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Parenting: Towards a work-life articulation model of women entrepreneurs

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Parenting: Towards a work-life articulation model of women entrepreneurs

Being a female entrepreneur is presented in the literature as either a difficulty or a solution to the work–family and the work–life balance. Since these two conflicts increase entrepreneurs' life stress and reduce career satisfaction, they deserve a better understanding. The life narrative analysis of 29 women entrepreneurs who actually created their own business provides deeper insight into the reasons for their career choice within the context of a whole-life story. Three cases emerge, based on female entrepreneurs' perceptions of articulating their work life and private life. Four criteria explain the work–life articulation: the entrepreneur's life stage, the business life stage (and the conjunction between these two criteria), spousal support, and the entrepreneur's motivation for creating the business.

Keywords: women entrepreneurs; work–life conflict; life narrative; Parenthood; mumpreneur

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Introduction

Work-family conflict refers to the extent to which the demand of one role is inconsistent with the demand of the other (Segal, 1986). Typically, women are particularly concerned with work-family conflict (WFC) since they are still mainly responsible for the raising of children and housework (Aldrich and Cliff, 2003) regardless of the amount of work they have to face. The understanding of work-family conflict is of great importance since it increases stress and life satisfaction.

Traditionally, women with children waited until their children had completed secondary school before becoming an entrepreneur (Breen, Calver et Oliver, 1995; Carrier, Julien and Menviell, 2006). However, recently, women with young children have been turning to self-employment and entrepreneurship notably to limit the work-family conflict (Mallon et Cohen, 2001) for the flexibility it allows in terms of time schedule and workspace. Specifically, the term *mumpreneur* has been introduced to describe these women who start a business while mothers of very young children to blossom through maternity and entrepreneurship at the same time (D'andria and Gabarret, 2017; Richomme-Huet and D'andria, 2013). Nevertheless, Kirkwood and Tootel (2008) have shown that in reality "entrepreneurship may not be a panacea for achieving work-family balance" (p.285), since most of their female respondents reported work-family conflict, especially in their role as mothers and homemakers at the same time as entrepreneurs.

Hence, previous literature is not unanimous regarding the advantages of entrepreneurship about the work-family articulation. While some conceive entrepreneurship as a way of achieving a better harmony between work and family (Buttner and Moore 1997; Mallon and Cohen 2001), others are more moderate (Boutillier, 2008; Baromètre de la caisse d'épargne, 2012; Bourgain and Chaudat, 2015) and still others show the opposite (Kirkwood and Tootel, 2008).

According to their samples, the studies that have shown entrepreneurship as a way of achieving a better harmony between work and family seem to be mainly composed by women who had started a business at least partly in order to conciliate work and family, while the other studies have examined women entrepreneurs regardless of their reason for starting the business. Yet, there are still opportunities to investigate the topic further, and to better investigate the lived experience of women entrepreneurs (WE) regarding work-life conflict (WLC), taking into account the motivation to start the business.

This research fills this gap in the literature by focusing on the perceived WFC of WE as they experience it in a life path. Do WE perceive WFC? What are the factors which can explain the differences in perceptions? Do all WE look for a reduction of WFC? Or, on the opposite, do some of them reject the search for a balance? What is precisely the link between parenthood, the motivation to create and WFC? Does entrepreneurship reduce the work-family conflict compared to a salaried employment? The objective of this paper is to highlight the disparities in the perception of work-family conflict among WE and to propose factors that explain this difference in perception.

To explore these questions, we conducted life narratives in France based on a sample of 29 WE, which was heterogeneous in terms of age, familial status as well as size and sector of the business, and the motivation to create a business. In the first part of this paper, we review the literature on work-life articulation as it pertains to women, especially entrepreneurs. Our results pinpoint three cases

discriminating the perception of work-life conflict. Then we propose four factors which reduce the conflict: the role of the spouse, the life stage of the business and of the WE, and the motivation for becoming an entrepreneur. The discussion focuses on two results that appeared counterintuitive: maternity and the role of passion at work as a way to reduce the conflict.

1-Women, entrepreneurship and work–life articulation

1-1Work–life articulation

The problem of work-life balance is easily observed. Of great note, however, is the change in the way personal life and work life are conceptualized in the literature. The notion of a conflict between home-life and work-life refers in part to our limited time and energy and the lack of a clear idea of how to apportion these limited resources to each (Segal, 1986).

As Goode (1960) observed, people have limited resources and, unsurprisingly, fulfilling one life role may exhaust the time and energy available for another, making it difficult to fulfill that other role. Yet others (Sieber, 1974; Barnett and Hyde, 2001) have pointed out that having multiple roles can confer benefits that compensate for what is demanded by these roles. According to this perspective, the lives of people greatly involved in multiple roles are "enriched" as these individuals create or find the personal resources needed to fulfill them (Garey, 1999). Greenhaus and Powell (2006) defined work–family enrichment as an improvement in one role that leads to a better quality of life in the other.

Work-family conflict is defined as a form of role conflict in the career-driven individual when the demands of work and family become mutually incompatible (Higgins and Duxbury, 1992). Conflicts arise when demands for participation in one sphere of life are incompatible with the demands in another. Although the focus always seems to be on conflict, balance and harmonization emerge as key concepts for understanding the relationship between work and private life (Poelmans, Kalliath, and Brough, 2008). Work-family balance would seem to imply a 50/50 split in resources, time, involvement and satisfaction between the professional and family spheres (Greenhaus, Collins, and Shaw, 2003). Thus, as Poelmans and colleagues (2008) point out, (1) two elements are in balance because they have the same weight and (2) if even the slightest element is removed from one side, the balance may be disrupted. The balance between work and family life refers to an equal amount of time spent in professional and family roles (Greenhaus et al., 2003).

