

**AN EXPLORATORY STUDY INTO THE WORK-LIFE BALANCE OF
SELF-EMPLOYED MOTHERS WHO WORK FULL-TIME FROM HOME**

IN PARTIAL FULFILMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE
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ABSTRACT

This study explores the work-life balance of self-employed mothers who work full-time from home. The relationship that revolves around both personal and working lives when self-employed and working from home provides a rich narrative for exploration. The aim of the study is to understand the interpretations and subjective experiences of self-employed mothers who work full-time from home.

The researcher developed a conceptual framework that outlined the elements that can influence the work-life balance of self-employed mothers. This conceptual framework was guided by the situationalist perspective on work-life balance. It was also guided by the concept of work-life fit (Moen, Kelly and Huang, 2008). The proposed conceptual framework provided a structure to the study that tied all parts together. Using an interpretive research philosophy, qualitative semi-structured interviews with 8 self-employed mothers who worked full-time from home, were based around the elements contained in the conceptual framework. Qualitative thematic analysis of these interviews resulted in the emergence of the main themes as stated below:

- Work revolves around life
- Boundaries
- Client demands
- Resources: flexibility and support

The above themes were used to maintain, manage and control a WLB that suited each particular individual. The implications of these findings followed previous research in studies undertaken in WLB and self-employment full time from home (Hilbrecht and Lero, 2014).

RESEARCH STUDENTS DECLARATION FORM

Submission of Thesis and Dissertation

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Research Students Declaration Form

(Thesis/Author Declaration Form)

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ABBREVIATIONS

CSO	Central Statistics Office
GFE	Goal-free evaluation
JD-R	Job Demands-Resources Model
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNICEF	United Nations Children Fund
WLB	Work-life Balance

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

This research focuses on work-life balance. It will specifically explore the work-life balance of mothers who are self-employed and working full-time from the home. This research will advance understanding in the work-life balance of self-employed women working full-time from home, by focusing on and addressing gaps in relevant academic literature. Gaps such as those referred to by Walker, Wang and Redmond (2008) where they state that a very under researched area is that of small home-based businesses. Vinkenburg and Weber (2012) advise the need for further research into how the balancing of both work and family affects women's career paths. Drew and Humbert (2011) mention how there is a gap in research regarding the implications associated with running one's own small business whilst simultaneously raising a family. Annink and den Dulk (2012) refer to the need for further research on the conditions that influence the work-life balance of the self-employed. They also refer to the limited research that has been undertaken on how self-employed women perceive their work-life balance. Byrne-Doran (2012) specifically mentions the value of a potential study of self-employed women in Ireland, where such a contribution would add to the study of working mothers and women's lives.

There are currently 54,000 women self-employed as of Q1 2019 in Ireland (CSO, 2019). Upon further dissection of this figure, precisely 42,100 of these women are working full-time from home with no employees. This amounts to 1.82% of Ireland's current workforce (CSO, 2019). Whilst this is not a very large figure, it is none the less not an insignificant figure and worthy of investigation. UNICEF (2019) states the importance of family-friendly policies for maintaining work-life balance. Ireland currently ranks 27th out of 41 countries for family-friendly policies. The significance of being so low down on this scale points to possible issues with family friendly policies in Ireland, which in turn can impact negatively on one's work-life balance. Such figures tie in to research undertaken by Annink and den Dulk (2012) who point to a negative correlation between WLB and a higher Human Development Index, where Ireland currently ranks 4th highest in the world (UNDP, 2018).

Whilst previous academic research has largely focused on the WLB of employees working from home, this research will focus on the WLB balance of self-employed

mothers working full-time from home. The purpose for undertaking this research is to make a contribution to the knowledge, practice and understanding of the work-life balance of self-employed mothers working full-time from home.

A conceptual framework containing the various elements that can influence the WLB of the self-employed mother was developed by the researcher to assist them in this study. Exploration and examination of this conceptual framework took place in the form of semi-structured interviews conducted with self-employed mothers who worked full-time from home. The qualitative thematic analysis followed previous academic studies of WLB such as those undertaken by Hilbrecht and Lero (2014).

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

BACKGROUND OF WORK-LIFE BALANCE

Whereas work-life balance was once considered a peripheral topic, it has in recent years become increasingly important due to its impact, whether positive or negative, on all aspects of one's working and family life (Powell *et al.*, 2019). WLB has been recognized as one of five critically important challenges facing European organizations (Strack *et al.*, 2007). The importance of WLB across all sectors of the economy has been acknowledged (Irfan and Azmi, 2015). Darcy *et al.* (2012) add that WLB is a concern for all employees, regardless of their age and their child status. This concern could be expanded to include the self-employed individual, as they are essentially employees of their own company.

The interest and importance in WLB has been steadily increasing over the years. This surge in interest can be attributed to a number of reasons including the changing nature of families, from single-earner to dual-earning families and the rise of single-parent families leading to families struggling to combine their work and family lives (Seva and Oun, 2015 and Valcour, 2007). Also, the changing nature of the workplace, where work interferes with family and vice versa, a term known as spillover, which can affect both organizations and individuals negatively, has resulted in both employers and employees acknowledging the importance of WLB.

The consequences of failing to address work-life imbalance amongst the self-employed can ultimately result in the failure of one's business, if one is unable to maintain balance between one's work and life outside work (Annink and den Dulk, 2012). Research undertaken has also proved that individuals who struggle to maintain WLB perform less effectively in their jobs (Abendroth and den Dulk, 2011). One can also be propelled from being an employee in an organization towards self-employment, as a means of rectifying work-life imbalance, where full time self-employment from one's home may be thought of as providing greater autonomy and flexibility, such that one's work-life could be improved. This leads one to question whether self-employment does or does not provide one with greater autonomy and flexibility. This is a controversial question and will be addressed further on in this paper. Ultimately, work-

life imbalance has a negative effect across all forms of employment, either as an organization or as an employee, whether or not they are self-employed.

DEFINITION OF WORK-LIFE BALANCE

The topic of WLB is extremely broad. Bailyn (1993) has stated that there is no blueprint for WLB due to it being such a subjective term. The challenge with the definition of WLB lies with the term 'balance', over which there is an academic lack of agreement (Reiter and Morgan, 2007). "The issue of definition is fundamental to the logic of advancing ideas, measures and programmes in WLB and requires deeper consideration" (Reiter and Morgan, 2007, p.274). Because it has proved challenging to define, WLB has many varying definitions, depending upon one's viewpoint (Leslie, King and Clair, 2019; McMillan, Morris and Atchley, 2011 and Kalliath and Brough, 2008). It is so broad that Kalliath and Brough (2008) identified six different conceptualizations that encapsulated the definition of WLB. These conceptualizations of WLB range from WLB being defined using the multiple roles one juggles in one's life, to WLB being defined as a problematic concept, because of the conflict that can occur when attempting to maintain it (Wattis, Standing and Yerkis, 2013 and Kalliath and Brough, 2008).

Mroczkowski (1997) takes the problematic view of WLB a step further and cites it as being the biggest hurdle that female self-employed entrepreneurs can face when commencing their own business. However, this is disputed by other academics who are of the opinion that WLB may just be the reason that someone chooses to become self-employed in the hope of redressing imbalance in their work-life domain (Rey-Marti, Porcar and Mas-Tur, 2015). Both viewpoints have validity. The weakness of Mroczkowski's viewpoint is that he states WLB as the largest hurdle that women must overcome when starting a business. Whilst WLB may be a hurdle, it may not be the biggest hurdle that women will face when starting a business. Other hurdles, including economic issues will play as great, if not a greater role in such endeavours.

Conversely, looking to self-employment as a form of WLB redress may prove challenging. The self-employed individual may have to work harder than an employee in general. This would impact negatively on one's family time, thus promoting possible

further work-life imbalance than they originally had as an employee. Such conceptualizations form part of the WLB discourse.

THE SITUATIONALIST PERSPECTIVE ON WORK-LIFE BALANCE

As previously stated, there is debate amongst scholars on the definition of WLB. Munn (2013) finds the term work-family balance problematic in itself, as it assumes a dichotomous relationship between both life and family, thus excluding other domains within one's life. The 'balance' element implies that there must be an equality in the splitting of roles to attain balance. The fact that WLB is subjective, negates the implied requirement that the equal division of roles to attain balance is necessary. Different individuals will have different ratios of balance that will work for them in attaining their own particular brand of WLB.

Guest (2002) takes a very simple approach when assessing the term WLB, and stated that WLB did not require equal division of work-life spheres but rather "serves simply as a convenient shorthand for work and the rest of life" (p.262). Having stated all of the above, Munn *et al.* (2011) provides a very simple definition of WLB as follows: "Work-life balance is simply how individuals choose to prioritize their work, family, individual and community responsibilities" (p.1). This is the preferred definition that has been chosen for the purpose of this research. With regard to this definition, one could say that the term "balance" is not of itself intrinsically important - it is the emotional state that results from attaining balance that is important to the individual (Fletcher, 1966).

This research will focus on presenting a situationalist perspective on WLB. Such a perspective involves the analysis of a WLB based upon an individual's particular situation (Reiter and Morgan, 2007). As stated earlier, different individuals will have different ratios of balance that will work for them in attaining their own particular brand of WLB. This epitomizes the situational perspective. Such a perspective is particularly relevant to this research. The situational perspective focuses on the individual, which correlates with the individual nature of the self-employed mother working full-time from home, which is the focus of this research. The relevance of adopting a situationalist perspective on WLB is that it allows for the possibility of adopting different WLB programmes or policies for different segments of the

workplace. For example, one could say that there currently exists an absolutist approach to WLB in organizations. This means that organizations follow a structured system that is applied equally to all individuals and is presumed to work every time, for all employees, when applied.

WLB policies do not exist for self-employed individuals unless self-implemented. A situationalist perspective is simply a different way of approaching WLB and demonstrates how it can be applied to all segments of society, not just employees but the self-employed as well.

