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**Exploring key drivers for entrepreneurial growth: A gendered perspective**

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1. **Introduction**

Historically, the concept entrepreneur and entrepreneurship have been framed in masculine terms (Ahl, 2006; Bruni et al., 2004; Mirchandani, 1999) as prior to 1980 the majority of entrepreneurial businesses were started by men (Brush et al., 2006). Women were less active and certainly very less visible as entrepreneurs, so it is not rare that entrepreneurial research is focused on men. Lately, the UK Government have encouraged more and more women to enter entrepreneurship; in an attempt to boost the UK economy (Marlow and Patton, 2005; Shaw et al., 2001). Nowadays, women are increasingly starting their own businesses (Brush et al., 2008; Renzulli et al., 2000). Self-employment brings flexibility in the careers of women and this flexibility partly explains why women owned-businesses are increasing. As scholars have long noted, women entrepreneurs are vastly understudied, despite the fact that they *are “…one of the fastest rising populations of entrepreneurs and that they make a significant contribution to innovation, job and wealth creation in economies across the globe…”* (deBruin, Brush and Welter, 2006, p. 585).

Although, the number of women entering entrepreneurship has increased over the past decade, the number of women owned businesses has not (Bosma and Harding, 2007). Studies have shown that women entrepreneurs have higher exit rates and less sustainable success and potential growth. Although, both female and male entrepreneurs have the orientation to start and run small businesses (Lewis, 2006), women lack motivation for growth. The lack of motivation for growth has been seen as a female issue (Ahl, 2006) rather than a wider socio-cultural problem (De Bruin et al., 2007). Female entrepreneurs have as a key motivation to start-up their ventures; the need to achieve, the desire to make things happen and to control resources (Cromie, 1987). Female entrepreneurs enter into entrepreneurship as a result of career dissatisfaction (Downing, 1991) and also to pursue intrinsic goals, key among them being independence, flexibility to run business and the ability to fit work around their domestic lives. Numerous studies report that female owned businesses tend to be smaller than businesses run by men, when measured in terms of net income, number of employees, and revenue level (Ahl, 2006; Buttner and Moore, 1997; Jennings and McDougald, 2007). There is also evidence to suggest that the growth strategies of male and female entrepreneurs are different. Male owned enterprises usually grow vertically and women’s enterprises tend to grow by diversifying. Based on US panel data, the growth expectations of male and female entrepreneurs are different. While male want to grow their new venture to achieve financial success, for female entrepreneurs financial success is just one of the main reasons to achieve growth (Manolova, Brush, Edelman and Shaver, 2012).

Despite the fact that women claim flexibility and family commitments as strong motivations for starting –up a business no study has explored the motivations, expectations and experiences of entrepreneurship and the extent to which entrepreneurship offers an improved work/family “balance”. The effect of gender on business growth and organisational performance has become an important theme within the entrepreneurship literature (Carter et al., 2001).

However, limited research has been conducted on the different measurement that male and female entrepreneurs adopt to measure success (Brush and Cooper, 2012). Further work should extend the notion of gender embeddedness – the identification of distinct gender differences among male and female entrepreneurs (De Bruin, Brush and Welter, 2006).

Previous studies were based on the underlying assumption that, for women the key motivations to start up their own businesses are independence, flexibility to run business and fit work around their domestic lives. Among working parents, men are regarded as breadwinners and women are primarily child carers and secondly, income earners. Future research also needs to reflect on the fact that more and more women are moving beyond “start-up” and they are getting involved in growing their business. Work which focuses on the challenges that women face in terms of family/work balance issue, human capital development over the cycle of their careers and of their venture, sector choice and opportunity identification would be beneficial. The key questions that have been raised is whether male and female use the same criteria to measure business growth and performance and whether there are differentials in business growth and performance between male and female owned firms. The long-standing tradition of scholarship on entrepreneurship and parental commitments has been a feminine issue (De Bruin et al., 2006; Carter et al., 2001). The study contributes to the areas of entrepreneurship, gender and diversity by revealing the fact that single men with parental commitments have been seen are child carers primarily and secondary as breadwinners. This study aims to investigate the factors that determine business growth among divorced male and female entrepreneurs. So far the foundations of knowledge about entrepreneurship are based on the study of the majority (typically white, able-bodied men) and neglect the experience of minority groups (Carter and Marlow, 2003). There is a need to research SMEs from alternative perspectives; taking into account the diversity of SME owners. In the field of entrepreneurship, the group of divorced entrepreneurs has not been examined before. This group of entrepreneurs is very interesting as they have different personality traits, family commitments and potentially different motivation for growth of their enterprise.

1. **Aim and Objectives of the study**

The aim of the project is to investigate the push and pull factors for entrepreneurial growth among single male and female entrepreneurs with parental/maternal commitments. The study will address the following objectives.

1. Identification of the factors that constrain as well as factors that encourage male and female entrepreneurs to grow their business.

2. Development of measurements to assess business growth and success among male and female entrepreneurs.

3. To assess whether marital status or caring responsibilities impact business growth for male and female entrepreneurs

1. **Contributions:**
2. Theoretical contributions to the entrepreneurship literature.

Previous studies on entrepreneurship have explored the personality traits and the motivation of female entrepreneurs to start-up their own business. No research has been conducted on the entrepreneurial orientation and on the motivation of divorced male and female entrepreneurs towards business growth. In the area of entrepreneurship, this minority group has not been examined.

1. Theoretical contribution to the gender literature.

The influence of gender in perceptions of financial relationships, business growth, organisational culture are considered as important topics for future study (Brush and Cooper, 2012; Ahl and Nelson, 2010; Wilson and Tagg, 2010). There is a need for further research to reflect critically on the current theories of entrepreneurship, more through the lens of “gender” (Brush, 2006).

1. Methodological contribution

From the methodological point of view, the literature within female entrepreneurship suggests the adoption of diverse methodological approaches. The use of qualitative methodologies to complement quantitative approaches (De Bruin, Brush and Welter, 2007) would be a useful addition. The incorporation of interpretivist qualitative case studies will help to shed light on the entrepreneurial actions that are unique to women. The use of mixed methodological approaches; interviews with divorced male and female entrepreneurs as well as, the distribution of questionnaires to both groups will enable the capture of key business growth motivations both in terms of objective financial indicators as well as more subjective factors driving the decision.

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