This approach is limited in that it overlooks those individuals who do not desire or require a 50/50 balance between their professional and family life (Rapoport et al., 2002). A person can reconcile work and family even if the weight of "work" is greater than that of "family" or vice versa. For some researchers, work-life balance and reconciliation are therefore not the right terms to use in this context (Poelmans et al., 2008). Some individuals refer to balance as a transitory state of harmony, a momentary absence of tension, which is "homeostasis" and not necessarily "balance" (ibid). Others will feel stressed despite the temporary balance and will need to make unceasing efforts to juggle demands and responsibilities (Poelmans et al., 2008).

It may be more interesting to examine how individuals deal with this type of conflict, how they perceive it and strive to find "some kind" of harmony. According to Poelmans and colleagues (2008), there is still some way to go before a widely accepted measure of work-family balance can be formulated, which they believe will be in line with the measures of Greenhaus and colleagues (2003). In addition, broadly shared definitions of states of satisfaction and subjective satisfaction are needed.

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These states will have to be evaluated according to personal priorities, or what Poelmans (2005) calls POP (Purpose, Objectives, Priorities).

Moreover, the use of the term "family" may also be problematic. Instead of using the term "family life," several researchers have suggested the more inclusive "personal life" or "private life" to take into account those who are single or childfree (Burke, 2004) or those who have teenagers (or older) children (Emslie and Hunt, 2009). These terms also include a wide range of leisure activities, from volunteering to sports to an active social life with friends, all of which may be of great importance in people's lives and require considerable commitment of time and energy.

The increasing numbers of women in higher education has accelerated their participation in professional work. The articulation of professional and family life is considered a particularly female problem, although perhaps less so today. Yet conflict is seen as greater for some women because of the effects of "social roles" and the unequal sharing of family and domestic responsibilities within the couple (Aldrich and Cliff, 2003).

1-2 Work–life articulation for women entrepreneurs:

Research on work–life articulation is a relatively recent stream in the entrepreneurship literature (Greene et al., 2003).

Work-Family conflict and Motivations to create a business:

Motivation is a crucial element of commitment that leads the individual to act, think and evolve (Deci and Ryan, 2008). If several models of WE motivation exist (Moses et al., 2014), "Pull" and "push" factors are a common way of explaining different motivations for women to start a business (Orhan and Scott, 2001; Kjeldsen and Nielson, 2000). Push factors, or necessity factors, are mainly related to negative events or emotions such as divorce, dissatisfaction with a salaried employment (boring, glass ceiling), a loss of job, an insufficient family income and a need for a flexible work schedule because of family responsibilities (Buttner and More, 1997). Pull factors are more related to a positive aspect and as an opportunity, a search of independence or self-fullfilment, the desire to organize one's own work, or the search for a social status (Duchéneaut, 1997).

Note that depending on the studies certain factors are considered as being "push" or "pull". For example, the desire to break the glass ceiling is mainly seen as a push factor while Cornet and Constandinis (2004) consider it as a pull factor. Moreover, "push" and "pull" factors are often combined (Brush, 1990).

Studies revealed that most women cited push factors as the major motivation for starting a business (Shapero and Sokol, 1982; Hisrich and Brush, 1988).

Regarding the motivations related to the WFC, many researchers report that considerations towards the family are often cited when women decide to start a business (Taylor, 1988; Zellner, 1994; Orhan and Scott, 2001). Flexibility to manage their dual responsibilities (mothers and workers) and the search for a more balanced life are the major reasons why women leave salaried employments to start their own businesses (Buttner and Moore, 1997; Mallon and Cohen, 2001; Parasuraman et al., 1996; Stevenson, 1986; Zelner, 1994; Orhan and Scott, 2001; Gundry and Welsch, 2001).

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Parenthood may particularly be a trigger for entrepreneurship. The term *mumpreneur* refers precisely to women who start a business while mothers of very young children blossom through maternity and entrepreneurship at the same time (Nel et al., 2010; D'andria and Gabarret, 2017; Richomme-Huet and D'Andria, 2013). These women, dissatisfied with their salaried positions create their own businesses in order to balance professional with private life (Cromie, 1987; Boden, 1999). Starting a business is, in their eyes, a way to cope financially while raising their children and managing domestic and family tasks (Fielden et al., 2003).

In that case, entrepreneurship is clearly a coping strategy to reduce the WFC.

Aside from *mumpreneurs*, studies on WFC of WE which do not focus on motivations to create are more balanced. On the one hand, some surveys consider that WFC is not a major difficulty for WE in a French context ("Baromètre de la caisse d'épargne", 2012; Boutillier, 2008). On the other hand, other surveys highlight the work-family conflict WE have to face. For instance, Kim and Ling (2001) emphasised work-family conflict experienced by WE through three interrelated issues: job-parent conflict, job-homemaker conflict and job-spouse conflict. In the same vein, Kirkwood and Tootell (2008) showed that WE do experience WFC, the job-parent conflict being the most prominent issue. They reported that WE feel terribly guilty when leaving their children with others. Similarly, in the French context, a government report showed that 63% of French women entrepreneurs confessed to feeling overwhelmed (Bernard, Le Moigne, and Nicolaï, 2013).

To explore this apparent contradiction between the motivation to create and the mixed reality, we explore the different WFC factors identified in the literature, with a focus on parenthood.

