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'Longing to Grow My Business': The Work–Life Interface of Women Entrepreneurs in Ethiopia

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Introduction

Women entrepreneurship is often encouraged for various reasons. Some authors (e.g., Shabana et al., 2017; Singh & Belwal, 2008) stress that entrepreneurship empowers women and enhances their status in their communities. Others argue that entrepreneurship improves the household's welfare and fosters a nation's wider social and economic development. Yet, literature also shows that women face many challenges, such as gender inequality (e.g., educational background), the gendered role of women (e.g., normative and social expectations), and limited access to resources (e.g., time- and labour-saving technologies, household appliances and child care facilities), to name a few (Carter et al., 2015; Gudeta et al., 2019; Jennings

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& Brush, 2013; Kelley et al., 2017; Zewdie & Associates, 2002). These challenges are particularly severe in developing economies, such as those in Sub-Saharan Africa. Ethiopia, a Sub-Saharan African country and the context of this study, is no exception.

Generally, the enhanced autonomy to decide when and where to work, associated with self-employment, is identified as one of the important motivating factors for women to enter entrepreneurship, as this allows women to better manage the work–life interface (Álvarez & Sinde-Cantorna, 2014; Tremblay & Genin, 2008). This is even more true for married women with dependent children (Annink & Den Dulk, 2012). Although some research findings support the idea that self-employment can help women achieving the control and flexibility they aspire (Annink & Den Dulk, 2012; Loscocco, 1997), evidence still indicates that this may not bring the intended ease in managing women entrepreneurs' work–life balance (Annink & Den Dulk, 2012; Lee Siew Kim & Seow Ling, 2001; Marlow, 1997; Parasuraman & Simmers, 2001; Shelton, 2006). Inability to attain work–life balance through self-employment is oftentimes attributed to the varied and many responsibilities that women take on in both domains. Self-employment implies that one needs to be 'always on' for both family and clients, which creates time pressures (Hillbrecht & Lero, 2014) and that it comes with long, irregular, and atypical working hours and interwoven work and nonwork commitments (Gold & Mustafa, 2013; Hyytinen & Ruuskanen, 2007). Thus, the mere flexibility afforded by self-employment may not simply solve women's work–life issues (Annink & den Dulk, 2012).

The interwoven work/nonwork commitments and the associated work–nonwork boundary interruptions (cf. Ashforth et al., 2000; Kossek et al., 2012) may apply to women in Ethiopia where traditional gender roles are widely accepted (Bayeh, 2016; Burgess, 2013; Kassa, 2015). The traditional view of the feminine gender role prescribes women to shoulder the lion share of the domestic and care responsibilities in a household regardless of them having a job or running their own business. Men's involvement in domestic work in this traditional view is an exception (Gudeta & Van Engen, 2017, 2018). Women are not only expected to play primary roles in terms of being a spouse, a caretaker, and a parent, they are also expected to undertake and/or supervise household chores, care for close family members, and to provide community services (Gudeta & Van Engen, 2017, 2018). Managing the family–work interface is exacerbated as women entrepreneurs lack access to time and labour-saving technologies and household appliances (Zewdie & Associates, 2002) and also lack or have limited access to child and elder care facilities (Gudeta et al., 2019). All these factors combined can be expected

to negatively influence women entrepreneurs' business operation and growth ambitions.

In view of the account above, by using grounded theory to analyse in-depth interviews with women entrepreneurs in the capital of Ethiopia, Addis Abeba, the present study seeks to explore how the enactment of the work–life roles of women entrepreneurs in Ethiopia play a role in women's business operations and growth aspirations. In doing so, we aim to contribute to the literature on work–life interface and women business success by examining how women entrepreneurs in Sub-Saharan Africa explain the way they operate their business, how they perceive their roles in their family and community help or hinder their business operation, and what motivates them in pursuing business (and family and community) success. In this chapter, women business growth intention is conceptualized as women entrepreneurs' attitudes about engaging in actions or behaviours with the belief that these result in positive changes in business performance. Women's business growth intention is thus considered to be the link between their beliefs and behaviour (cf. Bird, 1988). Following Bird (1988), we can expect that women are pre-disposed to growth intentions based upon a combination of personal (e.g., perceived abilities) and contextual factors and may utilize work–nonwork boundary management strategies to help improve their performance (Shelton, 2006).