One could also say that WLB is not an end in itself, but rather the achievement of WLB is a form of emotional state. Maiya and Bagali (2014) link WLB to a positive state of mind, in addition to its relationship with both the fields of Work and Life. This state enables one to manage all aspects of one's working and family life. WLB forms the mid-point of a continuum where the starting point is a combination of various elements that can influence WLB. These elements include: the personal time and space to care for oneself, and for others, the different demands each job presents including physical and administrative, the different resources associated with one's job and self-employment, such as flexibility and autonomy, and also, what life stage a family is at. Varying amounts of these elements can impact on an individual's WLB either positively or negatively. These elements form part of the proposed conceptual framework which will be described and discussed below. Having a healthy WLB forms a midpoint or a stepping stone and from that point allows for progression along whatever path the individual chooses. This can be related to career progression or greater job motivation or allow the self-employed individual to step back from their career and spend greater time with the family. Ultimately, good WLB allows for personal and professional progression, however one sees fit.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

A conceptual framework is simply an analytical tool used to organize various ideas and provide a clear image of the particular idea or concept. In this particular case, a conceptual framework has been developed where the elements that can influence the WLB of self-employed mothers who work full-time from home will be explored. These elements are listed within the conceptual framework which can be found on

page 12. Such elements are taken from various models and WLB systems and will be discussed further below. The proposed conceptual framework provides a defined structure for this study. The elements it contains may be linked to all parts of the study and directly influenced the main research question, which is the title of the dissertation. The elements in the conceptual framework also influenced the sub-objectives of the dissertation, where for example, the fourth sub-objective, which poses the question: How does working from home affect career progression? This could be linked to elements in the conceptual framework such as: life stage of family, job demands and resources and time and space to care for others. In fact, question 4 could be linked to all elements listed in the conceptual framework that can influence WLB.

The conceptual framework may also be linked to the methodology undertaken, where the semi-structured interview questions are based around those elements that can influence WLB. One is testing the validity of the framework through the semi-structured interviews. It is important to state that the interviewer is approaching all interviews with an open mind and is not steering the interviews to an intended outcome. The outcome of the interviews will reveal whether it will be necessary to, for example, add additional elements that have been found to influence WLB or whether elements within the framework do not play as prominent a role in influencing WLB as previously shown. This will be discussed in Chapter 5.

This conceptual framework was partly influenced by previous studies around elements of WLB including Haddon, Hede and Whiteoak (2008) and Wayne *et al.* (2007). Both studies developed in-depth conceptual frameworks around WLB.

ELEMENTS OF THE CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

The work life system and work life needs

As has been previously mentioned there is no one definition of WLB. Moen *et al.* (2008) further support this supposition by stating that no single theory exists that can predict the conditions that would allow for either a positive or negative WLB. Therefore, the proposed conceptual framework takes elements of various WLB systems and models. It extracts the relevant elements from them that can influence WLB and places them in the conceptual framework.

For example, Munn (2013) introduced the work-life system. This is where individuals, organizations and government are linked correspondingly with WLB, work-life initiatives and work-life policy. The work-life system is in essence, acting as an umbrella, where one can accurately pinpoint what exact area of the work-life system they are focusing on. In this case, one will focus on the sphere containing the individual and WLB (whilst acknowledging the intersecting of all spheres), because it relates to this particular study, namely the self-employed individual and their WLB. Furthermore, one could link the WLB dimension created by Munn (2013) to the proposition of Williams (2001) where he provides three different areas that together can map an individual's work-life needs. They include:

- personal time and space to care for ourselves;
- time and space to care for others (children or elderly parents); and
- the requirements one needs to be economically independent.

When all three elements are achieved to the satisfaction of the individual, one has attained WLB. Varying mixtures of these three elements will result in different levels of WLB. It is for this reason that they form part of the proposed conceptual framework as elements that can influence WLB. Such elements can also be viewed as resources because the application of these elements, such as, for example, the personal time and space to care for ourselves, would prove beneficial in meeting the demands of our jobs. One can link these elements to the Job Demands-Resources Model which will now be discussed.

Job Demands and Resources Model

A prominent model that could provide additional elements to the proposed conceptual framework of WLB is the Job Demands-Resources Model (JD-R) espoused by (Bakker and Demerouti, 2006). The advantage of this model is in its applicability to a wide sector of employment, including the self-employed sector. It is a model that can be used to improve an individual's well-being and performance, which is associated with WLB. The particular relevance of this model in relation to how women manage WLB when self-employed and working full-time from home, is in its applicability. For example: the JD-R model splits particular job factors into both demands and resources. The elements contained within one's job demands and resources could be viewed as

potentially influencing one's WLB and for this reason are included in the proposed conceptual framework. The demands could include the following:

- The physical aspects of one's job. Example: being on one's feet all day, carrying heavy equipment around.
- The mental demands of one's job. Example: interaction with clients.
- The administrative demands associated with running one's own business. Example: paperwork/administration.

The resources to deal with the above demands would include the following:

- Support. Example, Economic support – being able to afford child care to enable one to successfully work from home. Social support - from a family member or friend in dealing with issues that may arise in the course of one's job.
- Job autonomy and flexibility. Example: the ability of the individual to control and be flexible with regard to their job characteristics, example: their workflow, their workhours etc.

Greenblatt (2002) similarly refers to resources including social, economic, temporal and personal resources when discussing WLB. All such resources are a necessary component in supporting the demands of the self-employed mother working full time from home. They in effect act as a buffer, neutralizing the negative demands of one's job. Resources also play an important role in their own right, as they possess motivational potential (intrinsic and extrinsic) for the individual to successfully navigate the job demands placed upon them. Valcour (2007) refers to both a cognitive and affective component when referring to WLB. The cognitive element is composed of how one appraises one's success in meeting the various demands and stresses associated with WLB. The affective component of WLB is how one feels after such an appraisal. Such components could be linked to the JD-R model, where analysis of demands such as for example: how the self-employed individual is managing their time? Upon completion of such analysis, one could conclude that they could be more efficient or alternatively they may feel that they are managing their time effectively. Either way, it provides a clarity of thought that can only prove beneficial in the process of achieving a satisfactory WLB.

The self-employed are particularly susceptible to strains when working full-time from home, as resources in the form of social support from family or colleagues may not be available. The roles of flexibility and autonomy may be strained due to childrearing responsibilities. One must ask what happens when those resources are themselves under stress and how does this ultimately affect one's WLB. Valcour (2007) refers to the term 'cross-domain constructs', where experiences in an area of one's life affect the experiences in another area of one's life. Excess demands in one's job, for example long working hours, would impact negatively on the quality of time one could spend with one's family. Such strain on resources could also be linked to the idea of 'drain theory', which is part of the work-family conflict perspective (Marks, 1977). This is where one has a limited amount of resources in the form of energy and time, to use throughout the day, and as the day progresses, such resources are consumed and once consumed, are gone forever. Autonomy and flexibility form part of this energy and time and thus could be interpreted as having limited use as the day progresses. The JD-R model enables one to see how the interaction between job demands and resources can impact upon WLB, either positively when both demands and resources are high, or negatively, when demands exceed resources.

The difference between both job demands and resources is not clear cut. What one individual views as a demand, another may view as a resource. For example: the mental demands of dealing with clients may be viewed by one individual as extremely stressful and time consuming. By contrast, another individual could enjoy meeting clients and view it as a more positive experience. Haddon *et al.* (2008) adds that an individual's coping strategies and styles will impact upon how one views their demands and resources.

Family life-stage, economic conditions and social policies

The life-stage of the family may be viewed as either a resource or a demand depending upon the age of the children. Greater demands are placed on a family with younger children than with older children. Thus, the life-stage of a family may influence the WLB of a self-employed mother working full time from home. It is for this reason that family life-stage is included in the proposed conceptual framework.

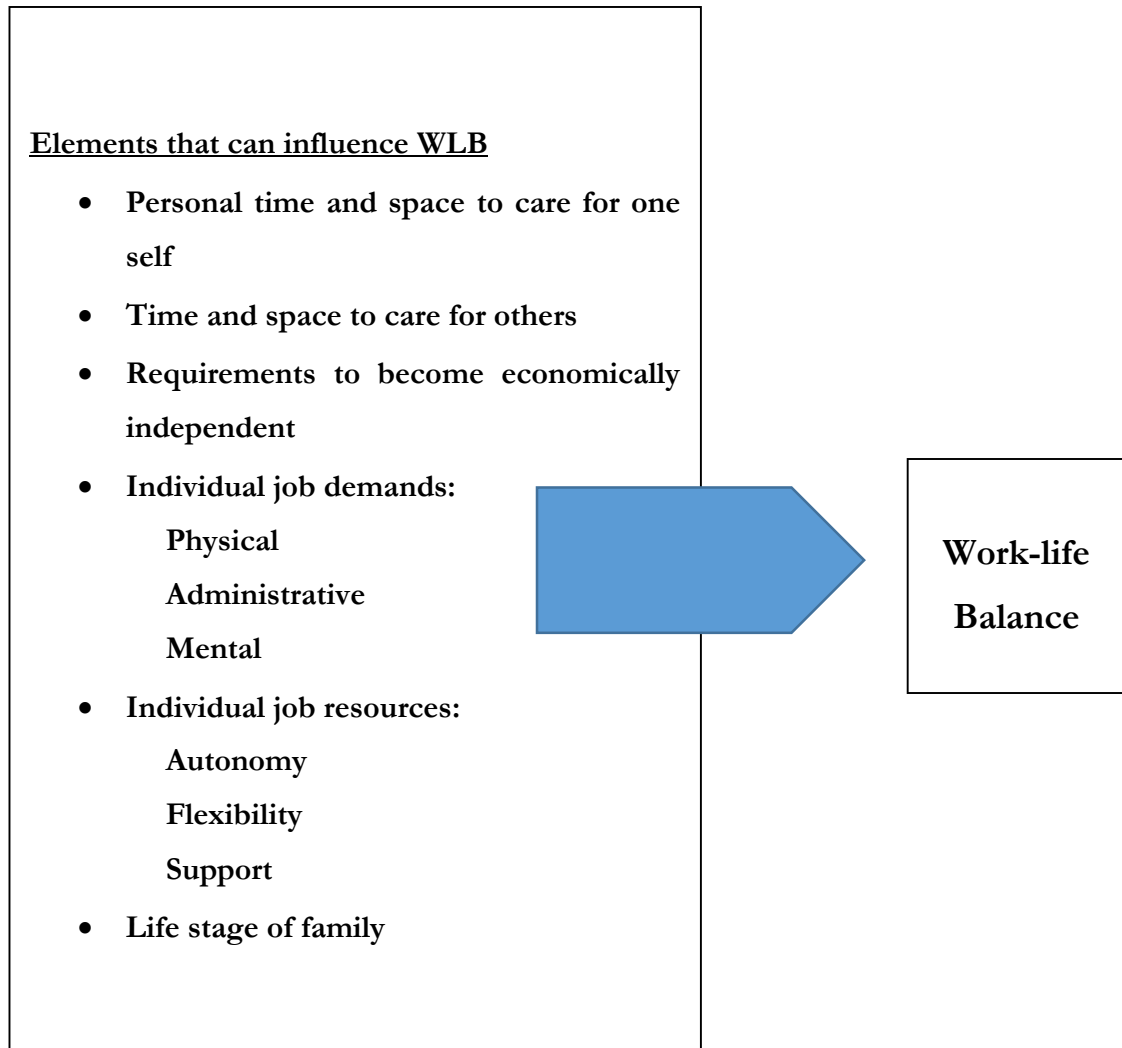
Autonomy and flexibility

Further investigation into the roles of autonomy and flexibility will now be discussed as there is conflicting academic discourse surrounding both. Autonomy may be defined as the freedom and discretion to decide when, where and how a job should be carried out (Annink and den Dulk, 2012, p.386). With regard to employment, autonomy may be divided into two separate spheres. The first is that of job autonomy which enables one to decide how to do one's job which would involve the opportunity to learn new things, perhaps undertake some training and development, and focus on certain areas within the job. Basically job autonomy is where the individual has the freedom to decide how they wish to work. The second sphere is time spatial autonomy and that involves the freedom to decide both when and where to work. Both autonomy and flexibility are constant features in the work- life balance discourse of the self-employed. Many women enter the self-employed realm in the hope of gaining greater autonomy and flexibility in relation to their working and family lives (Annink and den Dulk, 2012).