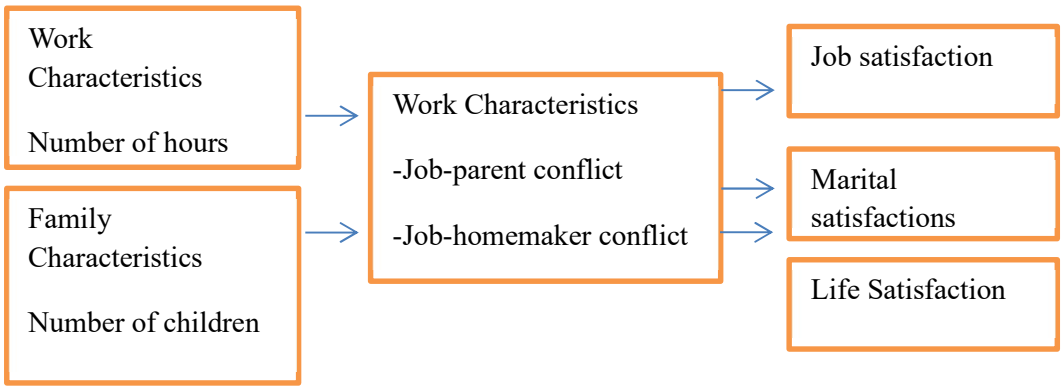
Factors that influence WFC

Greenhaus and Beutell (1985) have identified three types of major forms of work-family conflict (WFC): time-based conflict, strain-based conflict and behaviour-based conflict. Factors which have an impact on WFC were recognized both in the work domain (inflexible work, hours worked, role conflict, etc) and in the family domain (age of children, number of children, spouse support, spouse employment).

For women employees, parental demand (or the degree of parenthood) has clearly a positive impact on WFC. Is it also the case for WE?

Like in Greenhaus and Beutell's model (1985), Kim and Ling (2001) proposed that Work and Family characteristics positively impact WFC (figure 1).

Figure 1: Model on work-family conflict (Kim and Ling, 2001)



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Let's consider family characteristics. Kim and Ling (2001) emphasised the negative impact of family support on WFC. This result is consistent with other studies (Carrier, 2006; Kirkwood, 2009; Bourgain and Chaudat, 2015). Nikina, Le Loarne, and Shelton (2013) focusing on the spouse support highlighted three key dimensions: emotional support, business support and household support.

Parental demand (number and age of dependent children) is positively associated to WFC perceptions (Kim and Ling, 2001). These results are similar to other studies (Parasuraman et al., 1996; Huang et al., 2004; Shelton, 2006; Kirkwood and Tootell, 2008). Nevertheless, considering the case of mumpreneurs, the perception of WLC can reflect different realities. Indeed, as we have pinpointed above that previous literature is far from being unanimous about the effect of entrepreneurship on WE's WFC.

A reason for these mixed results may come from the different composition of the samples referring to the WE's motivations. In the case of mumpreneurs, all the WE have created a business in order to reduce WFC. Hence, they are less supposed to report about conflicts. Whereas, in other studies, the samples are more heterogeneous in terms of motivation

[1]. This implies that these WE did not necessary create their business to reduce WFC and may accordingly perceive it more easily.

This present research aims at investigating the different perceptions of WFC of WE, focusing on the conflict aroused by motherhood. In this respect, we concentrate on perceptions rather than on facts since our objective is to approach WE's own representations. According to personal characteristics, perceptions of a same reality differ greatly. Beyond the facts, whether WE see them as acceptable or not is what matters here. Of particular interest is the role of motivation to create a business: does motivation to create have an impact of the perception of WFC of WE? If creation is mainly motivated by family considerations and mostly parenthood, then perceived conflict should be reduced. What are the other factors than can impact the perception of WFC? Do WE conceive the articulation between their family and their work in comparing themselves to other jobs they had in the past or to other women with a salaried job?

In order to answer these questions, a qualitative study based on life stories was carried out among a sample of women entrepreneurs.

2- Methodology

According to Bernard, Le Moigne, and Nicolaï (2013), since women may express a positive or a negative attitude towards their business creation in relation to work-life balance, qualitative methodology is best suited for further exploration in order to have a comprehensive approach (Léger et al., 2015). This methodology allows to better understand WE in their complexity (Carrier, Julien and Menvielle, 2006; Bourgain and Chaudat, 2015). We therefore chose the narrative method as it is particularly well suited for in-depth exploration when knowledge is still partly based on stereotypes (Sanseau, 2005). Especially pertinent for grasping "contradictions in reality" (Rioux, in Pailot, 2003), collecting life stories is relevant to entrepreneurship research because it allows entrepreneurs not only

[1] For example, The WE in the Kirkwood and Tootel (2008)'s study have at least one employee without any reference to the motivation criteria. The target of the sample of King and Lim (2001) was married women without reference to motivation.

to give factual information about the events that have marked their lives, but also to highlight the major events that have had a very strong impact on them (Pailot, 2003, p.27).

The interview in narrative research has two phases (Bertaux, 1997): initially, the interviewee is prompted to tell her story. In our study, the entrepreneurs were invited to tell the story of their lives, from birth to the present day. The second phase follows a semi-directive interview. We processed themes not spontaneously mentioned but which were preestablished as important. Thus, we asked them to express themselves on the following personal points: motivation for starting a business, the ideal company (within 10 years), the aids and barriers encountered, frustrations and satisfactions, personal strengths and weaknesses, risk-taking, networking and work-life articulation. We asked for their opinions on women entrepreneurs in general and the issue of the glass ceiling[1].

The interviews were held at a location chosen by the interviewee (in their office or a public place most of the time) and lasted from one hour to two and a half hours. All interviews were fully recorded and transcribed.

Sample

The sample was composed of 29 female entrepreneurs with a broad range of ages, educational levels, and sectors of activity (see Appendix 1 for the list of interviewees). They also ensure a diverse picture in terms of family status. Even if this study focuses on WFC particularly aroused by motherhood, we made the choice not to only interview women with young children. Hence a part of our sample is composed by young single and childless women in order to understand if and how the business was created taking into account the future articulation between their hypothetical family life and work. In the same vein, another part of the sample is composed by older women with grown up children since we wanted to grasp if and how the business creation was linked to a reduction in family constraints. The one point in common was their choice to create their own small company (0 to 30 employees). They were recruited from local entrepreneur networks (women's or not) and then by the snowball method. We focused on two French regions (the northeast and the south of France) [2]. Both regions are plagued by high unemployment[3], while most studies focus on regions that are particularly attractive in terms of employment (see, for example, Orhan and Scott, 2001).