Literature Review

Until now, work–nonwork boundary management and work–family balance have been primarily studied in the context of organisational employment. Consequently, the larger part of the existing work–family interface research focuses on the experiences and challenges of those employed in organisations. However, with the growth of men and particularly women entrepreneurs and self-employed workers across the globe (Elam et al., 2019; Millán et al., 2014), the work–family interface has become an emerging theme in the area of entrepreneurship, and there is a growing research interest in investigating work–life interface experiences of women entrepreneurs (Jennings & McDougald, 2007; Shastri et al., 2019; Shelton, 2006). One possible explanation for the heightened interest in work–life interface in the entrepreneurship field emanates from the fact that entrepreneurs are their own bosses with a latitude of discretion and control and flexibility in terms of what business and tasks they want to do, where they do this, and with whom they do business and collaborate (Peters et al., 2020).

However, all these agentic choices come with a multitude of challenges for women entrepreneurs, especially since they may hold multiple roles, values, and identities (Peters et al., 2020; Shastri et al., 2019). For many women, their ability as professional entrepreneurs is not recognised and acknowledged by society. The literature on women entrepreneurship suggests the importance of including family when investigating women entrepreneurs' work–life balance as these are often intertwined and, consequently, considerably affecting one another (Aldrich & Cliff, 2003; Jennings & McDougald, 2007). To better understand the work–life experiences of individuals, various theories and perspectives have emerged (Bianchi & Milkie, 2010; Harrington, 2007; Shockley et al., 2017). For example, Jennings and McDougald (2007) argue that female entrepreneurs are likely to experience more work–life conflict as compared to male entrepreneurs, which demands them, intentionally or unintentionally, to employ coping strategies that limit the growth of their businesses. Therefore, the reported performance differences between male-headed and female-headed businesses may be explained by examining how women and men entrepreneurs experience work–life conflict as well as the coping strategies they choose (Jennings et al., 2010). Jennings and colleagues, therefore, suggest that women entrepreneurs may 'choose' to integrate their work–life responsibilities, which may result in reduced commitment to and involvement in one of the life domains—usually the work domain (Bögenhold & Klinglmair, 2015), while men may separate their work–life roles more to focus on managing and growing their businesses.

Work–family literature reviews reveal that experiencing conflict between work and family roles has negative consequences for individuals, such as reduced physical and mental wellbeing, enhanced stress, lower job satisfaction, and engagement with family (Eby et al., 2005; Ford et al., 2007; Shockley et al., 2017). Also Peters et al. (2020) report that overload with parental responsibilities can lead to conflict between work and family roles for women self-employed entrepreneurs, affecting the relationship between work-related values, their sense of work control, and, in turn, their subjective career satisfaction. In general, studies on (women) entrepreneurs have reported that the challenges involved in managing domestic and care responsibilities, while taking care of a business, can be sources of tension and stress for women entrepreneurs (McGowan et al., 2012), resulting in lower economic performance of their businesses (Elam et al., 2019; Longstreth et al., 1987; Rogers, 2005; Shelton, 2006).

Drew and Humbert (2012) provided great insight into the family–work interface management by men and women entrepreneurs in Ireland. They showed that mothers rather than fathers worked flexible hours and took

on the lion's share of unpaid work and care, and consequently, reported higher work–nonwork role conflict (Drew & Humbert, 2012). Their work is important as it extends the gender and employment issue from mainstream organisational studies to entrepreneurship. It provided empirical evidence on the predictable continuity of fathers' career trajectory, while mothers had 'more fragmented working patterns, reflecting absences for caring and adjustments such as part-time or working from home (p. 49)'.

The many contributions that women could make through their entrepreneurial activities are widely acknowledged. However, to facilitate women better to make these, the structural mechanisms which shape women entrepreneurial activities need to be taken into account (De Bruin et al., 2007; Thebaud, 2010). For instance, the study by Bade et al. (2014), conducted in India, showed that women entrepreneurs face a challenge in finding a balance between their work and personal life as a result of conflicting needs/demands from their familial, social, personal, and entrepreneurial roles. This study drew on secondary sources, such as literature review and Internet sources, and showed that although Indian women are satisfied with their work–life balance, they are also struggling with the overtime associated with their business. It suggested more awareness of the personal goals in the family, societal, and personal domain may help better management of work–life balance. Some of the work–life interface strategies identified by Jennings and McDougald (2007) include women reducing the hours spent on their business to fulfil family and/or domestic roles and postponing women's decision to expand their businesses until children get older (prioritising fulfilling family/care demands). This resembles work by Bleijenbergh et al. (2016) who study part-time work in relationship to gender and ambition. Also in this case, reducing working hours is revealed as a strategy for women to combine work and nonwork demanding them to postpone the realization of their ambitions in the work domain.