Flexibility in relation to self-employment enables one to assert more control over the management of daily routines. Self-employment may be associated with what is termed a 'boundaryless career'. Such a concept was introduced to distinguish a career that was bound to an organization as opposed to one that was not (Lewis, 2014). However, it has been found that segmentation, both temporal and physical, between the roles of work and family is a necessity for successful self-employed individuals who work from home (Lewis, 2014). Thus, the term 'boundaryless career' is in reality similar to that of the 'bounded career', in that separation of work and family is required in both self-employment and organizational employment for successful WLB. Therefore, how much autonomy and flexibility is one really gaining from self-employment when one is in reality bounded by the same processes as organizational employees? Hilbrecht and Lero (2014) are conflicted about the extent to which self-employment contributes either positively or negatively to WLB. Mustafa and Gold (2013) refer to the irregularity of workload of the self-employed, which impacts negatively on their ability to control working hours, and in turn, flexibility and autonomy.

Conceptual Framework of the elements that can influence the work-life balance of the self-employed mother who works full-time from home

The conceptual framework below contains various elements from different theories that can influence WLB. These elements will be examined and explored through the medium of semi-structured interviews to see if they do actually influence WLB.



THE WORK-LIFE FIT MODEL

The work-life fit model introduced by, Moen *et al.* (2008) enables one to appraise one's quality of work and home life throughout the course of one's life. Whereas the JD-R model enables people to define their demands and resources, the Work-life fit model takes the process a step further, whereby one is constantly readjusting their resources and demands to fit the needs of their life. Example: Some turn to self-employment to

increase the 'fit' in their life. This may result in greater autonomy and flexibility in their choice of work and work hours, resulting in a match between one's expectations in their working and family life. Such improvement of the 'fit' element in their life, may have a positive effect on their WLB. This model is tailored to the individual and their ongoing appraisal of how their work and their family life fit together and what adjustments are necessary to allow for the optimum fit according to each individual's needs. This model forms part of the construct that leads to satisfactory WLB. Work-life fit is an evolving concept that allows for change and adjustment in circumstances of the individual, leading to greater WLB.

This model is relevant to this study because of its focus on the individual, which may be aligned to the self-employed mother working from home. The flexibility of the continual adjustment that the work-life fit model allows for in mediating one's WLB is also suited to the self-employed individual, where they too are constantly adjusting and readjusting their schedules to maintain a satisfactory WLB.

CONFLICT, FACILITATION AND INTEGRATION PERSPECTIVES ON WORK-LIFE BALANCE

The four previous models and theories, William's work-life needs, the JD-R Model, drain theory and work-life fit theory, all possess elements of inherent conflict. Such a conflict perspective has been the dominant discourse regarding WLB for the past forty years (Ford, Heinen and Langkamer, 2007; Greenhaus and Powell, 2006). The JD-R model is conflicting with demands and resources. The work-life needs structure, is conflicting with personal and family and economic needs, drain theory is conflicting with scarce resources and the work-life fit model infers continual conflict between demands and resources, requiring constant adjustment for satisfactory WLB. Further conflict is prevalent in case studies on work-family conflict and self-employment, where findings suggest a negative association between self-employment and work-family conflict (Bunk *et al.*, 2012, Prottas and Thompson, 2006 and Parasuraman and Simmers, 2001). WLB is essentially about controlling conflicting elements within one's life. This forms part of the conflict perspective espoused by Greenhaus (1985) which is the most common approach exploring WLB. It is where both work and family roles are viewed as being in conflict with one another. Participation in one role, either work or family, negates fulfilment in the other, resulting in work-family conflict. Halpern

and Murphy (cited in Greenhaus, 2018) refer to the conflicting relationship as a 'balance beam' where one has placed work on one side of the beam and family on the other. This beam requires an equal division of both family and work to attain WLB, so one is not short-changed by the other, so to speak. However, the weakness of the 'balance beam' lies in its quest for equality of division of both work and family roles. One could say that the balance beam regards WLB as an objective concept, where the lack of flexibility in division of work and family roles denotes a viewpoint encompassing a fixed perspective, where equality has to be fulfilled, thereby disregarding the impact this equality has on division of one's WLB. WLB is a subjective concept, working at an individual level, where division of work and family domains does not require equality in order for it to prove successful. Such concepts foster a greater insight into WLB, which is highly relevant to this WLB exploration of self-employed mothers.

At the opposite end of the conflict perspective lies the facilitation perspective where work and family roles do not conflict with one another but rather complement and enhance one another. "It is the extent to which experiences in one role improve the quality of life in another" (Greenhaus and Powell, 2006, p. 73). Both perspectives are bi-directional, which means that work can either enrich or subtract from family roles and vice versa. Such bi-directionality is relevant to this investigation into WLB, in particular the area of WLB and how working from home impacts life outside work.

A further step on from conflict and facilitation theory is an integrative approach to WLB. It is where other roles, such as that of leisure are considered an important addition to that of the work and family roles (Crosbie and Moore, 2004). This theory could be considered particularly relevant to this investigation. Being a self-employed individual, working full-time from home can be an isolating experience. Leisure has been shown to have positive/restorative effects. Therefore, making a conscious effort to incorporate leisure into one's work and family domain can result in positive effects in one's business, such as increased personal motivation and greater engagement with one's career.

CONCLUSION OF LITERATURE REVIEW

Although there exists significant academic literature surrounding WLB in general, less research has been conducted within the self-employed category. In fact, the self-employed tend to be grouped homogeneously, whereas the reality is, that there is high levels of heterogeneity amongst the self-employed. For example: there is great difference in the work-life of a self-employed cake artist who works full-time from home and a self-employed author who would be sitting down and writing all day (Annink and den Dulk, 2016). Increased research on the WLB of the self-employed has been called for (Annink and den Dulk, 2012). The many definitions of WLB add to the complexity of the concept.

The role of conflict is a recurring theme through the WLB literature and plays a significant role in the WLB of the self-employed. Whilst the conflict and facilitative perspectives on WLB remain popular, perhaps the most suitable WLB application is that of the integrative perspective, because of its inclusion of leisure to the work-family role. This is an important addition because self-employed people who work full-time from home may find their jobs socially isolating, thus leisure time has a positive impact on their well-being, which in turn impacts positively upon their WLB. Case studies on work-family conflict and the self-employed have found there to be a negative correlation between the self-employed and work-family conflict. The importance of the roles of autonomy and flexibility with regard to self-employment have been discussed with both roles found to be as challenging, if not more so, when actually self-employed.

Finally, the purpose of the proposed conceptual framework is to provide a structure that links elements throughout the dissertation, as has been previously discussed. Elements from the JD-R model in the form of job demands and resources, as well as elements from Williams work-life needs model, along with various other elements, combine to make up a group of factors that can influence the WLB of a self-employed working mother. This conceptual framework will be examined and explored through semi-structured interviews conducted with self-employed mothers.

CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

The research question posed revolves around the WLB of self-employed mothers. The title of the dissertation is as follows:

An exploratory study into the WLB of self-employed mothers who work full time from home.

The question is grounded in the WLB discourse. This topic is very worthy of study because of the distinct lack of academic research into the WLB of self-employed women working full-time from home in Ireland. This claim is supported by Byrne-Doran (2012) who supports further research on the working lives of self-employed women in Ireland. Academic studies undertaken by Vinkenburg and Weber (2012), Drew and Humber (2011) and Walker *et al.* (2008) all refer to a need for further research on the WLB of women and their home-based businesses.

The aim of the study is to understand the interpretations and subjective experiences of self-employed mothers who work full-time from home. The research objective is to add knowledge to the under-researched field of the WLB of self-employed mothers who work full-time from home.

Inherent in this particular study, is an understanding of the following, which will form the sub-objectives. These sub-objectives were developed to facilitate the research. They are as follows:

- How do self-employed mothers experience WLB when working full time from home?
- What strategies do these women use to maintain a WLB?
- How does working from home impact life outside work?
- How does being self-employed and working from home impact on their career progression?

CHAPTER 4: METHODOLOGY

PARADIGMS/PHILOSOPHIES

“A research paradigm is a framework that guides how research should be conducted based upon people’s philosophies and their assumptions about the world and the nature of knowledge” (Collis and Hussey, 2014, p.43). Interpretivism emerged in response to criticism of the positivist movement and was associated with the social sciences, as opposed to the natural sciences. It viewed social reality not as objective but as subjective and influenced by an individual’s beliefs and perceptions. Whereas positivism was concerned with scientific exploration and measurement, resulting in numerical data (quantitative data), interpretivism was concerned with exploratory investigation of a subject, with the aim of gaining a greater understanding of that subject through different processes such as interviews and questionnaires (qualitative data). Both positivism and interpretivism may be viewed as opposite ends of a continuum, along which other paradigms lie. Other paradigms/philosophies include postmodernism, pragmatism and critical realism.

This dissertation on: an exploration into the WLB of self-employed mothers working full-time from home, will hold with the interpretive paradigm. The wording of the dissertation title holds with the interpretive paradigm, because the research question is quite wide ranging and broad. The way in which the research question is approached, takes the form of an exploratory investigation. This approach enables the researcher to cast their net widely so to speak and not curtail any potential lines of enquiry (Werner and Schoepfle, 1987). Contrasting this, a positivist approach would see a very specific research topic where there was a relationship expressed between two variables.

Whilst the criteria for a research question using a positivist paradigm are quite specific and based on facts, the same cannot be said for a research question using the interpretive paradigm. These questions tend to be broader, exploratory in nature and narrative in their enquiry. It is worth stating that one paradigm is not better than another. The research question chosen and how it is phrased will decide upon the type of paradigm that is followed. The interpretive paradigm representing the WLB of self-employed mothers who work full-time from home may be attributed amongst other

reasons, to various philosophical assumptions, such as ontology, axiology and epistemology which will now be discussed.