Analysis

The interviews were analyzed both vertically, on the basis of interview summaries, and horizontally for thematic contents (Bardin, 1993). Two researchers conducted the analysis.

In a first step, a typology was built. The typology has emerged through the constant comparison of the summaries of 29 life courses. By comparing the narratives, categories emerged regarding the perceptions of work-family conflict. For the typology, first, each researcher had to compose separately different groups of WE. In each group, WE were supposed to perceive WFC similarly. Each group

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[1] Different themes were introduced in the interview guide in order to investigate the factors which might have an impact on the perception of WFC. This second phase lasted on average a quarter of the whole interview since most of the themes we were interested in were spontaneously mentioned.

[2] In order to have the best access to the Population of Female entrepreneurs, the sample was built within the two regions where the authors are located (northeast and South of France).

[3] At the time of the narratives, the unemployment rate was around 10% in France, while it was around 17,6% in the Department of Hérault (South of France) and 14,4% in the Department of Moselle (North-East) (reference: INSEE https://www.insee.fr/fr/statistiques/1405599?geo=DEP-34)

was supposed to differ from the others regarding perception of WLC. Second, the two researchers shared their representations. Since their representations were close, they then discussed the discrepancies. The noticed differences in terms of the terminologies used and the affiliation of WE were discussed and led to a consensus among the researchers.

In a second step, one of the researchers has realized a standard content analysis. The theme of the analysis emerged in an inductive way. We focus on this present article on the themes relating to the perception of WLC. From the content analysis, four factors were identified.

3 –Results and discussion

3-1 Results

A typology of WE's perception of FWC

We have identified three situations regarding the women entrepreneurs' perception of the conflict between family life and work life, where family life deals mainly with parenthood.

Case 1: A lessened perception of Work-parenthood conflict

In this first case, respondents did not experience conflict between their private lives and their work as business owners. We split this group into three subgroups according the lifecycle stage in which they were situated with regard to maternity, a central concept for our respondents.

a. *Entrepreneurs without children projecting childbearing: pre-maternitypreneurs* (4 out of 29)

These women had started their business only a few years earlier. They were young (under 35 years old), had no children and were single or living with a partner. They had all chosen to start their own business before thinking about motherhood because they were very much aware of how difficult it would be to manage maternity and a business startup, as Amy described: "*I started my company before having a child, I absolutely wanted to do this first. It was out of the question that I would have a child undergo the stresses of a startup*" and Clara: "*I put in so much time. I'm so glad I did. And now I know I'm ready for children*".

They hoped to find fulfillment in family life, which is one of the reasons they started businesses that would be compatible once they started their families: a small company with limited investment and number of employees. For this group, entrepreneurship was a means to reduce work-family conflict, since it would offer great freedom in scheduling work, even in the case of pregnancy: "*I think there's more latitude if you become pregnant than if you have a contract*" (Clara).

These women make sure that their business does not intrude into their private lives. They thus make a point of keeping time free for personal activities (sports or time with friends). They do so even though they admit that this is not easy and that they must make choices: *"I still feel like I'm missing out on things. I have no sports activities, no time. I'm godmother of a little girl I never see, no time ... But I do take vacations ...*" (Amy). Two of them nevertheless acknowledged that their partners have been helpful in this regard, not hesitating to remind them when they are working too much. They pay attention to these remarks and know that they need them to avoid becoming overwhelmed by their business.

They consider entrepreneurship as a situation which would improve the articulation between family (particularly a future maternity) and work, compared to a salaried employment, for the flexibility it

allows. But of course, this is so because they do not aspire to an oversized business, the motivations to create the business were mixed. A major pull factor was the passion they feel for the aim of the business and the desire to play a societal role, the articulation of their work with their future family being an advantage they have thought of only once having become entrepreneurs.

b. *Maternitypreneurs* (1 case out of 29)

Only one respondent was a real *mumpreneur* as described in the literature, and this case was somewhat exceptional. Carolina, a hairdresser, had been pregnant six times but had given birth twice. A seventh pregnancy gave her a "miracle" child. Her doctor told her that hairdressers have a high rate of miscarriage due to the harmfulness of the products they handle. She quickly left her job, and two years after this "revelation" she created a business, hairdressing and selling organic products from home. Divorced now with three children, one of them still very young, she has few financial resources but plenty of time for her children, thanks to a business that she can fit into her personal life.

This case is very specific since Carolina realized she would not have been able to be pregnant if she had gone on with her salaried employment. The motivation to create her business is then completely linked to her being a mother. Then, creating this business was not only her solution to resolve her own work-family conflict, but plays also a societal role in helping other female hair dressers not to encounter the same conflicts.

c. *Entrepreneurs with grown up children*: *post-maternitypreneurs* (8 cases out of 29)

These women set up their business after their child-rearing years, as illustrated by Florence: "*If I had small children, it would be complicated. But now it's perfect. The children have grown up.*" Yet these women had chosen entrepreneurship as a way to reconcile private and family life and took the time to enjoy their spouses and their (grown) children, saying that today they live in harmony. As Sarah told us: "*I was really trying to find an activity where I could work alone and stop whenever I wanted. When I want to go jogging on the beach at 4 pm on Friday, I simply close up.*" For those who set up their business knowing that their personal time was most important, they took few risks: low investment and no employees. All these women had one thing in common: they were not seeking high revenue either because they had already set aside enough or because their spouses already had a substantial income. Three had experienced significant stress in the past (as an employee or because of serious illness), and this too enabled them to be vigilant about becoming overwhelmed by work. Benefiting from a major setback, they had created companies to reflect their personal passions: their work was thus experienced as a personal accomplishment. For those among them who have created the business most of all for push reasons (such as following the spouse in another region), the enjoyment of conciliating work and family appeared just after the creation. Even if the family was less demanding, they report enjoying taking time for their adolescent or young adult children. In so doing, they feel like they make up the time lost comparing with when they were working long hours in salaried jobs.