The use of boundary theory (Ashforth et al., 2000; Kossek et al., 1999, 2012; Nippert-Eng, 1996) would help us to understand how women entrepreneurs would be able to manage the work–life interface by using different work–life role management strategies and the effect of such strategies on the performance of women entrepreneurs' businesses. Boundary theory states that people create, maintain, and frequently transit across boundaries of the work and nonwork domains to manage their work–life roles. For the purpose of this study, two dimensions are distinguished: work–family role flexibility and work–family role permeability. Flexibility refers to roles being enacted in variable physical and temporal locations (Sundaramurthy & Kreiner, 2008). Permeability refers to the degree to which roles

are enacted during the execution of another role. Importantly, roles can be psychologically and/or behaviourally located in other roles, referring to the extent to which a role can spill over into another role (Sundaramurthy & Kreiner, 2008). To manage their physical, temporal, or psychological work–nonwork boundaries, mainstream boundary theory assumes that people enact a boundary management strategy. The options can lie on a continuum ranging from high on segmentation (i.e., where work–life roles are separately undertaken) to high on integration (i.e., where people deal with their work–life roles simultaneously) (Kossek et al., 2012; Nippert-Eng, 1996). Moreover, individuals may have different preferences for either segmenting or integrating their work–life roles. In practice, however, individuals' preferred boundary management strategies are not necessarily reflected in their enacted boundary management strategies (Peters & Blomme, 2019).

Methods

The study followed a grounded theory approach to explore the work–life boundary management experiences of women entrepreneurs in Ethiopia. In-depth interviews were conducted with 31 women entrepreneurs who are operating micro, small, and medium enterprises in Addis Ababa. To tap into heterogeneity in experiencing and managing work–life interface, we included women participants operating in different sectors, for a varied number of years, having diverse demographic characteristics, such as age, marital status, availability of children, and level of education. For sampling the women interviewees, snowball-sampling technique, referrals through friends, and contacts with established women-related business associations were used. Employing a variety of criteria in selecting our samples and using different mechanisms of sampling enabled us to capture different experiences of participants as well as increase the credibility of our findings (Rubin & Rubin, 2005).

Semi-structured interview questions were used to explore the work–life boundary management experiences, challenges, and boundary management strategies of the selected women entrepreneurs. Interviews lasted 50 min on average and were audio-recorded after informed oral consent was obtained from the participants. Data were analysed using constant comparison (Corbin & Strauss, 1990), where incidents in the data are constantly compared with other incidents for similarities and differences. Line-by-line coding was initially conducted by the researchers, followed by the construction of the core categories which matched the collected data set. The core themes that emerged from the qualitative data analysis included: permeability of multiple roles, 'I'm here and there' and longing for success.

Findings and Analysis

This section presents the main findings of the study. These are organized by core themes, supported by representative quotes and descriptions.

Permeability of Multiple Roles

One of the study's main findings concerns the women entrepreneurs' struggle with managing the permeability of the various work and nonwork roles that they were expected to play. More specifically, the women experienced that there were too many roles spanning the boundaries of their roles in business (work), family and domestic care, social obligations, and community services. Some of these are highly culturally sensitive, such as paying respect to the dead, making financial or material contributions during weddings, cultural celebrations, and mourning for the dead. For some of our interviewees, domestic and childcare responsibilities (i.e., caring for children, husband, dependents, and other extended family members) took their primary attention. One of the respondents said:

It's a must [to take care of home/family responsibilities], you must give a priority to your home/family, you have to fulfill [your family roles]. If I have to leave my business and go buy groceries for home, I do that; if your child is taken ill, you must give priority for that (Women's clothing store owner, aged 31, two children aged 3 and 1).

Interestingly, in most accounts, the interviewees indicated that they needed to fulfil the societal expectation to be the (primary) care provider and take (sole) responsibility for overseeing domestic chores. Another respondent mentioned:

[F]or instance, today, I left home to go to work very late. Because I had to tell the housemaid what she had to prepare for my children and had to arrange things in the house. If something happens at home, [...] if something happens to the children, it concerns me. I am responsible. So, such things at home affect [my] business (Advertising and Printing business owner, aged 30, two children, aged 3 and 1.5).