RESEARCH ASSUMPTIONS

The dissertation subject that is chosen by the researcher is heavily influenced by their individual beliefs and assumptions, whether they are consciously aware of this or not. These beliefs and assumptions will in turn influence how they will approach their research methodology. Research assumptions may be grouped into three different categories, ontology, axiology and epistemology. Additionally, a researcher will interpret all three assumptions differently, based upon their philosophical paradigm, i.e., whether they form a positivist (objective) or interpretive (subjective) view of the research being undertaken.

Ontology is a somewhat abstract concept and is concerned with how individuals view reality (Saunders *et al.*, 2016; Scotland, 2012 and Crotty, 1998). In this particular dissertation, the research object is the WLB of self-employed mothers who work full-time from home. From an ontological viewpoint, WLB will be shaped by the researcher's own views and ideas about it. This is supported by Scotland (2012) who states that all research methods eventually lead back to a single ontological position. From an interpretivist standpoint, WLB would be seen as a contextual phenomenon, emerging from the actions and perceptions of individuals.

“Axiology refers to the role of values and ethics within the research process” (Saunders *et al.*, 2016 p.128). The role of values is shaped ontologically by the researcher's perceptions of reality. Thus, the choosing of WLB as a topic of research has been shaped by the experiences of the researcher in relation to their particular experience of WLB and their views and interest in it. The very fact that the researcher chose the topic of WLB over every other possible topic is indicative of a higher value being placed upon this subject by the individual. Additionally, the interpretive paradigm chosen is also significant, as it is a reflection of the researcher's individual values (Heron, 1996).

Epistemology is concerned with knowledge. Assumptions about knowledge, how knowledge is communicated and what is accepted as valid knowledge (Saunders *et al.*, 2016 and Collis and Hussey, 2014). It also examines the relationship between the topic

being researched, in this particular case WLB and the researcher. By choosing an interpretive paradigm with regard to WLB, one is purposely narrowing the gap between the researcher and the topic of research through examination of subjective information in the form of semi-structured interviews. Additionally, epistemological assumptions will be heavily influenced by a researcher's ontological and axiological assumptions. All three: ontology, axiology and epistemology are interlinked. This is highlighted by King and Horrocks (2010) who state the importance of their application, examination and inclusion within the research process. They are important because they provide the researcher with a heightened awareness of their own particular research philosophy and enable them to assess and examine their own actions and beliefs which is important as a researcher (Alvesson and Skoldberg, 2000).

THE INTERPRETIVE RESEARCH PHILOSOPHY/PARADIGM – elements contained within the paradigm

As previously stated, this dissertation is following an interpretive research philosophy/paradigm. Saunders *et al.* (2016) states that interpretivism is explicitly subjective due to its focus on greater and richer perspectives and understanding of various phenomenon, and also their particular context and relationship to the individual. Particular terms are used to describe approaches within this paradigm. Interpretivism is associated with the collection of qualitative data, subjective interpretations and the assumptions of the arts and humanities. All these approaches have been considered, undertaken and examined with regard to the WLB of self-employed mothers working full-time from home and will now be discussed.

Qualitative Approach

Qualitative research differs from quantitative research in terms of flexibility. For example, the research processes undertaken in this dissertation, which took the form of semi-structured interviews, enabled one to observe, interact and expand on the topic with the interviewees through open ended questions, thus allowing one gain greater contextual insight into the WLB of mothers working full-time from home. This again demonstrates the narrowing of the gap between the interviewer and interviewee and the increased level of depth that interpretive and qualitative research allows. Contrasting this, quantitative methods lack flexibility due to their very structured and scientific, epistemological and detached, axiological approach when gathering data. It

is just simply another way of approaching one's research design. Whilst qualitative research might at first appearance prove slightly less daunting to undertake due to its lack of mathematical calculations, quantitative data may in the final outcome prove the lesser of two evils, as the quantitative process is so structured it leaves little room for ambiguity. Thus, is easier to analyse than qualitative data which because of its flexibility and less structured approach, can prove more challenging to analyse.

The qualitative research approach for this dissertation takes the form of semi-structured interviews, followed by thematic analysis. It follows previous research in the area of WLB and the self-employed, including studies undertaken by Hilbrecht and Lero (2014) who engaged in thematic analysis. Hudson-Breen, Tasker and Hubert, (2017) undertook a grounded theory investigation, as did Annink and den Dulk (2012) and Myrie and Daly (2009). All four studies examined various aspects of women and self-employment and all included qualitative semi-structured interviews as part of their investigations. Whereas one article followed a thematic analysis investigation, three others followed a grounded theory route. Whilst the overall research topic involves WLB, each of the above authors have chosen to tackle various aspects within this domain such as the use of boundaries in WLB, autonomy and WLB, being always "on" and WLB and managing multiple life roles and WLB through qualitative investigation. From this point, they branch off to either thematic analysis or grounded theory and this is indicative of how epistemology, axiology and ontology define our choice of what type of data analysis we choose.

Additionally, Grix (2004) states that differing ontological and epistemological positions amongst researchers can often lead to different approaches to the same research problem. This is visible through this dissertation and another study. This dissertation examines the WLB of self-employed women who work full-time from home and follows a thematic analysis of the research topic. The comparable study is one by Hudson Breen *et al.* (2017) where the topic of investigation concerns self-employed women with children and their management of multiple life roles in Canada. Grounded theory was used in the Canadian Study as a form of data analysis. Both studies chose semi-structured interviews as a form of data collection. Thus, there exists two very similar studies, yet each researcher has chosen a different form of data analysis. This ties back to Grix (2004) assertion that a single research topic can have

different forms of analysis depending on the researcher's ontological and epistemological assumption. Different researchers will choose different epistemologies. Choosing thematic analysis over grounded theory for the purposes of this study was in fact examined very closely. It could have gone either way. However, on closer examination, it was decided that the researcher was not looking to resolve a basic social problem as grounded theory often does, but was rather looking to explore the WLB of self-employed mothers who worked full-time from home and thus thematic analysis lent itself to this topic more so than grounded theory. This could in turn be further analysed as an axiological assumption that gave rise to this decision.

Subjectivism

As previously stated, interpretivism is associated with subjective interpretations. The fact that there exists so many definitions for WLB (Leslie *et al.*, 2019; Munn, 2011 and Kalliath and Brough, 2008) is indicative of how contextual and subjective WLB is and how different individuals will have different views on it. For example, when conducting interviews for this dissertation, each and every interviewee was asked their own definition of WLB. All focused upon varying elements with WLB that were of relevance to their own particular situation, which is indicative of how contextual a subject WLB is. This may also be related to social constructivism which states that reality is made from the perceptions and actions of social actors and their shared interpretations of their realities (Saunders *et al.*, 2016). Such constant interactions mean that change is ever present because of this continual social interactive process. From a researcher's viewpoint, in-depth, immersive research would be required to gain an understanding of the reality of what was being experienced. This would be achieved qualitatively through exploratory and varying narrative accounts of interviewees. In contrast, at the opposite end of the continuum, the objectivist researcher would be interested in obtaining facts through structured examination and analysis.

The WLB interviews conducted in this dissertation, allowed the researcher to interpret the subjective viewpoints of the interviewees and allowed for the examination of how individuals make sense of their own unique WLB.

RESEARCH APPROACH

The theoretical reasoning that is adopted for a research topic can take two contrasting forms that is either deductive or inductive reasoning. Strauss and Corbin (1998) define inductive analysis as where theory emerges from the data through the researcher's area of initial study. Inductive analysis is largely concerned with qualitative research methods. Contrasting this, deductive analysis is largely concerned with quantitative research methods. Data is essentially used to test a theory in deductive analysis and data is used to generate theory in inductive analysis (Saunders *et al.*, 2016).

Inductive Analysis

This dissertation on the WLB of self-employed mothers who work full-time from home will follow an inductive approach. Scriven's (1991) 'goal-free evaluation' may also be linked to the inductive approach. Goal-free evaluation (GFE) is any evaluation, in this case, the WLB of self-employed mothers who work full-time from home, where the researcher conducts the research without knowledge of or reference to predetermined goals and objectives (Youker *et al.*, 2016). The relevance of goal-free evaluation to the researcher is to remind them to keep an open mind when approaching the outcomes of the research, not to be focused on intended outcomes, because by doing so an unintended outcome, which could in truth prove really important, could be overlooked because of being so focused on a particular result. This form of research encourages flexibility in the thought process where occasionally, unintended outcomes of research can often prove more beneficial than intended outcomes. Thus 'goal-free evaluation' is concerned with focusing on results as they occur not fixating on a planned result. It ties well with inductive reasoning through the semi-structured interview process, as the researcher is supposed to approach the interview with a completely open mind and let the interview progress naturally. It is not supposed to be fixated upon gaining certain information, but allowing the process to evolve organically, which is essentially what goal-free evaluation does.

Bansal, Smith and Vara (2018) refer to inductive reasoning as a cornerstone of qualitative research. This dissertation follows the inductive line of enquiry seen in previous research studies of WLB, including those undertaken by Hudson Breen *et al.* (2017), Hilbrecht and Lero (2014), Annink and den Dulk (2012) and Myrie and Daly (2009). The reason for the inductive line of enquiry in this research topic: WLB and

self-employed mothers who work full-time from home, revolves around the actual topic and what information one is hoping to elicit from the semi-structured interviews. How this information in turn will relate to the researcher's conceptual framework on the elements that can impact WLB and whether a revised conceptual framework will be required due to new information gleaned.

Abductive Analysis

There exists a third strand of reasoning, which is in fact a combination of both deductive and inductive reasoning and is called abductive reasoning. It involves the movement back and forth between deductive and inductive reasoning, thus moving from data to theory and back to data again, in essence mixing it up.

RESEARCH STRATEGY

Mono and multi-methods research strategy

This dissertation follows a mono-method data collection strategy in the form of semi-structured interviews. A mono-method is where a single form of data collection technique is used. Primary data, which is data generated from an original source, in this case through semi-structured interviews will act as the main contributor to the data collection strategy. It follows previous studies undertaken such as Hudson Breen *et al.* (2017); Hilbrecht and Lero (2014); Annink and den Dulk, (2012) and Myrie and Daly (2009). All of these studies conducted semi-structured interviews as a form of data collection. The reason for deciding upon a mono-method in the form of a semi-structured interview was because that form of data collection was best suited to the research topic and would potentially obtain the most relevant information for analysis.

Mixed methods research strategy

This is where both qualitative and quantitative data collection and analytical techniques are mixed (Saunders *et al.*, 2016). Reasons for undertaking a mixed-methods approach would be to widen the scope of the research to gain optimum results. Thus, qualitative research may be analysed quantitatively. Conversely, quantitative results may be qualitatively analysed.

