepreneurs (Greene, Brush, & Gatewood, 2007, p. 181).

According to Greene et al. (2007, p. 182 f.), most studies in the 1980s did not test the theory but considered gender (or sex) as an analytical variable and focused on possible differences between women and men entrepreneurs.⁵ This first wave of research showed that theories developed on male samples did not necessarily generalize to women (Greene et al., 2007, p. 185 f.). As Greene et al. (2007, p. 182) illustrate, in the 1990s, evolving theories suggested that context and perspectives were relevant for conducting research and gender began to be treated as a lens rather than just a variable (see for example Barrett, 1995; Berg, 1997; Brush, 1992; Fischer, Reuber, & Dyke, 1993). Researchers who took a feminist perspective noted that women had historically been excluded from entrepreneurship literature and emphasized the need to understand entrepreneurship as a gendered activity (Greene et al., 2007, p. 187).

In the early 2000s, women's entrepreneurship received considerable attention in research. A two-volume special issue on women and entrepreneurship was published

⁵The specific meanings of the terms 'gender' and 'sex' will be explored in Sect. 2.1.1.1.

in the scientific journal "Entrepreneurship Theory and Practice (ETP)" (De Bruin, Brush, & Welter, 2006, 2007). In the first volume of the special issue, De Bruin et al. (2006, p. 585) claimed that women are one of the fastest rising populations of entrepreneurs but still vastly understudied. Women's entrepreneurship was characterized as being "at the early childhood stage" (De Bruin et al., 2006, p. 590) at this time. De Bruin et al. (2006) discuss several reasons for the paucity of research on women's entrepreneurship. One reason lies in the implicit assumption in many theories of entrepreneurship that the individual entrepreneur is generic and, thus, that there is no need to study women separately (De Bruin et al., 2006, p. 586). However, as these theories were developed on samples of men, by men, and tested primarily on samples of men, they may not adequately reflect women entrepreneurs (De Bruin et al., 2006, p. 586).⁶ Furthermore, De Bruin et al. (2006, p. 587) argue that women are less often studied because of less visibility in the media as well as because of perceptions that they should not be entrepreneurs and that they are less capable because of family responsibilities. Regarding research norms in educational institutions, De Bruin et al. (2006, p. 587) postulate that institutional support and funding for researchers interested in studying women's entrepreneurship will generally be less than for other more broad-based and "accepted" topics.

In the second volume of the special issue on women's entrepreneurship, De Bruin et al. (2007, p. 323) stated that there was an expanding body of research on women's entrepreneurship. Again, they noted that the existing standards in entrepreneurship research, particularly theories and measures, are inherently male based (De Bruin et al., 2007, p. 328).

In 2009, the "International Journal of Gender and Entrepreneurship" was launched. This journal is entirely focused upon gender and entrepreneurship. The inaugural issue also featured an article by Brush, De Bruin, and Welter (2009). According to the editor, Brush et al. (2009) "[...] lay the theoretical foundation for this inaugural issue by presenting a gender-aware framework for women's entrepreneurship" (Henry, 2009, p. 5). In this article, Brush et al. (2009) introduced the women's entrepreneurship "5 M" framework. First, the authors explained that the following three basic constructs "3Ms" were frequently used in entrepreneurship theory to explain venture creation: (1) management, (2) money and (3) market (Brush et al., 2009, p. 9).⁷ Access to management, money and market is essential for every entrepreneur and is often discussed in the context of entrepreneurship (Bates, Jackson, & Johnson, 2007). Second, the authors proposed including two additional constructs in the "3 M" framework: (4) "motherhood" and (5) "macro/meso environment" (Brush et al., 2009, p. 9). "Motherhood" is depicted as a metaphor that represents the household/family context, and it is acknowledged that

⁶De Bruin et al. (2006, p. 586), referencing Hurley (1991).

⁷Brush et al. (2009, p. 9), referencing Schumpeter (1934), Kirzner (1985), Shane (2003), Penrose (1959), Bruno and Tyebjee (1982) and Aldrich (1999).

this context might have a larger impact on women than men due to societal stereotypes and structures (Brush et al., 2009, p. 9). In support of this, Jennings and McDougald (2007, p. 756) suggested that women business owners are more likely than male business owners to experience greater work-family conflict. The “macro/meso environment” includes expectations of society and cultural norms (macro) and intermediate structures and institutions (meso; Brush et al., 2009, p. 8 f.). Henry (2009, p. 5) state that the “5 M” framework “[...] helps lay a foundation for coherent research on women’s entrepreneurship.” In sum, Brush et al. (2009) proposed a holistic framework to investigate women’s entrepreneurship (see Sect. 2.1.2).