The women's family–home responsibility was followed closely by the responsibility of giving attention to managing their business. In practice, this implied that they had to take the roles of manager, purchaser, operations, customer service, and supervision of employees, if present. Some interviewees,

however, indicated that business was given priority over social or community services. These women chose to find a way to deal with community roles outside of work hours. One reflected on her experience as follows:

I do it [deal with community roles outside of work hours, authors] in a way that doesn't affect my work [business]. And if I have to help, for instance, if you tell me to go right now and chop some onions for a wedding, I wouldn't do it. It's my work that is going to hold me responsible and not anybody else. The responsibilities [at work] are a priority. (School owner, aged 46, three children, aged 28, 22, and 18).

For most interviewees, however, fulfilling social and community expectations did constitute an important and demanding role. The commonly described roles included attending important life events of community members, such as childbirth, weddings, and funerals, which also involves paying respects for the dead, visiting the ill, involving in a community or kinship-based voluntary associations. Some aspects of this role, at times, also required making monetary and material contributions. The social and community service is considered to be important as it helps to develop the interviewees' social capital, since a large part of the community members come together at times of difficulties and loss. One of the interviewees shared her experience of managing boundary-spanning roles at home, business, and community (religion, in this case), and how she experienced difficulties navigating these roles simultaneously. She proclaims:

It is very difficult to be a mother and a businesswoman at the same time [...] For example, we wake up every day at 5:45 AM and wake the children so they can have breakfast. [I] then have to drive them to school. Though my husband is home, I am the one who must get to work in the mornings, so I drive the children to school and arrive at the shop around 8 AM. I work [at the shop] all day and close the shop around 6 pm. When I get home, more work awaits me as I must bath the children, help them study, and teach them the bible. Moreover, there are days when I also have to go to church for a bible study session, so on those days, I must go there at the end of the business day. [...] I am also responsible for making sure we have enough to eat and drink at the house and check whether the house is being kept properly. [...] Whenever I hear someone is sick, I make time to go and visit them. I also do my best not to miss funerals. I make time after I get home or I close my shop early to go [attend]. (Stationary Store owner, aged 36, three children, aged 16, 9, and 7).

Most of the interviewees expressed similar experiences and challenges of managing competing expectations simultaneously. Hence, the role permeability can be regarded to be real and poses a significant challenge of managing work and nonwork boundaries. How do women entrepreneurs attend simultaneously to competing and at times, conflicting expectations? The findings reported above imply the potential trade-offs: attending to a certain role effectively comes at a cost of not being able to attend some of the other roles. For instance, the interviewee referred to above experienced that she had to close her shop on a regular basis in a bid to attend to her social obligations which have to come at a cost in the form of reduced sales. Other interviewees had to skip the time they were supposed or want to spend with their family in order to fill urgent customer orders which put pressure on their domestic roles and family relationships.

'I'm Here and There'

One of the consequences of work–nonwork role permeability is the intersection of spatiality, temporality, and behaviours of women entrepreneurs in their day-to-day routines. Most of the interviewed women, especially those with care roles at home, reported how their responsibilities at home interfered with their business roles, and required space- and time-bound coping strategies. In particular, this appears true for women who have small children at home. A women entrepreneur with two young children, who were three and one-year old at the time of the interview, and who worked from home designing and producing leather products, explained how challenging it was for her to juggle her business and her family responsibilities. Initially, her decision to move the business to her home was motivated by the ever-increasing rent she had to pay for her small shop as well as by the availability of open space at her in-laws' compound. She admitted that she benefitted from bringing the business to her home. At the same time, however, she felt the pressure working from home put on her business. She says:

[My work-family life] is full of pressure. Now, I am not working as fully as I should be. My children are close-by and need on-off supervision... there are times when I am here and there. A full-time commitment to work is impossible due to children-home responsibilities. So, there are things like that, and I think to some extent it has affected my work (Leather Products company owner, aged 31, two children, aged 1 and 3).