THE PURPOSE OF THE RESEARCH DESIGN

The nature of the topic the researcher has chosen and how the research question is posed will guide one towards the purpose of their research. Thus, based on the research question, the researcher will either be involved with exploratory, explanatory or descriptive research.

Exploratory study

This dissertation is involved with exploratory research which is involved with exploring a topic and gaining insights about it through in this case, semi-structured interviews, where open ended questions allowed for an organic expansion upon the topic of WLB and the self-employed mother who works full-time from home. Semi-structured interviews were deemed the most appropriate form of data collection for this dissertation. The advantage of exploratory research lies in its relatively unstructured approach when compared with the highly structured explanatory form of research which is associated with quantitative research, where relationships between two variables are examined. The exploratory process in contrast, allows one more adaptability and flexibility. One must be willing to adapt accordingly to any new data that may emerge from the research investigation (Saunders *et al.*, 2016). As previously mentioned, a disadvantage of engaging in exploratory research is that no useful patterns or themes may emerge from the investigation. However, this could be interpreted as a result in itself.

SAMPLING TECHNIQUE

Sampling technique is concerned with examining a subset of the researcher's relevant population that is representative of the phenomenon being researched. This subset of the population is referred to as a target population. The sampling technique which this dissertation follows, is that of non-probability technique, which is most often associated with qualitative research. It involves selecting samples from the population based upon the precise requirements or subjective judgement of the researcher. On the other hand, probability technique is concerned with quantitative methods and samples are chosen based upon various forms of random selection.

This study follows in particular, the structure of the study of Hilbrecht and Lero (2014), who undertook a study on self-employment and family life. This dissertation follows

their methodology where they undertook inductive, qualitative research in the form of semi-structured interviews and analysed them thematically. For this dissertation topic, purposive sampling was used to identify individual's suitability to partake in the project. Purposive sampling or judgemental sampling is where the researcher themselves chooses their sample participants according to their research topic requirements. Patton (2015) emphasizes the importance for the samples chosen to be information rich as they yield deeper insights and greater understanding of the topic. Richie and Lewis (2003) state the importance of the samples being chosen matching the requirements of the research topic to ensure relevant information is obtained.

Homogenous sampling was used in this dissertation and is where the characteristics of the participants selected are purposely chosen because they all have similar profiles required for the research topic (Saunders *et al.*, 2016). In the case of this dissertation: The WLB of self-employed mothers who work full-time from home, the selection criteria involved the following three requirements:

- Be a mother, be self-employed and work full-time from home.

The value of this screening process that used homogenous sampling is, because it ensures that only relevant candidates are chosen, it avoids collecting data that is not applicable or irrelevant to the researcher's goals. The sample size is dependent upon the researcher's topic and the objectives of the research. This dissertation followed the recommended sample size for a homogenous population of 4-12 proposed by Saunders *et al.* (2016), and thus conducted 8 semi-structured interviews. 11 participants were initially approached. Two declined to participate and 1 did not respond. Participant's age ranged from 35-52 years and all are married. Please see below the participant summary. Whilst all had varying professions, all participants were mothers, self-employed and worked full-time from home, thus homogenous sampling was used. All participants save one, were known to the researcher prior to the interview. Thus, a form of snowball sampling was used to obtain access to participant 7.

Participant Summary Table

Participant number	Number of children	Number of years in business	Profession
1	2 children, not yet in school	11	Marketing
2	2 children, primary school	10	Cake artist
3	3 children, secondary school	20	Photographer
4	2 children, secondary school	13	Cake artist
5	2 children, primary and secondary school	5	Florist
6	2 children, not yet in school	10	Beauty therapist
7	2 children, primary and secondary school	16	Ceramics
8	2 children, secondary school	11	Business Consultant

Qualitative sample size tends to always be smaller in quantity than sample size in quantitative data. This is because qualitative information is concerned with obtaining detailed, in-depth, complex and context related information. Quantitative information requires larger samples so as to generate very precise statistical data covering large populations (Gentles *et al.*, 2015).

RESEARCH INSTRUMENT

SEMI STRUCTURED INTERVIEWS

Interviews are a form of data collection. They concern exploring “data on understandings, opinions, what people remember doing, attitudes and feelings and the like, that people have in common” (Arksey and Knight, 1999, p.2, cited in Collis and Hussey, 2014).

The research instrument used in the exploration into the WLB of self-employed women working full time from home took the form of semi-structured interviews and followed the structure of a study on: Self-employment and family life, Hilbrecht and

Lero (2014). The use of semi-structured interviews suited the purpose of the research, which was an exploratory study. An exploratory study requires that for optimum research results, face to face contact with interviewees is the best means of data collection. Also, the nature of the interview questions which consisted of 20 open ended questions concerning WLB and self-employment required sit down, face to face contact (please see appendix 2 for list of interview questions). This allowed the interviewer to gauge the emotions as well as the narrative of the interviewee. It also allows one greater validity and flexibility to probe into the topic and ask additional questions, so as to gain further insights. Such in-depth observation can provide additional insights, which would complement the information gained from the interview questions and allow one to build upon and generate more insightful data when performing the data analysis. Such insights would be missed if one were to engage in quantitative research through use of a structured interview in the form of a questionnaire for example.

The interview questions within the researcher's dissertation were informed by the proposed conceptual framework within the literature review. The elements contained within this framework provided the guiding structure for the contents of the interview questions. Such elements were taken from an assortment of theories including: William's work-life needs, Munn's work-life system, the JD-R model, drain theory and work-life fit theory. This followed the structure of the study undertaken by Hilbrecht and Lero (2014), where they based their interview questions on self-employment and family life upon Moen *et al's.* (2008) work-life fit model.

Semi-structured interviews lend themselves to the epidemiological, ontological and axiological assumptions of the interpretive and exploratory paradigm. This is where in-depth investigations in the form of qualitative semi-structured interviews are conducted. This process in turn allows for a focus on the narrative of the interviewee and their views and perceptions on WLB and self-employment. The interviewer's interpretation of such events also plays an important process in the interpretive paradigm.

The main point with regard to interviews, whether they be qualitative or quantitative is to ensure consistency at all stages of the interview process. The researcher should

ensure that the type of interview they are conducting matches the type of study they are undertaking. In this case, an exploratory study requires semi-structured interviews. Ensure that interview questions link to both the objectives and sub-objectives of the research topic and that the type of interview undertaken matches the proposed data collection method (Saunders *et al.*, 2016).

Consistency is linked to two terms, reliability and validity that Saunders *et al.* (2016) refers to as “central judgements about the quality of research” (p.202). Both are required to ensure the quality of the research undertaken and are discussed below.

Reliability and Validity and Bias

Reliability is composed of two parts, internal and external reliability. Internal reliability is related to consistency and refers to consistency of process and method during the research process. This can be linked to processes that pertain to the semi-structured interview. Reliability issues can occur due to the lack of standardized structure within the process. Such issues are related to bias and whether it be interviewer, interviewee or participation bias, all three impact negatively on the data collection and analysis process. There are ways to counter bias. Awareness of its existence is foremost. By the interviewer being aware of potential interviewer or interviewee bias, they can actively take steps to prevent or limit it. It is also of the utmost importance that the researcher is methodologically rigorous, ensuring that the research process is thoroughly examined and evaluated to ensure the process matches the objectives and sub-objectives of the research topic. Interview questions need to be well thought out, ensuring that each question is relevant to the research topic and easily understood by the interviewee, thus reducing the prospect of interviewee bias through misunderstanding of a question. The nature of the questions should not be too personal, as this may also induce interviewee bias and cause the interviewee to become uncomfortable or annoyed, thus impacting negatively on the researcher’s data collection. It is also important for the interviewer to guard against misinterpreting what an interviewee is answering. If in any way unclear, ask the interviewee for clarification of a point.

All of the above were considered by the researcher whilst undertaking their dissertation research topic on WLB and self-employed mothers. An interview consent form was

presented to the interviewee before the interview took place (please see appendix 1), which provided the participants with the opportunity to learn about the research topic and address any questions they might have. This will be discussed further on.

“External reliability refers to the absence of differences in the results if the research were repeated” (Collis and Hussey, 2014 p.130). External reliability is considered of less significance when performing qualitative research and more significant when engaging in quantitative research. This is due to the subjective, contextual and changing nature of the qualitative research topic and the type of study undertaken. Thus, whilst rigorous attention was paid to procedure within the data collection and analysis, to limit issues with reliability, there are some who would question whether the same results would occur if the research were to be repeated. This follows Saunders *et al's.* (2016) idea that perhaps such qualitative research is not suited for replication because of the research topic’s continual changing nature and its basis in reality which is in constant flux. A varying result would just be indicative of the subjective and changeable nature of the interpretive and qualitative research method undertaken.

Validity is where the findings of the researcher’s topic accurately reflect the concepts it aims to investigate (Alshenqeti, 2014). This concept also relates to issue of bias within the interview process. Where bias occurs, it can impact negatively on data collection. In addition to the points previously mentioned when attempting to minimize bias, Cohen, Mannion and Morison (2007) add some points that could increase validity in the interview process. They are as follows:

- The interviewer should be aware of their own views and their attitude towards the interviewee.
- The interviewer should not seek answers to justify their preconceived notions.

Additionally, to assist with maintaining issues of reliability and validity in interviews, the following are suggested.

- Use a dictaphone to record your interview. It assists with accuracy as the researcher can replay the interview if unsure of an issue (Berg, 2007). In this particular case, the interviewer used a Dictaphone and a

mobile phone, so if one did not work, there was a backup. Also, take notes during the interview, as it can help to clarify issues and aids the interviewer's focus.

- It is important to conduct a pilot test before any interviews take place. The researcher conducted a pilot test before any interviews took place and recorded the pilot test. Some issues surrounding the clarity of one or two questions were raised and changed accordingly (Alshenqeeti, 2014).

ETHICS

Consent

It is of the utmost importance that ethical issues be considered at all stages of the interview process, from data collection through to data analysis. A consent form (please see appendix 1) was provided to each interviewee and the single participant in the pilot study before the interview took place. Information on the consent form pertained to the nature of the research topic and details regarding the participant's level of involvement in the research process. The document also stated that they could withdraw from the process at any time. Issues regarding confidentiality and anonymity were addressed. Having read through the document, both the researcher and participant signed and dated two copies of the document, one for each party. The participant was reminded that the interview would be recorded and their permission was requested, which in all cases was acquiesced. It was also restated that the audio recording would be confidential and stored securely and that all information within the interview would be confidential. The participant was also informed that the interview would take approximately 40 minutes. The audio recorder was turned on, the interviewer thanked the participant for their participation and the interview commenced. On completion of the interview, the participant was thanked for their time and their input into the research topic. They were also assured once again of the confidentiality and anonymity of the process.