In 2012, another special issue on women’s entrepreneurship research was published in the journal “Entrepreneurship Theory and Practice (ETP)”. Within the introduction to the special issue, Hughes, Jennings, Brush, Carter, and Welter (2012, p. 429)⁸ refer to “*the dramatic expansion of scholarly interest and activity in the field of women’s entrepreneurship within recent years [...]*” and characterize research on women’s entrepreneurship as being “[...] *at the brink of adolescence.*” Unfortunately, the results of the increasing number of studies on women’s entrepreneurship are difficult to compare because they are rooted in different countries and involve diverse definitions of the term ‘entrepreneurship’. Recently, Birkner, Ettl, Welter, and Ebbers (2018) stated that women’s entrepreneurship research “[...] *seems to be in its ‘teens’, challenged by a liminal state of its own reaching for broader acceptance in the ‘adult world’ of entrepreneurship research*” (Birkner et al., 2018, p. 5). Even within the teenage age, women’s entrepreneurship is still a young research field and a richer understanding of women’s entrepreneurship is needed. In particular, Hughes et al. (2012, p. 431) reference several calls for greater attention to questions concerning the heterogeneity evident among women entrepreneurs and to highlight the different contexts in which women are embedded. For example, Carrier, Julien, and Menvielle (2008, p. 60) state the following: “*It is to be hoped that future research will avoid attempts to characterize ‘THE’ woman entrepreneur, since she does not exist; women entrepreneurs have different management styles, motivations, perceptions of their firms, and ways of developing them.*” More generally, De Bruin et al. (2007, p. 331) observed the following: “*What researchers frequently neglect in entrepreneurship research is the embeddedness and context specificity of entrepreneurship.*” Thus, future research on entrepreneurship and women’s entrepreneurship in particular should take greater account of the specific context in which entrepreneurial activities are conducted.

In a second step, several main aspects from the literature on the work-life balance research field are discussed in the following Sect. 1.2.2.

⁸Author’s own formatting.

1.2.2 State of the Art of Research on Work-Life Balance

The debate over how to succeed in occupational life without sacrificing personal life has its roots in a long tradition of research concerning the interface between work and family or personal life (Lewis & Cooper, 2005, p. 9). Research on these topics began in the mid-1960s with an initial focus on women, work-family conflict and stress, and it has more recently focused on all employees (Fleetwood, 2007, p. 353; Lewis & Cooper, 2005, p. 9). Over the years, a variety of related concepts evolved in this research field (e.g., work-family stress, role conflict, role strain, work-home conflict, work-family conflict or interference, work-family accommodation, work-family compensation, work-family segmentation, work-family enrichment, work-family expansion, work-family balance, and work-life balance). Sometimes the different terms are used synonymously or confound.

The term 'work-family balance' was the predecessor of 'work-life balance' (Gregory & Milner, 2009, p. 1). However, by focusing on employees with family responsibilities, the notion of work-family balance was considered in practice as causing a backlash in the workplace among nonparents (Gregory & Milner, 2009, p. 1). However, much current research still focuses on the relationship between work and family roles (see for example Eddleston & Powell, 2012; Heilbrunn & Davidovitch, 2011; König & Cesinger, 2015). The term 'work-life balance' enables a wider understanding of nonwork concerns and gained widespread use in research and policy arenas (Gregory & Milner, 2009, p. 1). According to Lewis et al. (2007, p. 360 f.), the shift from 'work-family' towards 'work-life' discourse began in the 1990s, originating specifically in the United States of America (USA) and the United Kingdom (UK). Today, the term 'work-life balance' is most common. It is often used in scholarly journals as well as in the media, everyday language, government and employer discussions and in human resource departments (Hilbrecht et al., 2008, p. 455; Lewis & Cooper, 2005, p. 8). Nevertheless, the term 'work-life balance' is not without controversy as it is discussed in more detail in Sect. 2.2.1. Some researchers criticize the implication that work-life balance indicates that work is not a part of life and that a person's time should be equally split between the two (Lewis & Cooper, 2005, p. 8; Rapoport, Bailyn, Fletcher, & Pruitt, 2002, p. 16). Other terms such as 'work-life integration', 'work-life harmonization' or 'work-life articulation' are proposed as more useful statements. In the end, however, there are also difficulties with these terms (see Sect. 2.2.1). For example, 'work-life integration' implies that the two spheres must be merged, which leads to "[...] fears of a contamination or the domination of personal life by the demands of paid employment" (Gregory & Milner, 2009, p. 2). The present work follows the notion of Gregory and Milner (2009, p. 2) and uses the "original, long-standing, and easily-understood term" work-life balance.