Case 2: Conflict accepted and painless when delegated: the prowork entrepreneurs (8 out of 29)

The *proworkers* were not really looking to reduce the work-family conflict. Indeed, as the heading suggests it, these women were caught up in their work. Conversely, some of them complain of a family-work conflict if they can't find a way to delegate their family constraints. They have created the business most of all to be independent and for personal accomplishment. Logically, they aspire their business to grow successfully. Surprisingly, all the *proworkers* had divorced when their children were relatively young. Two cases emerged:

- either the father had custody and they felt like it was the best option for the children, as expressed by Tamara: "*And then, the father took very good care of them, I knew that I had left them with a dad who was there for them*" and Bene: "*I left André in Italy ... but I know what they said... 'look, she left her child with the father ... a mother never separates from her child—it's a part of her.' But no, for me a child is not mine alone, and I left him where he would be better off!*" In that case, there was simply no family-work conflict since there was not anymore a family to care for in daily life. They made the choice to put their family aside in order to focus on their business once they have realized that raising children was not what they aspire to in life.

- or they had custody and got outside help as needed (childcare, help with homework, etc.) so that they could continue to focus on their work, as explained by Daniela: "*Anyway, I soon realized that staying home to take care of them was not my thing (...) So I took care of them, especially on Wednesdays, and then I set up a whole system of childcare and everything ... nannies and then help with homework afterward. But well, I would come home late because in this business we finish quite late ... it was not ideal for them. So, overall they were not great students ... and I don't know if it had changed things if I would have been staying more at home with them..., it's hard to know.*" In that case, the family-work conflict emerged when there was not enough money to outsource certain tasks not considered to be priorities. For example, Sabrina felt she had to take care of her children herself because she was not earning enough to hire someone: "*I have no choice, at 5:30, I have to be in front of the school*" and once at home "*I'm there but I'm not there*": she laid out rules so that her children understood that even if she is at home, she cannot be disturbed because she has to work.

Comparing with salaried jobs, the family-work conflict depends most of all on the financial resources. In case of a lack of resources, the conflict is higher for entrepreneurs, proworkers report to be caught by their work almost 24 hours a day.

Case 3: Suffering from Work-parenthood conflict: The pulled-in-two-direction entrepreneurs (8 out of 29)

The *pulled-in-two-direction* entrepreneurs were experiencing a complicated but key moment in their lives: they had to manage family life with young children at the same time as a period of business growth. All respondents in this group had been living with a partner for a number of years. Their partner was present to care for the children, often because their work demanded less investment. Yet all these entrepreneurs complained about the many tasks they still have to perform once they return home. Even when they get home at 8 pm, much later than their partner, they have to take care of the kitchen, the children, etc. As Sandy remarked: "*When they were little, they would go straight into the bathroom with me, I would take my shower and they were behind the curtain calling to me ... I felt like I was suffocating.....*" Then Magali asks, "*Why not him? I have a little boy who has not slept in two years. He has spent two years waking five to six times a night, and... it's the same... who gets up? Me! I mean, I think society still has a lot of work ahead of it...*," she later made sure her husband heard about his absence: "*My husband, a lot less now. There are a lot of things he was forced to do. He cooks every night, for example. Because I get home at 7–7:30 in the evening. There are plenty of things he started to do, once I insisted. It was that or else we ate at 8 or 9 every night and the kids were there, it was just the total chaos....*"

Finding a compromise is all the more difficult for these women because the future of their companies is uncertain and the financial resources are limited so they cannot hire someone to take care of their children during work hours and personal time. For example, Belly is 36 and has an 18-month-old child and a business she created four years ago, with a single employee. She would like to have another child quickly but is worried that she would not be able to hire someone to take care of the

baby: "*My personal problem is telling myself that as long as the business is in this state, I have to give up the idea of a second child. So, I'm afraid (...) to tell myself I won't make it. But just as much as I wouldn't manage my business correctly, I wouldn't be able to handle two children and a business that is not healthy. I'm not sure that a man would have to say this.*"

None of these women has created her business in order to reduce WFC but rather for pull reasons such as self-accomplishment and to respond to societal needs. WFC or FWC (family-work conflict) appeared with time, each sphere becoming more demanding. However, even if these women aspire to a better harmonization, they constantly compare themselves to other female employees, as if they wanted to minimize their complain. For example, Sandy argues *"it is sometimes hard with my family but it is the case for all women who work a lot"*. Likewise, Stella adds *"I love working and investing and I think that even if I had been a public servant I would have worked as much"*. Then the conflict they still admit to face is due most of all to their status of working women and to their personality. Entrepreneurship neither reduces nor amplifies the conflict *per se*.

However, entrepreneurship seems to reduce the perception of WFC for the passion they feel for their work. Indeed, all the *pulled-in-two-directions entrepreneurs* reported being very involved in their business. For from being a simple livelihood, their business expresses a huge part of who they are. For example, Layana explains *"I don't sleep a lot but I wouldn't change. I feel proud of what I realized, and I can't imagine doing anything else"*. Or Maelys *"It's hard to be so often separated from my children but I love what I'm doing. I have many projects and I don't want to stop here…my business allows me to express my creativity and my will. When I was an employee I had many ideas but I was restricted and I was bored"*. These WE would very much like to perform as mothers and entrepreneurs at the same time because both spheres play an important part of their personal accomplishment. They nevertheless accept to take care of the family less than what they would aspire to thanks to the pleasure they feel working in their business. Then, in their opinion, the surplus of time they dedicate to their work is better assumed and accepted than if they were employees.

Criteria that provide insight into work–life articulation

The thematic analysis highlighted four main criteria to explain the differences in women entrepreneurs' perceptions of work–life articulation.