Anonymity and Confidentiality

Anonymity of participants has been assured and maintained throughout the entire research process. Any identifying details have been removed from the transcription

of interviews and the subsequent data analysis. Anonymity is important because it provides the participant with a greater sense of security and flexibility when discussing various details in the interview. It also allows a greater rapport to be built between both the interviewer and the participant, thus allowing for increased validity and reducing the chance of bias occurring.

Protecting participants from harm

The dissertation topic and process by which it went about its data collection and analysis presented no harm to any of the participants. Participants were free to withdraw completely and at any time from the research proceedings. The researcher was aware of the issue of protecting participants from harm throughout the research process and thus monitored participants throughout the interview process for any harmful effects that could have arisen throughout this time. No harmful effects were presented at any time throughout this process amongst any of the participants.

Pilot Study

Creswell (2007) states the importance of a pilot study taking place prior to any interviews occurring. As previously stated, a pilot study was conducted by the researcher with one participant prior to any interviews taking place. This interview was recorded and lasted approximately 46 minutes. The importance of undertaking a pilot study is that it allows the researcher to refine the interview content based upon feedback from the interviewee. This process also establishes the suitability of the data collection process (in this case the semi-structured interview) to the research question. It was established during the pilot test that some questions were unclear. These questions were altered, so as to make them easier to understand.

THE INTERVIEW PROCESS

Informed consent, confidentiality and anonymity and protecting participants from harm had to all be considered and prepared before the interview process commenced. Cohen *et al.* (2007) states that the semi-structured interview is by its nature an intrusive process into the lives of participants, and therefore ethical considerations must be in place throughout the data collection process and analysis. Such ethical considerations were duly implemented by the researcher for this research topic. Additionally, a pilot study was conducted before any interviews took place. Only after such considerations were met could the interview process begin.

Eight semi-structured interviews took place between 27th June and 18th July, 2019. The interviews were conducted at the home of each interviewee and lasted between 35 and 70 minutes. All interviews were audio recorded with the consent of the participants. This form of interview allowed for greater flexibility in data collection due to the researcher being able to probe issues if required. The interview involved 20 open questions around the WLB of self-employed mothers who work full-time from home (please see Appendix 2 for the list of interview questions). The questions explored all aspects surrounding the individual's WLB and included amongst other questions the individual's definition of WLB, their daily routines, their challenges in their job, what resources they possessed that could help them meet those challenges and their work space, amongst other questions.

It was noted by the researcher that as they finished their final and eighth interview, they felt that a saturation point had been reached, in that no additional information was being acquired and that the same information was reoccurring.

DATA ANALYSIS

The form of data analysis chosen by the researcher for this dissertation was that of thematic analysis which followed previous academic studies such as that undertaken by Hilbrech and Lero (2014). This study is exploratory and qualitative in nature. Maguire and Delahunt (2017) refer to thematic analysis as “the process of identifying patterns or themes within qualitative data” (p.3352). The researcher wished to identify patterns or themes from the qualitative data gathered in this study and therefore chose thematic analysis. The researcher did consider other forms of similar data analysis such as grounded theory. However, it was ultimately decided that themes were what the researcher felt to be most relevant to the nature of the study, as opposed to generating theory, which is what grounded theory results in, therefore thematic analysis was the final choice of data analysis.

The collected data consisted of 8 recorded interviews which lasted in total 5 hours and 40 minutes. The researcher transcribed each interview on the same day after the interview had taken place. Transcription of all interviews took approximately 18 hours in total. Notes were also taken during the interview. These notes concerned any

distinct behaviour or emphasis given by the interviewee in response to a question. Such notes were added to the transcription in the form of comments.

Thematic analysis is considered a generic form of analysis. It is therefore a method as opposed to a methodology and has no affiliation with any particular theoretical perspective (Clarke and Braun, 2013). Such lack of affiliation allows the researcher greater flexibility, where thematic analysis may be applied whether one is using an inductive or deductive approach.

Another advantage of thematic analysis lies in its structure of analysis which is very systematic. It provides clear steps to enable either an experienced or a novice researcher to analyze their particular data. Such clear guidelines allow a researcher to analyze either large or small amounts of qualitative data. Braun and Clarke (2006) provide a 6 stage guide. Such steps were used and adapted in this study when analysing data collected. The steps undertaken by the researcher were as follows:

1. The researcher must become familiar with the data. This was achieved through transcribing the data and then reading the transcription of each interview numerous times to become familiar with the data. Various comments were also inserted into each transcription by the researcher where they wanted to draw attention to a certain issue or ensure that they remembered a salient point. The data was deliberately transcribed very shortly after each interview took place so as to gain high levels of accuracy.
2. Initial 'in vivo' codes were generated from each transcript, which are terms used by interviewees. A bottom-up approach where analysis is driven by the data received was undertaken. Also, unusual and amusing responses were coded and will be discussed in the next chapter. This can be related to an advantage of thematic analysis where it can highlight similarities and differences and unusual insights across a data set. It is also important to state that the researcher feels that thematic analysis matches this study's interpretive philosophy. Thematic analysis is reflecting the reality of interviewees through semi-structured interviews. Similarly, interpretivism focuses upon interpretations of narratives/realities which can also be linked to the semantic

element of thematic analysis. The semantic element is simply the spoken words of an interviewee.

3. The purpose of thematic analysis is to search for patterns or themes across a data set. It is at this stage that this search for patterns or themes began in the form of cross-referencing transcripts. Both themes and sub-themes emerged from this process.
4. A theme essentially captures something significant within the data. Braun and Clarke (2006) emphasize the lack of rules about what constitutes a theme. It is at this stage that the researcher reviewed and modified the themes ensuring that each theme was distinct from the other. Whether a theme was a theme or a subtheme also had to be addressed. The researcher also reviewed all transcripts again to ensure no important piece of information had been left out.
5. This step involved the refinement and organization of the themes, where a structure would be developed for final analysis. Themes and sub themes were examined in relation to how they tied to other separate themes in the analysis. Were the themes relevant to the dissertation title? Could the themes that emerged be linked to the elements within the proposed conceptual framework? Essentially, had the form of analysis the researcher had chosen resulted in data that was relevant to the study topic?
6. The final step involves this actual dissertation. Themes have been converted into this final document. An inductive approach was taken, which again is linked to the interpretive philosophy and it was found that the themes that emerged, were linked to the semantic data collected. Latent themes have emerged from the semantic content of the data (Braun and Clarke, 2006). The semantic content is simply what interviewees have said. Latent themes are the ideas and thoughts behind what the interviewees said, what theories and ideologies their conversations could be linked to. Such analysis forms the next chapter in this dissertation.

Some limitations to thematic analysis do exist. The first being one of its advantages, namely: flexibility. Such flexibility allows for a large amount of information to be gleaned from data. Because this information can be so wide ranging, it can make it challenging for the researcher to decide upon a particular area of focus. Another

challenge in thematic analysis relates to its form of data collection. Braun and Clarke (2006) refer to its “limited interpretive power beyond mere description” (p.97). The researcher acknowledges this limitation, but ultimately feels that it is a conscious choice made by the researcher as to whether or not they progress beyond the descriptive data, thus the limitation is self-inflicted if that is what the researcher chooses.

LIMITATIONS

The researcher is aware of the issue of external reliability. This is the absence of different results if the study were to be repeated. Whilst every possible effort was taken to guard against such an outcome, the subjective and interpretive nature of WLB is ever present and changing. Thus, if the study were to be repeated in a couple of years time with the same individuals, there is every chance that the outcomes would not be identical to today’s study. This is simply the nature of the beast.

The researcher feels in retrospect that the demographic chosen, namely mothers, actually excluded other potentially valuable contributors such as women without children and single fathers. Also, the researcher feels that perhaps an additional form of data analysis, in the form of a questionnaire or a survey could have generated additional data.

CHAPTER 5: FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION AND ANALYSIS

INTRODUCTION

Thematic analysis was used to generate the themes that emerged from the data collected. The purpose of this chapter is to present those findings that emerged from that data. Such findings will also be discussed and linked to the research sub-objectives and the proposed conceptual framework. It is important at this stage to again make reference to the concept of “goal-free” evaluation espoused by Scriven (1991). This is where the researcher allows for data collection to occur organically without imposing any preconceived results. Such a concept may be linked to thematic analysis and is consistent with the inductive approach to data gathering, a bottom-up approach where themes emerge from the data gathered without the restrictions of a structured methodology.

Four main themes emerged inductively from the data gathered. Smaller sub-themes also emerged from the findings. The semantic content of both will now be discussed. They are as follows:

- Where there is a deliberate decision taken by the individual, resulting in work revolving around family life, as opposed to family life revolving around work.
 - Structure emerged as an important sub-theme.
- Boundaries: physical and temporal.
- Demands: client demands.
- Resources: flexibility and support.

WORK REVOLVES AROUND LIFE

The reasons for becoming self-employed were central to this theme. This proved the starting point for the creation of this deliberate structure emerging within each participant’s family sphere. All participants had varying reasons for becoming self-employed. Some were pushed into it, others chose self-employment, it was also a mixture of both push and pull factors. Push factors refer to external factors such as lack of career opportunity and pull factors refer to internal factors such as motivation and desire to become self-employed (Hudson Breen, *et al.*, 2017). The recurrent theme running through this revolved around placing the care of their young families ahead of

their careers. Such a move allowed them to then place work around their families' lives. For example, participant 2 stated: *"Emmm, so I could be a stay at home mum and to save on child care costs"*. Participant 8 similarly made reference to family reasons amongst other reasons for taking up self-employment: *"I decided that I could do that job for myself rather than working for somebody else and it suited when the children were small, I thought I could get a better WLB"*. Participant 6 stated: *"...that is why I have done it, to give my kids a better home life and that their mother is around more"*.

Participants were asked their own definition of WLB. This is relevant to the theme of work revolving around life because differing definitions highlight an individual's own priorities within their life. The different definitions also highlighted the subjective nature of the topic of WLB. It is worth noting that participants conceptualized their WLB in terms of time, activities and mental health. Each participant gave a different answer whilst referencing the importance of family within WLB. For example, participant 1 stated: *"Allowing and ensuring that you do give adequate time to all aspects of your life, that you are not overly concentrating on your work"*. Participant 8 stated: *"I have a tendency to try and do everything, do the job, do the house, get involved in the community, you kinda forget yourself in it. WLB for me is to make sure you look after yourself as well"*. Participant 3 stated: *"It is very important for me being self-employed that I keep all the balls in the air between work, home and family and community and I am involved in charities as well and quality family lifestyle"*.