Table 20.1 Summary of results

No	Main findings	Summary
1	Permeability of multiple roles	Most participants were identified as having multiple roles in their work, family, and community domains. Most women, with care responsibilities with the family, were found struggling to manage the permeability of the domains and the various roles that span the work–life boundaries of the work–nonwork domains. Doing so require the women to make some trade-offs, to manage demands from one domain (e.g., attending funeral) while impacting their other roles (i.e., closing business to go attend)
2	‘I am here and there’	The women’s multiple roles in the three domains and the high permeability allow the women to considerably integrate their roles, demanding them to be ‘here and there’. Women with pre-school children and who do not have familial or reliable house help support heavily use integrating coping strategies
3	Longing for success: Effect of permeability of work–life interface management	For some women, competing demands from their work, family and community domains impact their business growth intentions and/or decisions. On the other hand, some women with considerable experience in the business and with less family responsibility or with reliable support were indeed able to grow their businesses showing the significance of the favourable family context

The same interviewee moved on and said that she could have ‘focused more on [her] work’ if she had decided to move her business out of her house (Table 20.1). But she decided not to do so, she wanted to have her young children ‘at a close distance’ to provide them with better care at home.

A woman, however great she is as a businessperson, she also has a lot of other responsibilities. In the house, from the family and culturally expected role of women, there are lots of pressure on women, what we call family... things like managing housemaids and household activities. So, when I see it from that aspect, it is quite a challenge for the woman [all women]! And a business led by a woman encounters similar challenges as well. When I say I didn't hit the target that I had in the beginning, I also know that I need to be satisfied and be grateful for what [I have] now. But sometimes, I think what if I kept going on the momentum I had when I began. But for me not to go at that speed I wanted to, could be explained by something that happened here – children and home and these are also significant aspects of life”.

The above narrative of this mother-entrepreneur reveals the tensions, conflicts, and ambiguities of straddling across different roles. At times, she feels joy about having children and caring for them as a mother; and, at other times, the narrative shows how such a role also holds her back not making progress on running a profitable business. She brought business home, perhaps believing that it would be easier to do in that way. However, this proved more difficult temporally and spatially because she must monitor and care for children and manage home-related activities along with running a business. This finding questions one of the premises of the boundary theory as this suggests women to be able to enact their roles flexibly in variable physical and temporal locations (Sundaramurthy & Kreiner, 2008). However, it also confirms insights from boundary theory that individuals' enacted work–nonwork boundary management strategies do not always resemble their preferred boundary management strategies (Peters & Blomme, 2019).

Another interesting and relevant issue raised by a few interviewees related to their social capital need, in particular networking, for running a business. They considered the importance of networking for business resource access, but also indicated that they could not do it because of a lack of time due to their caring responsibilities.

The difference between working men and women, [...] is that men network much. They support each other well. Plus, they make time [for each other]. They may say “let's have some beer”, but they spend a great deal of time discussing about their work, sitting with just one bottle of beer. [...] So, when they are out and about, they build support [networks]. But when you look at a woman, she immediately goes to home when she leaves work. There are children, she must make sure that food is prepared, there is marriage [to tend to] and all that. And I used to see that clearly sometimes. When I go and present my case [at work], I am all alone. Because I couldn't mobilize support using

that time, through networking [as men do]. (Social entrepreneur, aged 68, four children aged 40, 35, 35, and 32).

Another businesswoman experienced that she had to be reflective regarding to dealing with work–home demands. She said:

I often get fed up as I must buy and sell everything at the shop and I also have to make sure the house is full. Sometimes, it becomes too much to handle, but you have to do it anyways [...] It was difficult at first, but I have now managed to handle it. (Stationary business owner, aged 36, three children, aged 16, 9, and 7).

Longing for Success: Effect of Permeability of Work–Life Interface Management

Managing the work–life interface by women entrepreneurs requires them to deploy essentially two strategies: integration and/or separation or segmentation. Role permeability essentially refers to how women can manage work–life challenges simultaneously, though this could be at a different level of prioritising. The analysis suggests that women were not only interpreting their experience of dealing with competing roles, but were also reflecting on whether it was a right decision to start a business in the first place and on how they could manage it to have a potential for growth. Such narrative strongly featured from women who were relatively young with pre-school children and/or less fortunate in having familial support or trustworthy housemaids. One respondent shared her experience of the ups and downs of managing her business, while at the same time trying to raise her two young boys. She said that running her own business as a self-employed was radically different from being employed in someone else's organisation. She opined that young aspiring women with pre-school children or with a plan to have a child in the near future should not go into business. She mentioned that a caring burden impacts women's business operation (performance). She puts it as follows:

