

Mumpreneurs: Mothers in the Business of Babies

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ABSTRACT

The phenomenon of 'mumpreneurship' is explored within the context of gender and entrepreneurship. A single in-depth case study is used to explore the influence of life-stage and personal milestones on the entrepreneurial journey. The link between motherhood and the entrepreneurial experience is illuminated through an exploration of how the mumpreneur orients the activities of her enterprise to her family, her child(ren) and her personal aspirations. The paper points to how future work on entrepreneurship from a life-stage theoretical perspective can further advance understanding of the impact of the life of the entrepreneur on the life of her venture.

Keywords: Mumpreneurship, Women Entrepreneurs, Business Creation

From a gender perspective, business ownership has historically been viewed as a male preserve and even though women have often worked side by side with their partners or siblings, they were often the silent partners (Walker, 2004). Although this has historically been the case, changes are evident. The number of self-employed women is growing and despite the fact that women as employers are still far outnumbered by male employers, the number of female employers and female self-employed has doubled over the last 30 years (Massey & Harris, 2003). Developing a conceptual framework for understanding the life stage factors of entrepreneurs provides theoretical advancement of entrepreneurship. Research into 'mum-preneurship' will aid other business and entrepreneurship researchers to conduct further research that will aid in economic and social policy, and best practice cases, and teaching. We propose that existing business practice in much of the commercial and corporate sectors in New Zealand and Australia operates to "push" women who start families to explore other options and to redefine themselves as business women as well as mothers.

For many women self-employment fits around their family commitments. That is, the start-up decision is in some way motivated by the accommodation of family needs and a family orientation drives the way in which the firm is managed, and mediates goals in relation to firm performance. This paper focuses on the life stage and family dimensions of Mumpreneurs, who can be defined as mothers who move from traditional employment to owning and operating new ventures, either to better fit with their role as mothers, or motivated by opportunities identified by the experience of pregnancy or having children. We look specifically at a venture that is clearly the result of the lifestyle changes that stem from motherhood; in this case, a “baby-friendly café”. Research for the case reported in this paper was undertaken to better understand how the life stages of individuals influence the entrepreneurial process through the intersection of motherhood and entrepreneurship.

The research literature on female entrepreneurship dates from the mid-1970s, with most studies originating from the USA. As Carter, Anderson and Shaw (2001) explain, the focus on the characteristics and motivations of female entrepreneurs is particularly apparent within the early exploratory studies, few of which developed sophisticated taxonomies, preferring to identify female proprietors as a homogenous group. At this time there was an implicit acceptance by researchers that, beyond the start-up phase, few significant differences existed between male and female owned and managed companies. Since these early days, academic studies have highlighted the broad similarities between women and men in their characteristics and motivations to start a business. In contrast, Carter, Anderson and Shaw (2001) stress that differences can be seen in:

- The relative youth of women business owners
- Women’s propensity to start businesses in retailing and services industries
- Women’s lack of prior work experience, training and business experiences:
- Women’s desire to start businesses as a means of circumventing the ‘glass ceiling’

More recent research has continued the preoccupation with the characteristics and motivations of female entrepreneurs; although greater specialisation is developing. Still (2003) surmises that as more

has become known about women small business operators and their businesses, the motivation for women to enter small business or self employment is now being categorised into ‘push’ and pull factors (Buttner & Dorothy, 1997) with the evidence suggesting that ‘pull’ factors have more impact than ‘push’ factors (Walker, 2000). Push factors include restructuring and downsizing which erodes the availability of once secure jobs, the inflexibility of many traditional occupations and a lack of job opportunities, whereas pull factors include the promise of independence, flexibility, and the opportunity to escape barriers in paid employment (Hughes, 2003). The development of the ‘push – pull’ scenario raises the issue that women attracted to small business and self-employment are not a homogenous group either in terms of their motivations or the nature of their businesses (Still, 2003). Dupuis and de Bruin (2004) note the advancement beyond the push/pull dichotomy, with the theorisation of the often ‘complex system of interacting motivations’, such as the those identified by Orhan and Scott (2001) leading to other categorisations including ‘dynastic compliance’, ‘natural succession’, ‘forced entrepreneurship’ and ‘no other choice’. Motherhood itself can be posited to be both a push and a pull factor. The changing needs, requirements, expectations and demands brought about by having ones priorities abruptly changed with the birth of a child mean that aspects of many traditional workplaces suddenly become untenable, as illustrated by the mother of a 6 month old stating emphatically to one of the authors “*you just couldn’t pay me enough to go back to work!*”. On the other hand, the booming baby industry means that new mothers are identifying opportunities that would probably not occur to those without children. New Zealand ventures range from saucy maternity underwear (Hot Milk) to online nappy information and sales (Snazzipants), to Web networking sites (Mums on Top) and baby friendly cafes (Bang Bang and Spoonful of Sugar). Other pull factors for mothers include the opportunities to spend more time with their children and the perceived flexibility that self employment brings, along with the sense of identity and fulfilment that comes from not being “just a Mum”.