- The life stage of the WE

First, the point in the life stage appears to be the essential criterion for achieving harmony. In other words, it seems difficult to achieve true conciliation in a crucial period: when children are young and therefore when entrepreneurs are between 30 and 45 old. Before this period, they generally accept to work as much as necessary as long as they have enough time to take care of themselves. Later, they gradually come to appreciate the freedom offered by their status and begin exploring personal interests. This may be true for many women who work a lot (i.e., more than 45-50 hours per week), as noted for some female executives. However, in comparison, entrepreneurs have a certain freedom in their schedules, which can either reduce conflicts or, on the contrary, exacerbate them. Indeed, although some say they have learned to slow down (by taking holidays, not working nights or weekends) thanks to self-employment and parental demand, others admit that they never stop because the company is always running and they remain connected at all times.

The crucial moment in this lifecycle remains maternity. When a woman stops working to take care of a newborn, the adjustment may be substantial. Often, it is experienced as a step back on personal priorities, as Nathalia explained: "*Well, having the baby was magic. Because before I left the company*

in the evening (...) it was 8 or 9. And now, the baby is with the nanny all day, from 8:30 to 6:30 in the evening. So no matter what happens, at 6 pm I shut down my computer. No matter what. Before, it wasn't always possible, there was always an emergency that was more urgent than the usual emergency. I couldn't do it, but now, whatever happens, if I have a customer who calls me at 10 minutes to 6, a customer, a supplier, the tax office, I tell them that in 10 minutes I have to finish the conversation. Because my baby is my priority." or Belly: "*So, motherhood has been that, to finally detach from the challenges of risk-taking, of gambling all or nothing, and so on. Leaving work early. To detach just a little bit more on the weekends, stay off the phone, and realize that, well good, the business is running no better but no worse.*"

Thus, even though maternity is experienced as a complicated period because it is a kind of forced rest during which one has to accept that the company is ticking over in other hands, it is also a turning point for devoting more time to family (or not). In this consideration, we found a counterintuitive result. Indeed, if maternity is usually rather conceived as enhancing WFC, some of our interviewees experience the opposite: the birth of a child made them slow down and better harmonize their lives between work and family. In this case, the arrival of a newborn reduces the stress of WE.

Nevertheless, taking care of one's family is not synonymous – far from it – with taking care of oneself, and those in the crucial phase of raising young children were those who said they regretted not having time for themselves, caught as they were between family and business. More than anything, these entrepreneurs would like to have a little more time to relax or take care of themselves: "*I never rest ... and I would like to rest!*" (Stella). Thus, even though harmony was established between work and family, there was little time for the entrepreneur herself.

- The life-stage of the business

The life-stage of the business is also an important factor in understanding the process of reconciling work and private life. Entrepreneurs work more intensively at certain stages in the business lifecycle, usually at creation, with a variable startup phase, and during growth phases (internationalization, purchase of a production tool, etc.). In addition, the health and size of the business influence the perception of risk to the whole family. Thus, work-family conflict is even greater when the company is starting up or in a critical growth phase at the same time that the entrepreneur is raising young children. The pay that the entrepreneur gives herself is essential because if it is too low, she loses the freedom of action and her frustration will be all the greater. Elisa explained this quite well. This woman had always worked "*hard and relentlessly*." Her business has already passed through three growing steps. In the first step, she created nine hairdressing salons with a total of 27 employees. She had no children because she wanted "*more than anything to succeed*." In the second step, she sold her salons and bought a large one with a dozen employees. At the same time, she also chose to become pregnant. Her companion left two years later and she found herself alone to raise her child. The salon began to experience financial difficulties because of a great loss of customers and conflicts with certain employees. Elisa was struggling with the banks and found it difficult to pay herself. In this phase, the work-family conflict was quite evident in her discourse. She explained: "*I had undertaken a huge project but I could no longer pay myself a salary (), because I wasn't making money, I worked nights with my son. (...) It was survival*" (she became tearful at this point). Two years later, a third phase began when her financial situation was once again on firm footing. She still works long hours but the work-family conflict seems to have been resolved. She stated that "*Things are better, like a normal mom. I had a nanny who went to pick up my son at school and that bothered me so, since I could afford it, I took someone to help him with his homework*."

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The life stage of the business if of greater importance regarding maternity. Indeed, some of our interviewees reported scheduling their pregnancy according to the life stage of their business. And they had to postpone – if not cancel – a pregnancy, either if the business was growing too much or, on the opposite, if it had not reached a sufficient size so that they could not hire a replacement for a while.

Hence the life stage of both the business and the WE should be taken into account jointly. In this regard, Shelton (2006) had proposed optimal Work-Family strategies for WE, according to the salience of the family and external resources. In the case of low resources and of high involvement in family, Shelton (2006) proposed WE to maintain a small family. Nevertheless, if this strategy is supposed to enhance the growth of the company, we believe from our results that it will probably lead to a Work-family conflict since women should adapt their family life and size to the life of the company, which might create frustration in the long run if these women leave the time of fertility.

- The partner's behaviour

Like research had revealed it previously (Bourgain and Chaudat, 2015; Carrier, 2006; Kirkwood, 2009; Nikina, Le Loarne, and Shelton, 2013), when the entrepreneur was living within a couple, the partner's behaviour was also a determining factor for conciliation. The latter supported the entrepreneur in various ways:

- putting aside time for household chores and children,

- providing a stable income,

- listening during stressful situations: "And he's the one who listens to me all the time, all the time, all the time, all the time ... I talk all the time about my work" (Magali),

- reminding her when she is spending too much time and energy on her work to the detriment of her physical and psychological health – but also understanding when this is unavoidable. For example, Nathalia insisted that her husband is vital in helping her when work is overwhelming: "*The times when my husband made me realize that I wasn't really doing anything (...) I didn't know how to do anything but work. I got up in the morning and as soon as I was ready I was working. I went to bed at night, I was working. And I only talked about work, I was completely crazy, in fact*."