I wouldn't advise for a person who's newly married or has recently given birth to go into business. Because my children are what worries me most. It's recently that my youngest who's three-years old started going to school. So, I was worried about him very much... what if he falls... what if... I believe all other mothers think like that. So at least if they are done with and already sent their children to school, that would be fine. That way you could have at least fulfilled one of your responsibilities... when [the children] start spending the day at school that will take some burden off you. Because this is not like

office work [employment] that you go straight home leaving work at five and reach home at six. If that's the case, you could have helped your children with their studies and homework while cooking their food. (Children's clothing store owner, aged 38, two children aged 3 and 8)

The above expressed opinion is shared by another respondent who also believed that a woman aiming to open a new business should reconsider doing so. She described that running a profitable business requires a woman to dedicate her time which would be challenging if she has familial and/or care responsibilities. She described this as follows:

If a woman has children, if she has responsibilities at home, to tell the truth, it's very difficult [to open and run a business]. I sometimes say that I should just quit [the business] and sit down and raise my children at home. [...] So, for a woman with family responsibilities, if she starts a business, she better makes time to be there. Otherwise, I would advise not to start it at all. The business needs her. So, she should first be done raising her children and then come back to start a business when things are settled. I don't think women abandon their children to focus on their business. (Women's clothing store owner, aged 31, two children aged 3 and 1).

However, not all participants equally experienced the freedom to control their work, family, and community responsibilities from impacting one another. Most importantly, for the women interviewees with small children, family and care responsibilities frequently interfered with their business time, causing a few of the women to question their decision to stay in business. This was also reported by the women who had grown (adult) children at the time of the interview when sharing their struggle in running and growing their businesses when they were in the phase of raising small children.

An interviewee who worked as a business consultant and who owned a food retailing shop and had three children (aged 17, 11, and 4) said that 'being a woman' comes with many responsibilities, and this poses a significant challenge to run a successful business. She considered herself a lucky person because she had a trustworthy domestic worker who was able to take care of domestic and care responsibilities 'off [her] shoulders, so that [she has] no worries if [she] wants to work or stay out late'. However, she admitted that for most women this challenge will remain and that businesswomen do need 'extra support', because of the additional burden they have in the family domain while running their businesses.

Handling domestic and care responsibilities and responding to emergencies at the community were both found to be interfering with the women's businesses. The following two interviewees expressed supporting evidence:

The children, when they come home from school, they need somebody who opens the door for them, who prepares supper for them and that is difficult for us. Here it is not the husband who faces the problems, it is us. They just go to work, stay there until 5 PM and come home and something like that. But you can't do that. You leave your work and go there. Most of the time this is the reason why women's work [business] faces obstacles. Also, when there is a funeral, you just get up pick your cloth and leave (Restaurant and Construction equipment rental owner, aged 38, three children aged 17, 16, and 8).

[Women's] challenges are so many. By just being a woman, you have many challenges. Your responsibilities are many... [men's] responsibilities... [their] major role is in [their] work... when you take the women's responsibility [she has] to fill that a hole [at the family], the gap that nobody else fills in for [her]. [A woman] needs four ears instead of two, four more hands instead of two, especially when there're children, four children may talk to you at the same time (Import, Export and Health Services, co owner, aged 31, four children aged 11, 7, 4, and 2.5).

Some women entrepreneurs provided stark narratives on tensions between an ability to grow a business and to take up caring responsibilities at home. In one case, a leather products designer and manufacturer was not able to exploit the opportunity structure accessible to her. When she was offered a production site by the government, as she was operating in the leather industry which the government considers as one of the strategic sectors, she decided not to take the incentive in place in a bid to take care of her children working from home. She explained:

"... and it is because of such benefits [combining care and business], that I was inclined to [keep working from home] even when the government offered us production site. I am saying that I don't need a production site but rather a place where I can sell my products. Why? Because if I take this work out of my home, here I have very young children and we wouldn't see each other in the day time and I would like it if they won't be affected like that..." (Leather Products, co-owner, aged 31, two children, aged 1 and 3)

Some other women cited their familial responsibilities as a reason limiting their business growth (intention). A respondent with two small children reported:

I know how much I should work to be profitable in the business. But time is a constraint. I know how many hours I should be working here but I am not doing that... But I plan to do that in the future... I spent less time of the required because of my responsibilities at home. Further, the success and growth of my business is determined by the number of clients I have, and how much it's increasing... but my business growth slowed down, it has been impacted because I had to close before the end of the business day and go home to care [for the family]. If I had enough time, I could have grown it; I could have opened it in another location where there's a better market. I also have other business ideas that I want to venture into... I could have expanded it into that as well if I had more time. But I couldn't (children store owner, aged 32, two children aged 5 and 1.5).