An increasing theoretical sophistication, particularly noticeable within sociological and feminist approaches, has opened up the entrepreneurship field to include insights into race, class and family issues, and a more complete picture of women’s participation in the small firm sector is beginning to

emerge (Carter et al., 2001). Brush (1992) suggests that women entrepreneurs integrate their business with their family, societal and personal relationships. Walker and Webster (2004) found in their study on home-based business that there are some clear gender differences in initial motivation and rationale for operating from home, with many women choosing to do so because of the convenience it afforded them while having to balance work and family. Kirkwood and Mackie (2004) stress that, while flexibility is often seen to be an advantage of entrepreneurship, flexibility in terms of work and family may be something of a myth, with balancing and managing the work-family divide being a continual struggle.

Although research on entrepreneurship has grown considerably, very little attention has been paid to the life stage of entrepreneurs and how it impacts and affects fundamental entrepreneurial processes. To some extent this oversight can be attributed to the fact that business and life stage factors (such as family and age contexts) were considered to be distinct disciplinary institutions and thus investigated by scholars in separate disciplines. Nevertheless, as socio-demographic factors in society change, we are now seeing the vast majority of business being started by groups of entrepreneurs who can be categorised into specific life stages such as retirees (Baucus & Human, 1994; Rotefoss & Kolvereid, 2005; Singh & DeNoble, 2003; Tervo, 2006; Weber & Schaper, 2004) and mothers (Caputo & Dolinsky, 1998; Fried, 1989; Kim & Ling, 2001; Lee-Gosselin & Grise, 1990; Shelton, 2006; Wilson, Kickul, & Marlino, 2007). Therefore this paper seeks to address this gap by specifically looking at how the changes associated with motherhood motivate some individuals into entrepreneurship.

Life stages are often characterised by personal motivations, family and social commitments and age or developmental contexts. Against these changes in demographics and social contexts, understanding the factors that influence entrepreneurial activities and behaviours become important. In the entrepreneurship literature, there is an increasing call for researchers to incorporate life stage variables such as family and personal life orientations into their conceptual models and empirical investigations into the emergence of new business opportunities and ventures (Aldrich & Cliff, 2003; DeMartino, Barbato, & Jacques, 2006). Previous research has shown that dimensions such as personal life and

family can have effects on the motivations of entrepreneurs (DeMartino & Barbato, 2002); work/family balance (Haar, Spell, O'Driscoll, & Dyer, 2003; Jennings & McDougald, 2007); work/family balance (Haar et al., 2003; Jennings & McDougald, 2007); and their personal careers (Baucus & Human, 1994; Buttner & Dorothy, 1997; Eddleston & Powell, 2008; Schjoedt & Shaver, 2007; Wilson et al., 2007).

While lifespan development and entrepreneurship have been quite distinct and historically robust discipline areas in their own right, there is very little research that integrates or connects these two disparate areas. A life stage embeddedness perspective on entrepreneurship will pave the way for more holistic and realistic insights into the entrepreneurial process. Mumpreneurship or Mompreneurship as it is termed commonly internationally, “is an emergent phenomenon, which has yet to settle on a widely accepted definition or be researched from a social scientific point of view” (Korsgaard, 2007). Discourse analysis of internet documents on the subject of mumpreneurship by Korsgaard revealed three central elements:

1. A need to strike a balance between the needs of one’s workplace or career on the one hand and the needs of one’s family on the other.
2. The desire for a work environment unencumbered with an immediate supervisor impervious to and unconcerned with the needs of one’s family.
3. The desire to combine the first two elements with exciting and challenging work experiences.