In current research, there is still a focus on the conflict between the two domains of family and work. According to Shaffer, Joplin, and Hsu (2011, p. 221 f.), an extensive body of work-family research already exists, but the research field has been dominated by researchers and samples from the USA. In general, the 'life'

aspect of the work-life balance concept is rather unexplored, and it is a critical aspect that life is often taken to be a synonym for leisure or for nonwork (Collins, 2007, p. 416 f.). However, life outside paid work involves leisure, but it also includes unpaid work (Collins, 2007, p. 420). In addition, some activities such as training, study, work-related travel or commuting violate the strict separation of leisure and work (Collins, 2007, p. 418). This aspect makes it even more difficult to examine the work-life balance concept.

Additionally, the influence of gender on the work-life balance concept requires further research. According to Emslie and Hunt (2009, p. 151), many contemporary studies of work-life balance ignore gender or take it for granted. Prominent theories in the context of work-life balance such as the 'work-family border theory' by Clark (2000) are criticized for being gender-blind (see Sect. 2.2.2). Lewis et al. (2007, p. 364) argue that current work-life balance discourses reinforce gender inequities "*by claiming gender neutrality and obscuring wider ongoing gendered discourses and practices.*" Burke (2004, p. 1) marks gender as a common antecedent of work-family conflict. According to him, "*women, individuals with children, more highly job involved individuals and individuals experiencing greater job demands typically report more work-family conflict*" (Burke, 2004, p. 1).⁹ In this context, many authors highlight that women are still responsible for a larger share of family and home responsibilities (see for example Abendroth & Den Dulk, 2011, p. 239; Heilbrunn & Davidovitch, 2011, p. 128; Lewis et al., 2007, p. 364). However, overall, the results concerning the level of conflict between work and home life of women in comparison to men are mixed (Emslie & Hunt, 2009, p. 154). Furthermore, Ransome (2007, p. 374) criticizes the academic work-life balance discourse for focusing narrowly on the experiences of women with young children. Family households with dependent children have become the "*ideal-typical object of analysis in the discourse*", although caring comes in different forms and an aging population causes increases in eldercare (Ransome, 2007, p. 376). Emslie and Hunt (2009, p. 155) agree that research on work-life balance mainly focuses on the experiences of mothers of young children. These articles reflect a call for greater attention to questions concerning the heterogeneity evident among people's experiences with work-life balance.

In the past, studies primarily focused on the management of work-life balance and particularly work-family conflict in the context of large companies and other organizations (König & Cesinger, 2015, p. 532; Parasuraman & Simmers, 2001, p. 551; Stoner, Hartman, & Arora, 1990, p. 30; Loscocco, 1997, p. 205). The effects of self-employment regarding women's work-life balance have been only marginally addressed by the literature. The research need with respect to work-life balance in the context of women's entrepreneurship is formulated in greater detail in the following Sect. 1.2.3. Here, the link between women's entrepreneurship and work-life balance, as discussed in the literature, is presented and the specific research need is derived.

⁹Author's own formatting.

1.2.3 *Research Need in the Fields of Women's Entrepreneurship and Work-Life Balance*

Women's Entrepreneurship In recent years, women's entrepreneurship has been increasingly discussed in the academic literature. According to Reynolds and Renzulli (2005, p. 33) and Parasuraman and Simmers (2001, p. 552), it is sometimes believed that self-employment is an answer to many workplace problems, particularly to the balancing of work and family roles. Furthermore, many authors highlight that women are still responsible for a larger share of family and home responsibilities (see for example Abendroth & Den Dulk, 2011, p. 239; Heilbrunn & Davidovitch, 2011, p. 128; Lewis et al., 2007, p. 364). Therefore, self-employment might provide an opportunity for women to balance their multiple roles more effectively.