If the first three roles of the husband was already emphasized in the literature (Nikina et al., 2013), the forth one is specific to our research. Indeed, more than a moral support, some of our respondents reported their partners being the watchdogs of their harmony. In that case, the partner pays a peculiar attention to the entrepreneur not being too much drowned by her work. In this respect, harmony was easier when the business was experienced as a shared life project, a long-term project, especially when each had put the other first at some point in the past. For example, several respondents indicated that they had set up a business after following their spouse to a new city, giving up a job they liked, once their partner had finished their studies and found a job, or had sold his own business. In these cases, it seemed that the couple lived according to a principle of give-and-take: they took turns making concessions. For example, Magali remembers that she was a flourishing children's fashion designer in the United States when she agreed to follow her husband to a medium-sized city of South of France where unemployment prevails. He knew she was upset and he felt indebted to her. For this reason, he was very supportive when she decided to create her business: he created the Internet site, took pictures, gave her advice and took care of the children after school. This was an informal deal. In other cases, the company was created during a turning point in the woman's affective life (after a

separation and starting a new relationship). The new partner was thus strongly associated with this new undertaking and harmony was improved by this convergence of events.

- Motivations of the entrepreneur

The fourth criterion that might also explain the different experiences and perceptions of work–family conciliation is the motivation for starting a business. This factor is related to the size of the company. Indeed, when women decide to become entrepreneurs in order to have a job that is compatible with family life, they usually embark on small projects with little risk. As soon as they are making enough money to be independent, these entrepreneurs do not perceive a conflict between their work and their private life, in fact it is quite the contrary. They take advantage of their status to go on vacation, get involved in a sport, or take care of their children, whenever it suits them. These women have met their business goals, which are low. Consequently, their work satisfaction is not correlated with business success and growth, once a certain level has been reached. This would explain the "paradox of the contented female business owner" (Powell and Eddleston, 2008). On the opposite, for the entrepreneurs who have focused principally on career success, it appears that conflict is very much tied to their financial resources. Indeed, they must be earning enough to hire help for household chores and childcare. In that case, they do not perceive conflict. These results are in line with Kirkwood and Tootell (2008) who have suggested that outsourcing childcare is a key way to manage children-work conflict. Nevertheless, for entrepreneurs who have internalized the idea of performing well both professionally and at home, outsourcing childcare produces self-blame; a self-blame which is reduced by the pleasure they feel in working on their business.

For this reason, while the literature usually reveals that women entrepreneurs consider work-family conciliation as a factor of motivation to create a business, we propose here a reverse explanation: the motivation to create a business has an impact on the perception of WFC. Moreover, our results reveal that if the entrepreneur feels passion for her business, she is a lot more involved in her work and less able to perceive if work has invaded her private life. In the same vein, some of our interviewees who have created a business pursuing social goals seem to feel less conflict. For example, Tamara's business answers the seniors' need for tasty dishes and migrant women' need for a job. She engages in this business adventure feeling like her social role is far more important than her mother role. That is why she does not perceive a conflict: she doesn't take time for her children but it does not affect her as long as she knows they are safe.

We can thus see the interweaving of individual and professional factors, as illustrated in the diagram below, partly explaining perceptions of work–life articulation in terms of harmony or conflict.

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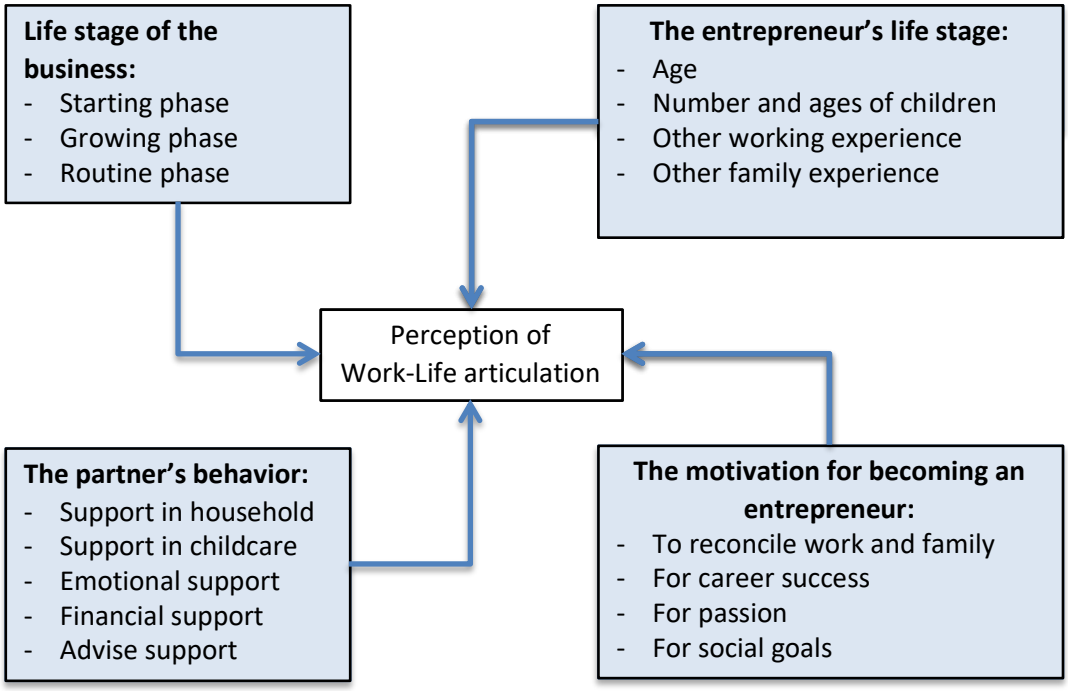

Fig. 1: Perception of the work–life articulation of women entrepreneurs

3-2 Discussion

Our results aligned with those of Nel, Maritz, and Thongprovati (2010), Cromie (1987), Boden (1999) and Wellington (2006): almost half the women in our sample (13 out of 29) had decided to start a business at least partly for the purpose of reconciling the different aspects of their lives. This objective may in fact derive from or induce a need for independence, as noted in the INSEE study of 2010. In that study, 61.3% of the French women interviewed gave "independence" as the main reason for starting a business.