Method

We selected an in-depth case study to illustrate the interaction of gender, family and pressures of being a mumpreneur. This research takes an exploratory case study approach in unravelling the life stage factors that influence the entrepreneurial process. In particular, it seeks to examine and understand the push and pull factors of an individual’s life stage through semi-structured interviews.

Its broad philosophical approach includes a relativistic ontology (where reality is believed to be socially constructed and shared through shared meanings and multiple interpretations) and subjectivist epistemology (where subjective interaction is needed to understand people's socially constructed realities) (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994). In this in-depth case study we utilise well accepted and rigorous method of semi-structured interviews to build a comprehensive study of Mumpreneurship.

Data analysis included the interviews being transcribed, and coded thematically, by highlighting key components and making preliminary margin notes to "isolate certain themes and expressions that can be reviewed with informants... maintained in their original forms throughout the study" (Miles & Huberman, 1984, p. 6). Data analysis also involved an iterative processes of data reduction, data display and conclusion/verification. By utilising repeated readings, the coding of the interviews and other data collection are used to identify issues that are emphasised, repeated or highlighted in the texts. The interview data were also triangulated with other sources of data collection such as documentation, participation observations and archival evidence. The methods to be used for presenting the evidence collected and analysed for this research include:

1. Quotations from documentation and interviews (attributed);
2. Modest paraphrasing of documentation and interviews (attributed);
3. First-order interpretations – descriptive properties of the studied scene and the common sense, organisational participants' understanding of those properties; and
4. Second-order interpretations – the researcher's contextualised understanding used to organise and explain the patterning of the first-order data. This case will be used to highlight the intersections of motherhood and entrepreneurship.

Bang Bang Cafe: Mumpreneur Sarah Dent

Sarah Dent is a highly articulate, energetic mother of two, who opened her café, *Bang Bang* in October 2006 at age 34. *Bang Bang* is a baby friendly café where mothers and carers can meet and relax in an environment, complete with a play area and activities for small children, baby food on the

menu, and highchairs at the tables. Sarah describes her venture as a “destination café concept” as it is off the main café area in Ponsonby. Sarah states that it is “...successful as a destination, which means cheaper rent, people will drive to get here”. Her target market includes mums, fathers, secondary care givers (nannies and grandparents), the children themselves and local businesses. Sarah believes that the concept is still quite unique. When researching the idea (in April 2006) there was nothing exactly like it in the Auckland region, “I would go to a café with my baby and wouldn’t get greeted and every time she gave a squeak I would feel guilty... you know it was just not right. I realised there was this massive gap ... I got really, really excited about it... the possibilities were endless...”

She admits that things are changing though, and there are more competitors now than even just two years ago when there was a real lack of this kind of cafe concept. At *Bang Bang* today there are approximately 6 employees at the café (4 full time, 2 to 3 part time). Average sales per customer are high; people will usually make extra purchases with the addition of a fluffy and a cupcake for toddlers or a bowl of mash for babies. Although she turns over \$500,000 p/a Sarah describes the business as still being very much in the early stage as it will hopefully be the “*first of many*”.

The Mumpreneurial Experience of a Start-up

During the first six months that the business concept was in development, her eldest child was in day-care five days a week. After the cafe opened she dropped the day-care days down to three days. During the early days of the business the day-care was vital as she was at the cafe all the time, as well as being pregnant with her second baby. Sarah cites the next major milestone after opening as, without doing any marketing, seeing the mums instantly trickling in. “*I think I almost wet my pants! That was just the most exciting thing for me, knowing that we might be on to something and that it would work was fantastic!*” A third significant milestone was realising after six months realising that they were still in business, although they do describe the first six months as a real blur. They closed for the Christmas holidays, during which time Sarah had her second baby. “*I came back a day or two*

days and would bring the baby with me and would stop to breast feed and they sleep a lot when they're little so she would sleep under the sink..."