Here, we can see that the interviewee's care responsibility is limiting her from expanding her business into new territories and also from growing her market/customer base by taking her time away from the business. Her analysis of space and time for growth indicated the intertwined negative association between care and home responsibilities and business growth and expansion. She described:

I feel that my business operations are sometimes limited because of my responsibilities with my children. There were times that I thought about travelling to Thailand to import goods for my store, instead of buying them from wholesalers in town. That would have made my business more profitable and grow, but then I say what about my children? It's not that I am not happy that I have them. I am. But because I have them, that limits me... from travelling and importing on my own. This type of business is more profitable if you could open your store from 8:00 am to 8:00 pm. It could have been more successful, but my responsibilities at home and with the children are limiting me from doing that.

In many respects, the accounts presented above can be viewed as the typical narratives of women entrepreneurs who face the challenges of managing the work–life interface. In fact, our analysis shows that role permeability and the use of integration strategies are more often used than flexibility and separation of work and nonwork role activities. The majority of respondents was struggling to manage the work–family interface. Their decisions for starting, running, and growing their business were not as rational as often suggested, but appear determined and profoundly influenced by the intersection of family, business, culture, normative societal expectations, and more. It is also clear that there is no simple panacea for the complex issue of managing boundaries between business (work) and nonwork (life roles,

such as family and community roles). Overall, the above empirical evidence points out that aspiration for women entrepreneurs' business growth demands a holistic perspective.

Although there were a considerable number of the women's accounts that show the challenges they face and how they feel being limited from growing their businesses, our data also shows the cases of women entrepreneurs who were able to grow their businesses. A closer look at our data shows that those women who have considerable experience in the business often raise factors such as finance, access to working space, and others as reasons limiting their growth aspirations compared to the women with a few years of business experience and care responsibilities. An entrepreneur who has been in business for seven years and who appreciates the child care support she gets from her aunt and hired help(s) shares her experience as:

We are in transition of getting it scaled up to the online business ... we have markets also... people who own stores [of traditional clothes] they want to buy from us. So it has good feasibility... thanks to God it's growing... it's really growing. So supplying them and going with the international fashion calendar... you need to invest more on the system and production capacity so we're there now (Designer, aged 34, three children, aged 7, 5, and 1.5)

Apart from the challenges from role permeability, determination in achieving success in all domains came forth as a shared personal strength in the interviewees, as is expressed by an experienced entrepreneur:

Nothing else pushed me forward. I wanted to achieve financial freedom and now I am where I wanted to be (Management consultant and foodstuffs shop owner, aged 36, three children, aged 17, 11, and 14)

In general, we observed that there remain strong motivations but also formidable challenges. The overall findings support the view of a strong 'superwoman' who attempt to integrate all the demands of work-life challenges.

Discussion and Conclusion

Drawing on work-life interface literature and boundary theory, this study examined the work-life challenges of Ethiopian women entrepreneurs and the consequences of such challenges on the management and growth of their businesses. First, our analysis showed that Ethiopian women entrepreneurs

experienced multiple role identities, as a mother, care-taker, business woman, household chore operator/manager, a member of community/social/religious group, et cetera. This may not be surprising, as many women in various countries face similar multiple identities with corresponding normative expectations. What is interesting, however, in our view, is how these women experienced and managed the expectations of multiple work and nonwork roles and how their work–life interface management clearly impacted their business operation and growth. Our qualitative analysis especially showed the pervasiveness of work–nonwork roles permeability which led the women entrepreneurs to deploy more of an integrating strategy to manage work–life interface. Experience of flexibility for managing the work–nonwork boundary interfaces was less commonly practiced, since this still demands segmentation which requires someone else to keep an eye on the children or to enact other roles in the nonwork domain. Further, the ways in which our interviewees interpreted and experienced their work and nonwork roles showed that most of them were likely to prioritise their children and other family issues followed by their business. In some cases, community obligations also competed with running the business. Importantly, however, there were also cases where women entrepreneurs were able to separate their business roles from family/domestic care management, both in terms of behaviour, cognition, or regarding time. We also noted that the ability to separate the enactment of business management from other domains could be facilitated because these women had dependable support from family members (spouse, mother) or from trustworthy housemaids. Integrating family into work was also observed in a few cases, for example, by working from home. Also, this strategy was not ideal about running and growing a business.