Structure

The relevance of questioning participants about their working hours may be linked to the theme of work revolving around life. This led to the emergence of the sub-theme of structure and its importance in constructing and maintaining work around family life. Participant's daily routines were structured around both work and family life. Work was scheduled to revolve around the schedule of the children as much as possible, where mothers could drop their kids to the bus in the morning, return home, get some work done and then collect the kids from school in the afternoon. Participant 7: *"So now I probably work the school time, so I drop my son to school in the morning and I start work when I come back. I don't see him until 5 o'clock every day. There is a huge difference between primary and secondary school. When my daughter starts in secondary school it will add 3 hours to my day"*. Participant 1: *"One of the best things I have been able to do from a WLB point of view is*

I don't start work at the moment till 11. We walk to crèche and that's WLB to me. I get time with them before I go and do anything else".

It was interesting to note that during the school holidays, structure was simply rejigged to again place family at the centre of WLB. Participant 6: *"We had beautiful sunny days last week, I was at the beach with the kids for the afternoon, I still did my work in the evening and I felt like I had the whole day off".*

Diary Management

Such attention to structure was a conscious choice for participants. Using diary management as a tool enabled them to control their time and consequently their WLB. Participant 6: *"So I schedule the whole day from 9 in the morning to 10 at night, so WLB for me is done because of my organizational skills and the amount of time I spend planning my life, very little stuff is left to chance".* Participant 8: *"So I plan what I have to do this week and that is in the diary and I do not interfere with it. It really is essential".*

Keeping businesses deliberately small

Another interesting finding was that businesses were structured to be deliberately small. This allowed the self-employed mother to successfully control and manage her working life around that of her family. Participant 2: *"I would love to open a coffee shop down the line, but I wouldn't do it until the kids are bigger, that kinda way".*

Juggle/Struggle

An important issue was how self-employed women viewed the process of WLB. All participants, save two participants, referred to it as both a juggle and a struggle. Participant 2 stated: *"I don't view it as a struggle, I just juggle everything to keep everything going".* Participant 3 also had a different angle upon the WLB process stating: *"you could view it as a struggle, but I view it as another challenge, another adventure".* Contrasting this, all other participants struggled with the juggle. Participant 4 stated: *"the struggle, the juggle and conflicting, yes all of those are perfect words to describe it".*

Finally, the researcher was surprised to find high levels of awareness around participant's WLB and their conscious attempts to manage and control it. When participants were asked whether life interfered with work or work interfered with life,

all cited the latter scenario. All participants were constantly adjusting and readjusting their WLB, such that it enabled them to successfully manage their working life around their families.

DISCUSSION AND ANALYSIS ON WORK REVOLVING AROUND FAMILY LIFE

The semantic content involving the theme where work revolved around life will now be further discussed and analysed, thus moving the analysis to a latent level of exploration. This theme revolved around the situationalist perspective where WLB is based upon an individual's situation (Reiter and Morgan, 2007). This was structured such that the self-employed women could both control and integrate daily routines, enabling work to revolve around family life. Such integration of routine can be tied to the work-life fit model (Moen *et al.*, 2008) where the self-employed mother is constantly reappraising and altering her daily routine such that an optimum level of 'fit' may be achieved that will allow her to manage her work revolving around life. The tool that enabled such adherence to structure was diary management.

Self-employment was viewed by participants in this study as a means of providing childcare whilst simultaneously enabling them to pursue their chosen career. This supports findings in previous studies where self-employment, as well as providing childcare, also provided an additional form of income to the household (Hilbrecht and Lero, 2014).

Valcour (2007) refers to the term 'cross-domain constructs' where experiences in one area of an individual's life impact upon experiences in another. This could be linked to the theme of work revolving around life. Spillover, where life interferes with work or vice versa does of course occur. Take for example the following: Participant 2: *"I had planned to go to the beach with the kids. When I came back after delivering a wedding cake, I realized that I forgot 12 cupcakes and they were coming out at 1815 for them, so I had to cancel the beach and make the cupcakes"* Controlling such spillover is the salient issue. The self-employed mother managed this by incorporating the 'fit' element of the work life fit model and simply readjusted her routine by cancelling her plans for the beach and prioritizing work over family as the situation required.

The theme of work revolving around life can be linked to particular elements in the proposed conceptual framework, namely: life stage of family and time and space to care for others. Job demands and resources could additionally be linked to this theme. The life stage of one's family forms what could be said to be a contextual characteristic that influences the WLB of the self-employed woman. The age of children within a family will influence the type of WLB one experiences and these findings indicate that family life will influence how one manages and controls their work and family life. Time and space to care for others may be linked to self-employed mothers making a conscious decision to structure their routines around the lives of their families, thus consciously allocating time to care for others. The self-employed mother continually adjusts job demands and resources such that they are in equilibrium, leading to work revolving around life. Keeping their businesses deliberately small aids such equilibrium, thus enabling work to revolve around life.

The theme of work revolving around life may be linked to Question 1: How do self-employed mothers who work full-time from home experience WLB? The participants struggled with juggling both their working and family lives. This could be linked to the conflict perspective where work and family roles conflict, which is a recurring theme throughout the WLB literature (Greenhaus and Powell, 2006). Thus in response to the above question, self-employed women could be said to experience WLB as a challenge. They manage this challenge through conscious structuring of their work and family lives, using tools such as diary management and deliberately keeping their businesses small such that work can revolve around family.

Work revolving around life may also be connected to Question 4: How does working from home affect their career progression? Career progression is impacted by participants deliberately choosing to keep their businesses small, thus allowing them to control their work demands and allowing work revolve around their life. This could be interpreted as applying the facilitative perspective of WLB, (where both the work and family domains work together, as opposed to conflicting with each other) as a means of rectifying the conflict perspective that occurs when one is attempting to manage both work and family life, when both are given equal footing. The facilitative method is in essence allowing for one domain to become dominant over another, thus contributing to one's WLB. Such a finding follows previous studies in WLB where it

was found that women deliberately kept their businesses small, such that they could manage both their life and career domains (Hudson Breen *et al.*, 2017). This leads one to question whether one domain must dominate another in order for WLB to be achieved? Two factors affect this, namely being self-employed and the topic of WLB. As previously mentioned, WLB is subjective and self-employment provides for individuals to manage their WLB as they see fit. It is thus entirely dependent upon the contextual factors, such as family life stage, an individual's job demands and the resources required to meet such demands which determine whether or not one will allow the family domain dominate the work domain or vice versa. Personal preferences and choices of the individual will also impact upon this decision.

BOUNDARIES

Boundaries emerged as salient element in these findings. It was found that whilst most participants had initially attempted to have an integrated working space within the home, all had progressed firmly towards segmentation of the work environment outside the home.

Physical boundaries

Physical boundaries of themselves, act as a physical resource, allowing the participant to concentrate fully when in their working environment, thus buffering the negative effects of an integrated work and life space. All participants strongly agreed that a separate work space was absolutely necessary when self-employed and working full-time from home. Participant 2: *"I know it sounds stupid but if it were separate instead of attached, I wouldn't go in and out as much"*. Participant 3: *"So, I took the work out of the literal home and home out of the literal work and that was one of the great decisions I have made and I haven't looked back"*. Participant 7: *"It's good to be able to go out to work now, my two second commute to work"*. The irony is of course that this is a dissertation based on women working full-time from home and it surprisingly turns out that optimum WLB for these participants could only occur when work was taken physically out of the home. There in actual fact appeared to be a "goldilocks zone" where good separation was considered a workspace that was separate, but within the home. Even better still was a workspace adjoining the home. But, by far and away the best was a workspace that was physically separate from the home, where one had to physically leave the home and walk or even drive for perhaps 2 minutes down the road to the workspace.

Segmentation as opposed to integration was the preferred work space of all participants.

Non-work related activities

7 out of 8 participants were deliberately engaged in some type of external non-work related activity. This was a conscious decision that forced them to take a physical break from work and also a chance to turn-off mentally from work. Such non-work related activities allowed them to create boundaries on both a physical and emotional level.

Participant 1: *"I could go out and swim by myself, but I make a conscious effort to book the classes because by booking the classes I have to go"*. Participant 4: *"The rowing. I started rowing about 3 months ago. I had to make it a priority cuz otherwise then I wasn't stopping. I need a thing"*.

Participant 2: *"I try and go to Kate's every Tuesday for coffee as a treat to myself every week, that is kinda my thing to do"*.

Temporal boundaries

Working hours varied and were structured towards work revolving around family, as was discussed in the previous theme. This variation was regularized by participants, thus a temporal boundary was created through the routine of working hours.

Participant 8: *"I will work like a dog for the week, but I absolutely will not work weekends unless there is an absolute emergency"*. Participant 6: *"Working by appointment is what makes it work for me, so people have to ring me, but it suits me and works and I feel I have satisfied all the boxes, it is very different"*.

Boundaries were also found to be created through routines of process, such as: Participant 6: *"I would always take my uniform off when I am finished my clients, even if I was going back to do clients later on in the day, I would still take off my uniform"*.

Participant 3: *"I feel having this studio now allows me to switch on/off. Open the door, put on the alarm, out that's it"*.

DISCUSSION AND ANALYSIS OF BOUNDARIES

According to Zerubavel (1991) boundaries can be both a source of conflict and order. In this particular case, separate physical working boundaries have been found to be a source of order. Such order has arisen from conflict between the home and work life space. This could be linked to the conflict perspective espoused by Greenhaus and Powell (2006) where work and family spheres conflict.

Boundaries have been used by participants as a means of structuring and organizing their WLB. Both the physical and temporal boundaries created by participants are themselves a resource. Such a resource forms part of the proposed conceptual framework. It influences a self-employed mother's WLB by acting as a buffer against the demands, either job or life related. Example: a separate physical work space negates the possibility of being disturbed by members of one's family constantly. It also provides a confidential space for meeting one's business clients. From a psychological point of view, it allows one to physically separate work from family life. Closing the door of the work space is a process in itself. It allows one to cross from the work to the private domain. Participant 1: *"When I finish work in the evening, it all goes back in there and in itself is a process. That is closing off the day, that means I am not looking at my laptop while cooking dinner"*. One could say that the physical and psychological boundaries are themselves resources that support the demands of the individual.