Prior to starting Bang Bang, Sarah co-owned another venture also in the "baby industry"; manufacturing hand merino knits for babies, which has since been sold. She describes herself as a "serial entrepreneur" and she hasn't let the fact that she is currently five months pregnant with a third baby slow her down. Sarah is no stranger to start-ups and creating something great from not very much. Her career background, particularly while living overseas, has always been in roles working with start ups which she said fuelled her desire to be start something and then make it grow. Three months after moving back to New Zealand Sarah got pregnant which she describes, "*catapulted me into this unknown territory that was quite scary actually. And even more scary, having a child and I would try to do the things I used to do before having a child that would make me feel like "me" - that kept my identity - yet it didn't feel like that. It made me feel completely different and uncomfortable.*"

Sarah was reluctant to work for an industry she didn't believe in, or feel that she should be supporting as a mother of young children. Over her entire career she has almost exclusively worked for small companies that grow and she admits to not really liking the corporate environment. "*The option for me coming to NZ was get a marketing job, and the jobs I was getting offered were for beer companies and when you have a kid I didn't want to spend eight hours a day going "wwooo Tuis!" ... I just couldn't do it.*" In addition to her own experience of work, she comes from an entrepreneurial family. Her Mum was an entrepreneur (owning a model agency and organising trade shows). "*That's the image that I've had, so I've grown up with a very busy mum. I'm sure that must have some impact on my work ethic*"

Sarah muses on the differences between Mumpreneurship and Entrepreneurship. She feels that the guts and drivers are essentially the same for both, with both Mumpreneurs and entrepreneurs being

ego led in that they believe they can do something that is different and that they are not afraid to say it – something she sees as common across all entrepreneurs. One particular difference she feels is the intersection of entrepreneurship with motherhood. *“I guess maybe you just have to be a bit tougher when you’re a Mum because you’ve got so much else to do and you can’t screw up your kids. You know that’s the one rule.”* She is quite philosophical about what it takes to make the venture a success and is aware that it is unlikely to get any easier as time goes by, *“... the impact I guess since we had this one [pregnancy #3] has been much bigger. With Tom [husband] in a job now which is very demanding so balancing all of that definitely takes its toll and it probably takes its toll hardest on me because I still have to do all the mum stuff and I’m alright with that... but there is there is no time or energy left for stuff for myself and I guess I just sacrifice that.”*

Discussion

The case of Bang Bang illustrates some key issues for mumpreneurs that make them a distinct subgroup of entrepreneurs. For many women, giving birth and raising children become important influences on their decisions to start new ventures. By incorporating the dynamics of family and personal motivations around the entrepreneurship process, a clearer understanding of entrepreneurial motivations and typologies can emerge with regards to the mumpreneur groups (Baucus & Human, 1994; Brush, 1992). In this paper we highlight two important theoretical streams to illustrate the influences of lifestage factors on the entrepreneurship process for mumpreneurs: personal-life orientations and family/firm tensions.

The convergence of personal and family life and entrepreneurship is starting to permeate discussions on the growing gender and entrepreneurship literature (see for example, DeMartino & Barbato, 2002; DeMartino et al., 2006; Eddleston & Powell, 2008; Sibylle, 2004; Wilson et al., 2007). While the literature has identified the progression of female entrepreneurial careers (Moore, 1990; Moore, 1999), beginning from the traditional roles of women to more “modern” generations, further examination has not been conducted in greater detail the individual motivations and push factors such

as motherhood that initiate the opportunity recognition process (Fischer, Reuben, & Dyke, 1993). Traditional studies into female entrepreneurial motivations have primarily focused on the move from corporate careers straight to self-employment and/or entrepreneurship (e.g., Buttner & Dorothy, 1997; Eddleston & Powell, 2008; Wilson et al., 2007) and this limits the huge diversity of women who participate in entrepreneurial endeavours (DeMartino et al., 2006). As prior research has highlighted, the likelihood of women pursuing self employment appears to be increased significantly if there are young children in the household (Caputo & Dolinsky, 1998). This may be associated with the perceived flexibility that self employment allows in terms of childcare. In addition, in the case of Sarah Dent the clash between having to 'sell ones soul' to promote (in this case) alcohol and beliefs about what work is appropriate as the mother of a young family, created a strong push factor from the corporate environment. We did not examine or speculate on the reasons behind how and why children and other personal factors such as family dynamics promote the entrepreneurship process. The finding by (DeMartino & Barbato, 2003) that children significantly influence female entrepreneurs is not surprising however and, as demonstrated in the case, the interaction of impending children and individual factors such as career background and personal values intensify the pursuit of the market opportunities identified.