Indeed, the findings by Buttner and Moore (1997, p. 34) suggest that the desire to balance family and work responsibilities is one of the most important entrepreneurial motivations for women. When compared to male entrepreneurs, female entrepreneurs are much more likely to cite a desire to achieve a better work-life balance as a motivational factor (Humbert & Drew, 2010, p. 190). In another study, Mattis (2004, p. 158) identifies the need for more flexibility as one of the most common reasons female entrepreneurs cite for leaving companies to start their own business. Thébaud (2016, p. 269) suggests that the decision to pass up a job that lacks flexibility is associated with women's self-employment. Entrepreneurship seems to constitute a "fallback" employment strategy for many working mothers who want greater work-family balance (Thébaud, 2016, p. 270).

Work-Life Balance The phenomenon of work-life balance has been important to both practice and research since the beginning of the mid-1960s, and interest in this phenomenon has greatly increased in recent decades in both academic journals and the popular press (Hilbrecht et al., 2008, p. 455; Lewis & Cooper, 2005, p. 9; Burke, 2004, p. 1). In the past, few studies about work-family conflict or work-life balance focused specifically on self-employment. Issues concerning the interface of work and life have primarily been studied in the context of employment in large organizations (König & Cesinger, 2015, p. 532; Parasuraman & Simmers, 2001, p. 551; Stoner et al., 1990, p. 30; Loscocco, 1997, p. 205).

In their early study, Stoner et al. (1990) note that little attention has been paid to the extent of work-home role conflict faced by business owners. The authors state that, "*The existing work-family role conflict literature has a distinctive non-entrepreneurial slant [...]*" (Stoner et al., 1990, p. 30). In 1997, Loscocco (1997, p. 205) argued that the discussion of work-family conflict has been framed almost completely in terms of the employment system. However, lessons from large enterprises' employees are not transferable to the entrepreneurship context. The reason for this is that entrepreneurs have considerably more control, flexibility and autonomy regarding their working lives in comparison to organizationally employed people (Reynolds & Renzulli, 2005, p. 48; Parasuraman & Simmers, 2001, p. 551; Loscocco, 1997, p. 205). In her study on work-family linkages among self-employed

women and men, Loscocco (1997, p. 205)¹⁰ states that “*self-employment provides a unique lens through which to examine gender and the work-family nexus since it is a context in which people have more control than the average employee to fashion their own connections between work and family.*” Few authors followed the shift from the organizationally employed person to the self-employed person as the focus of analysis. In 2001, Parasuraman and Simmers (2001, p. 551) highlighted a continuing paucity of research on work-family conflict of self-employed people. Accordingly, research has focused almost exclusively on the experiences of individuals employed in large businesses and other organizations (Parasuraman & Simmers, 2001, p. 551). In a recent publication, König and Cesinger (2015, p. 532) highlight that there is still little research on work-family conflict among self-employed people.

Summary In sum, it can be stated that the literature on work-life balance of entrepreneurs is extremely scarce. This is remarkable since there is an abundance of literature on work-life balance in the context of employment in organizations. However, self-employment is also a widespread form of work and should therefore be considered in the discourse on work-life balance. A subsample of entrepreneurship literature discusses the interface of work and life experienced by women entrepreneurs. There appears to be a large discrepancy between the small volume of research on work-life balance of women entrepreneurs and the high relevance of this topic for practice as argued in Sect. 1.1. In part, this discrepancy seems to result from a missing alignment of the scientific discussion with the needs of the individual women entrepreneur regarding the work-life balancing act.

Based on the presentation of the problem in Sect. 1.1 and of the research need in this Sect. 1.2.3, the objective and the central research question of this thesis are described in the following Sect. 1.3.

1.3 Objective

Although some issues regarding the balancing of work and life by entrepreneurs have been recognized in research, the existing literature provides only initial answers regarding the relationship between work-life balance and entrepreneurship—especially with regard to women’s entrepreneurship. *Therefore, the overall objective of this doctoral thesis is to explore work-life balance in the context of women’s entrepreneurship to gain a comprehensive understanding of the factors that influence the work-life balance of women entrepreneurs.*

This central research objective implies the following research problem. The **main problem area** includes unresolved questions with respect to the factors that influence work-life balance of women entrepreneurs. In particular, it is important to

¹⁰Author’s own formatting.