This central motivation for business creation has given rise to a population that is called *mumpreneurs* in the literature, in reference to women who start their own business in order to manage their lives as mothers and job-holders with autonomy and the freedom to manage their time as they see fit. Often, these women had never experienced independence and freedom in their previous salaried jobs. However, other women in our sample had the same motivation, but were not yet or no more mothers of young children and did not have unsatisfactory work experiences in their past. Therefore, this research enriches the literature by classifying WE who want to conciliate their private and work life. In this regard, we distinguish: *pre-maternitypreneurs*, *maternitypreneurs* and *post-maternitypreneurs*. Although Jennings and McDougald (2007) predicted that women would postpone the creation of their business long after maternity to prevent work-life conflict, this typology shows variety in the chronology. The *pre-maternitypreneurs* are those women who create a company to reconcile work and private life, but before becoming a mother. Given that the start-up phase is stressful and time-consuming, they consider childbearing for a second stage of the business life stage. The *post-maternitypreneurs* are for the most part women who have left maternity far behind, their children having grown or left home, and they have found harmony in their lives by optimally managing their

work time to dedicate more to their personal lives. Since they start their business later than other women, they tend to experience business creation as an endpoint, as personal fulfillment, because the sectors they choose seem to be linked to deep internal motivation that has ripened over the years.

Moreover, our analysis of the interview contents seems to confirm the dichotomy found in the literature: entrepreneurship is experienced by women either as a problem or as a solution with regard to work-life articulation (agreeing with the findings of Bernard, Le Moigne, and Nicolaï, 2013). However, our results provide additional insight. We identified a group of women (8 out of 29 women) for whom entrepreneurship is experienced neither as a problem nor as a solution, as work-life balance was not even a consideration.

Moreover, even when a work-life conflict was perceived, it was put into perspective. Indeed, for most of these women, this conflict was comparable to that of any female executive who works long hours for a company. Thus, from their point of view, they are not in conflict because of their status as entrepreneurs but because they are simply women who work long hours. The pride and pleasure they feel for their work minimizes the WFC they potentially face.

Globally, our results tend to show that entrepreneurship reduces the perception of a work-life conflict.

Conclusion

From a theoretical point of view, the results of this narrative study enrich the debate on the effects of female entrepreneurship on work-life conflict because life stories offer a glimpse into the complex reality of women's lives. Many factors can be highlighted, including motivation, the role of spouses or partners, and the life stage of the company and the entrepreneur. To summarize, conflict is lower when:

- women do not have dependent children,

- the business is at the stage of routine,

- the spouse provides support,

- the company was created to reconcile work and family (i.e., if entrepreneurship was chosen with family considerations or not: Powell and Greenhaus, 2012).

Although parental demand and spousal support have been pointed out in the literature (Parasuraman et al., 1996), the two other criteria have not been emphasized to our knowledge.

Beyond these criteria, one particular finding was the role played by financial resources. A sufficient income makes it possible to outsource home maintenance and childcare, which reduces the time commitment to family and hence reduces family–work conflict. An alternative, given sufficient financial resources, is to hire an employee who can replace the entrepreneur in the business to reduce the time commitment to work and hence reduce the work–family conflict.

From a methodological point of view, this narrative-based study shows that some of the criteria that have been emphasized in the literature as individual characteristics or personal traits that are expected to be long-lasting might better be considered within a whole-life picture. For example, although career-involvement is an individual characteristic (Beutell and Greenhaus, 1982), narratives offer a different perspective, of an evolution according to circumstances. For this reason, future research

should adopt a life-course paradigm in order to show how an early event (such as a divorce or a birth) can influence future decisions and events (such as a business creation or development).

In addition, our findings raise two points which merit further investigation.

First, the analysis of discourses reveals that the women entrepreneurs have one point in common: they have created their business in line with their values and in a sector that they are very much interested in. More precisely, they pursue not only personal goals, but also social goals in their business creation. They seem to be more committed to their work, body and soul and 24 hours a day, than they would be if they were subjected to external constraints and pressures, such as a hierarchy. Yet if this is the case, do they feel less of a need for personal time to escape from an oppressive work environment? In other words, even though they spend a considerable amount of time on their work, does this time invade their private lives as much as it does for salaried workers? Could passion and the feeling of being useful to society reduce work–family conflict?

Second, is there a conflict between work and private life or between pressure and pleasures? Would it not be more pertinent to refer, for example, to childcare and household tasks as constraints for most women, whereas many of the tasks of running a business are pleasures? Thus, the respondents expressing a conflict between work and private life seemed to be referring primarily to a lack of time for relaxation, leisure and pleasure. For example, playing tennis with children would fall into the category of pleasure, whereas homework would fall into the category of constraints, even though these two activities involve their children.

The research presents some limitations that bear mentioning. First, this study aimed at understanding WEs' perception from narratives. For this reason, the reality of the conflict was never approached. The analysis is thus based on women's discourse: what they recall and how they *a posteriori* legitimize their past actions. Second, even if the sample is diverse on different characteristics, it nevertheless remains a convenience sample. Third, we focused on the conflict between private and professional life. Yet, because women entrepreneurs have often chosen rather than accepted their professional reality, maintaining both parts of their lives is probably not experienced in the same way as it is for those who "endure" their responsibilities and working conditions, namely female employees (managers or not). The results illustrate this well. Without going so far as to challenge the concept of work-life-private-life balance, it would certainly be interesting for future research to explore the complementarity of these two aspects of life in this population, incorporating such concepts as enrichment (Dumas, 2006), positive overflow (Edwards and Rothbard, 2000), and harmonization (Poelmans et al., 2008). Essentially, this would mean an in-depth investigation of their coping strategies and their experiences of harmonization and conciliation. Can women "have it all"? Third, even if the sample is diverse on different characteristics, it nevertheless remains a convenience sample.

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