Second, this study also showed that it is difficult for the women entrepreneurs, if not impossible, integrating various roles in a day-to-day routine and achieving business success and, let alone, growth. There were many cases where the women entrepreneurs' decisions to expand their businesses were postponed, and this was for many reasons, such as lack of time, resources, and multiple roles vying for women's commitment. In short, many women were longing for business success, yet, without being enabled and supported by their environment, be they firm-specific, family, community, or social.

A third main finding of this study is that women's enterprises are more likely to be survival or life-style type and less growth-oriented because of their competing role requirements (Morris & Kuratko, 2020). This may explain why a majority of women enterprise start small and remain small. Hence, women's motivation to venture into business may likely to be driven

by family/lifestyle preferences than with an intention to grow it. This raises the question whether ‘business growth’ associated with economic measures could be an apt way to examine women’s venturing into business and its outcomes. We think it might be appropriate instead to explore what women consider as ‘success’ when enterprising, which includes qualitative indicators, not only business profitability/turnover and growth (De Bruin et al., 2007; Hailemariam & Kroon, 2018; Walker & Brown, 2004). Our chapter extends the view that suggests the relevance of using other measures of success given the interdependence between performance, success, and goals when studying about growth intention of women entrepreneurs (De Bruin & Hirsch, 2000).

Contributions

Our study’s findings and insights contribute to the work–life and women entrepreneurship literatures in three important ways. First, it questions the view of imaginary ‘gender neutral’ entrepreneurship. In addition to considering the market, money, and management aspects of women entrepreneurship, it is important to consider family responsibilities (theirs and others) and reproductive work environment as these are found to be key determinants of women business success (Brush et al., 2009; Minniti, 2010). Therefore, it is of great importance to apply a gender-sensitive and multi-level analysis of women entrepreneurship.

Second, our study identified the main coping strategies women entrepreneurs’ use in the study context and how such use is not only temporally and spatially bound, but they are also put limits on effective management and growth intentions of women businesses. It seems that integrating multiple role expectations emanates from the gendered ascription of women to family, childcare, and community responsibilities. This creates tensions and negative feelings such as guilt that put pressure on women entrepreneurs to conform with prevailing (un-codified) value standards (Jamali, 2009). This implies the need for radical changes in the culturally accepted norm and/or institutionalised practices that disadvantage women business.

Third, despite the fact that women entrepreneurs often create significant contributions beyond economic growth (Sheikh et al., 2018), the prevailing view that sees entrepreneurship as an engine of economic growth may need to be questioned. This view is problematic, since it diverts attention from examining *how* women businesses operate at the intersection of gender, sex, family, culture, religion, and institutions. Moreover, their businesses also contribute to emancipating women in male-dominated cultures by providing role models and opportunities for personal development (Hailemariam &

Kroon, 2018). Future research using a more intersectional lens by paying women entrepreneurs' multiple identities could not only further our understanding of the interplay of their motivation, identity, family, and community responsibilities with prescriptive expectations that individuals and institutions may have, to prescriptive approaches with emphasis on how women enterprises could be supported so that they contribute to family–community wellbeing and economic development.

One of the ways to extend the current strand of research might be using expectancy theory as this theory would help to identify factors related to how and why women pursue business growth opportunities. Previous studies have suggested that individuals' perceptions of their abilities and skills link with their expectancy perceptions and that they deploy their resources and efforts into tasks that they believe they can do (Bandura, 1986) with successful outcomes (Gatewood et al., 2002; Hailemariam & Kroon, 2018). Studying the association between the women's perceived abilities and their performance expectations of enterprise by size (Cliff, 1998) and industry, thus, might provide important insights into women business growth intentions, attitudes, and ways of achieving them. By showing the myriad ways in which Ethiopian women entrepreneurs manage the boundaries between their different work and nonwork life domains, this chapter highlights how 'longing to grow their business' is a strong motivator in juggling the varied demands from their family and community and their persistence in running their business.

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