In addition, our case highlights how life stage events such as motherhood can have a profound influence on the opportunity recognition processes of entrepreneurs. Ardichvili and Cardozo (2000) for example, highlighted the importance of social networks on the opportunity recognition process. The case above illustrates that life stage development factors such as becoming a mother influence the opportunity recognition process. Social capital variables such as social interaction, and the number of social relationships mobilises opportunity recognition activities such as acquisition, knowledge seeking and collective action (Puhakka, 2006). In particular, the role of the partner and family in establishing entrepreneurial activities can be a profound influence on the ability of the mumpreneur in succeeding in their entrepreneurial activities. This can be seen by the increasing difficulties that emerge when Sarah's partner went back to work. She found that her prior networks and knowledge of the baby industry influenced her opportunity development. Her reluctance not to work in an industry

she did not believe in nor supported as a mother points to her own personal values in developing the opportunity in her own image.

The increasing recognition of the social embeddedness of entrepreneurship places greater importance on founders' social ties in identifying opportunities and mobilising resources (Aldrich & Cliff, 2003). Influences of family ties have explicitly highlighted the role that family connections have on the resources mobilisation and constructions of the venture. These findings have robust analogues in the literature (Schindehutte, Morris, & Brennan, 2003; Starr & Macmillan, 1990). Prior research in this area has addressed the issue that personal life and family and career orientations of female entrepreneurs differ dramatically from men (DeMartino & Barbato, 2002; Parasuraman, Purohit, Godshalk, & Beutell, 1996). Our case illustrates the impact that family has on the entrepreneurial process, particularly the influence that Sarah's own mother had on her, which links in with claims by Schindehutte et al. (2003) that family represents an "*early and overriding source of influence on career choice*" (p 96). While entrepreneurship has been the pursuit of flexibility and combining a business with having and raising children, the tensions between work and family which develop over the course of the entrepreneurship process changes. Our case highlights the changing dichotomies and priorities in balancing the family-embeddedness perspective (Aldrich & Cliff, 2003).

Although Korsgaard (2007) suggests that it is often stress and guilt about not being a good enough mother while working outside the home, rather than the need for achievement or the presence of a unique business opportunity that pushes women into entrepreneurship, it seems that it is the latter rather than the former that motivates Sarah. She was under no illusions that owning Bang Bang would allow more time for her role as a wife and mother "*I think I was always very aware that there were going to be sacrifices and that just goes along with owning your own business, and again from the experience I've had of working for entrepreneurs I've seen what it takes and I know that it is not easy.*"

Conclusion

First and foremost, while entrepreneurship as a process has often been portrayed as an individual process around the founders of the business, there is increasing awareness that the personal lives of entrepreneurs provide an intertwined web of entrepreneurial ambitions, motivations, personalities, family, and social networks. This raises some important questions as to how the influence of life stage such as age and family commitments initiates and influences the entrepreneurship journeys of mumpreneurs. The development of theory and knowledge from this project will aid our understanding of the needs of specific groups of entrepreneurs such as mumpreneurs. This not only provides theoretical propositions and frameworks to be tested but also highlights issues that these individuals face in bringing value to their personal, family, social, community, and economic contexts (both nationally and internationally). From an academic perspective, developing a richer appreciation of the life stage factors of entrepreneurs provides theoretical advancement of entrepreneurship. This research project will aid other business and entrepreneurship researchers to conduct further research that will aid in economic and social policy, and best practice cases. Understanding the life stage demands of entrepreneurship highlights the difficulties and advantages that these groups face in creating opportunities and new ventures. The case in this paper demonstrates how a mumpreneur engages in entrepreneurial activities, underpinned by a desire to balance her life stage needs of personal motivation and fulfilment, family life, and work life balance. This paper highlights how existing work options operate to push women with children to explore other options and to redefine themselves as business women.

Our case is exploratory and thus generalisable only to theory generation. We were limited within this by our reliance on narratives and retrospective data. While the reliability and validity of retrospective data could have been a potential problem, careful consideration of the extant literature and documentary evidence. The use of interviews, combined with documentation, observations and informal discussions allowed a rounded picture of

mumpreneurship to emerge. Further research could utilize longitudinal and multi-method design to confirm and generalise findings from this paper.

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