Participant 1 also stated: *"Having an identity outside of my family is really important"*. This could be linked to the personal time and space to care for oneself that forms an element of the proposed conceptual framework influencing WLB. This is where non-work activities undertaken by most participants are in fact a form of self-care and are a positive influence on WLB. This is supported by the concept of work-family facilitation, where an individual's involvement in one life domain impacts positively upon another life domain (Wayne *et al.*, 2007). Therefore, by the participants engaging in non-work activities such as rowing or swimming, it provides gains in the form of increased physical fitness and greater mental clarity. It would enable one to perform at an optimum level in one's job, increasing efficiency and improving WLB. Non-work activities form part of the integrative approach to WLB and is where the inclusion of non-work activities is considered an important part of the work-family sphere (Crosbie and Moore, 2004). Inclusion of such activities is considered important because self-employment can be isolating and leisure activities have been shown to have restorative effects upon an individual. This could in turn benefit their WLB.

The theme of boundaries can be applied to Question 2: What strategies do they use to maintain a WLB? Strategies used to maintain a WLB would include the use of physical and temporal boundaries to delineate work from life. Non-work activities could be used as a means of controlling one's WLB. Physical separation from work and family

duties could prove regenerative for the individual and contribute positively to their WLB.

DEMANDS

Job demands and job resources are closely aligned and it is for this reason that both demands and resources will be discussed simultaneously.

Demands of clients

Clients not respecting the physical work boundaries and working hour boundaries of the self-employed participant was an interesting finding. In actual fact, during the researcher's interview, a client turned up at the participant's house completely unexpectedly. Participant 2: *"Sorry Janine, I didn't know this lady was coming....clients just call to the house, that's something that annoys me"*. Reflecting the lack of respect for participants' working hours, Participant 8 stated the following: *"Now some of my clients are very demanding, extremely demanding in fact. You kinda have to train them as well, that you are not available all the time and that you will get back to them and the work will get done"*. Having the resources in place to deal with such transgression of boundaries is a necessity for the self-employed mother who works full time from the home.

RESOURCES

Flexibility

The flexibility associated with self-employment could be considered a resource, where the individual has the freedom to choose when and where and how to work. This was a prominent finding. Participant 8: *"But someone said to me one time, the beauty of working for yourself is that you have more flexibility than you will ever have. Everything is your own choice, and that is what I like about it, that is the WLB, that I can do what I like, when I like"*. Participant 6: *"I would not be able to look after my mother, cooking, self-caring and looking after my kids if I was working as an employee"*. Another participant regarded it as a 'perk'. Participant 3: *"Flexibility and autonomy would be perks of being self-employed within reason"*.

Support

The findings related to the theme of support can be broken down into the personal and professional. Support from one's internal environment, such as spouse and family members. Participant 3: *"I wouldn't do what I do without the support of my husband. He has*

been so supportive. From a practical and physical point of view, he gets why I do what I do". Participant 8: *"But I have to say my husband is really supportive"*. This kind of support could be physical where spouses help to carry heavy items on a job, for example: camera equipment. Having a trusted individual to talk through a problem with could be considered a form of emotional support. Both forms of support are considered a resource and provide emotional stability during challenging times.

Support in the form of mentors was hugely important. All participants had some form of mentor save one, whether it was a family member or being part of a peer to peer mentoring group or a business professional whom they had a personal relationship with. Participant 2: *"I know these people, a woman now, who has a fleet of shops, we do kinda chat about different things"*. Participant 8: *"I do have a mentor, a group of us get together once every six weeks. Very often it is the discussion that comes up with the resolution"*. Participant 7: *"My sister is in finance and she is very clever and is good at seeing all the options"*. The importance of a mentor is invaluable for their guidance in the progression and management of the self-employed mothers' career. This in turn was found to impact positively upon their WLB by providing the individual with a sense of control over their working lives which then impacted upon their family's lives.

DISCUSSION AND ANALYSIS ON DEMANDS AND RESOURCES

The JD-R model espoused by Bakker and Demerouti allows for job resources such as flexibility and support to counter the demands within one's job. Job demands including client demands tend to impact negatively upon one's WLB. Such demands may be associated with drain theory (Marks, 1977). This is where the individual possesses a certain amount of resources in the form of physical and mental energy for use throughout a single day. Having to process job demands, such as demanding clients, consumes those resources. Once those resources have been consumed they are gone forever. One could therefore say that job demands require job resources as a form of replenishment and support to plug resources that may be draining away. Example: rules concerning working hours to counter boundary transgressions could be used as a form of replenishment for the self-employed individual.

One can see how the transgression of participants' boundaries by clients, is a result of the self-employed individual lacking the structure within their working environment to

implement rules governing boundaries. For example, participant 2 stated: “*So there has to be boundaries, I mean a cut off. Cuz I just feel if you rang a bakery you are not going to get through to them at 2030, so that is the way I feel just cut them off*”. The implementation of rules governing boundaries would serve to curtail and manage clients’ expectations. The addition of rules around aspects of boundaries would allow the individual greater control over their working environment. The flexibility associated with the individual’s ability to create and control their own working boundaries is an example of the JD-R model in use. The resource, in this case: flexibility, allows for the creation of rules to deal with job demands, in the form of clients transgressing boundaries. Rules emerge as a form of support to the self-employed individual. The rules are created because of the flexibility that self-employment affords an individual in choosing how to structure and manage their working environment. These rules in turn become a form of support, allowing for clear demarcation both within and between the work and family sphere.

Flexibility can be tied to the work-life fit model (Moen *et al.*, 2007). The flexibility of being able to independently choose working hours and routines etc., encompasses the ‘fit’ element of the model. This is where the individual shapes their resources to meet their demands, thus allowing for WLB. However, it must also be said that the individual may not feel able to take advantage of the flexibility and autonomy associated with self-employment, due to the great pressures associated with business ownership (Annink and den Dulk, 2012). Thus, flexibility as a resource could in fact turn to flexibility becoming a demand, if one becomes overwhelmed by the heavy workload associated with running one’s own business. Such perceived lack of flexibility leading to WLB imbalance, could in fact result in the eventual closure of the business.

The role of the mentor may be viewed as a resource and therefore tied to the JD-R model. The findings pointed very strongly to the positive effect a mentor had on an individual’s WLB. Participant 3: “*The new consultant I have coming on a weekly basis is key to my success. I love coming in to work now. I was starting to hate coming in because of the challenges there*”. The mentor may be viewed as acting as a buffer to the demands associated with running your own business. The knowledge they provide is wide ranging and can assist the self-employed individual with the structuring of their business and the particular

direction of their career. The knowledge they provide could be viewed as a resource because it provides the self-employed individuals with the tools to manage and control their working environment, which in turn impacts positively upon their WLB.

Demands and resources form part of the proposed conceptual framework and both influence WLB. Demands tend to impact negatively on WLB, with resources acting as a form of support through the use of flexibility. Support also takes the form of mentors and family support. Demands and resources may be linked to question two, where the strategies used to maintain a WLB are in the form of resources that buffer the effects of job demands, thus providing for a stable WLB. Additionally, the use of a mentor may be associated with question 4, where a mentor provides the tools that enable career progression when self-employed and working from home.

CONCLUSION

The researcher has attempted to maintain the concept of validity, (where the findings are reflective of the concept investigated) throughout this process. Implications of the findings are reflective of previous studies undertaken in WLB and self-employment. They include those of Hilbrecht and Lero (2014), where work revolving around family formed part of their findings. Findings undertaken by Myrie and Daly (2009) on boundaries and self-employment, where temporal boundaries formed part of the study are reflected in the findings within this dissertation. .

The strengths of these findings are supported by the framework of the work-life fit model (Moen *et al.*, 2007). The flexibility of this model allows for resources to support and flex with the job demands of the individual allowing for change and reconstruction in one's WLB. The strengths revolve around flexibility and support which may be classified as resources and form part of the proposed conceptual framework. These resources impact positively upon WLB allowing for the participants in this study to have work revolve around their family life. It is worth noting that the resource of flexibility may also become a weakness, where heavy workloads do not allow for flexibility to occur.

Limitations of the findings lie in its methodology. A qualitative exploration and subjective topic in the form of WLB cannot by its nature be viewed objectively and

this must be acknowledged. It must also be acknowledged that the single element within the conceptual framework, namely: requirements to become economically independent, was not addressed. This was a deliberate choice by the researcher, as they felt that such probing into a participant's financial situation was not ethical. It could cause discomfort and impact negatively on the overall exploration. This element was deliberately left in the proposed conceptual framework because it was felt that its inclusion was important and would have an impact on WLB. Such economic implications could add value to future research in WLB and self-employment. Limitations were also acknowledged in the choice of demographics. A wider demographic, that encompasses not just mothers, but the addition of single women and single fathers could prove of interest in future research. This topic was explored using a demographic that was located exclusively in the North West of Ireland. As such the finding may be somewhat skewed. Future research that would encompass samples from a wider location may provide different findings and add to the body of literature on WLB and the self-employed mother who works full time from the home.

CHAPTER 6: CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This dissertation involved an exploration into the WLB of self-employed mothers who worked full-time from home. An interpretive, qualitative and inductive exploration was undertaken. The aim of the study was to understand the interpretations and subjective experiences of those very women. WLB was acknowledged as a subjective topic. The very simple definition chosen for this dissertation is as follows: “Work-life balance is simply how individuals choose to prioritize their work, family, individual and community responsibilities” (Munn *et al.*, p. 1, 2011). The subjective nature of this topic became apparent when all participants proposed different definitions of WLB when requested.

The literature review outlined the academic studies surrounding the WLB and self-employment. It was acknowledged that whilst a large body of academia surrounds WLB, this academia gets smaller when one links WLB and self-employment. It gets smaller still when one includes the search requirement of: conducting one’s business full time from home. Prevalent within the study of self-employment is homogeneity around such a grouping. Whereas the reality shows that there exists great differences of occupation within the self-employment sector (Annink and den Dulk 2016). Such acknowledgements should be taken into consideration when conducting further research.

A proposed conceptual framework was developed by the researcher to assist them in this study. The conceptual framework was comprised of different and salient elements taken from various WLB related models and theories. Such elements included job demands and job resources, time and space to care for oneself and others and the life stage of one’s family. Such elements were believed to possibly influence WLB. Semi-structured interviews took place that would allow the researcher to examine and explore these elements. The semi-structured interview questions were informed by this conceptual framework. The conceptual framework also provided a structure throughout the dissertation that enabled one to link the framework to the findings of the semi-structured interview. Additionally, the conceptual framework proved to be part and parcel of the findings of the research aims and objectives which will now be summarized.

Question 1: How do self-employed mothers who work full-time from home experience WLB?

It was found that participants had deliberately chosen self-employment as a means of structuring their life such that work revolved around their family life. They acknowledged they struggled with juggling their WLB which could be linked to the conflict perspective on WLB (Greenhaus and Powell, 2006). Tools used to manage their WLB included extensive diary management, which enabled them to form routines which also resulted in impacting positively upon their WLB. Personal time and space to care for others and the life stage of family which were elements in the proposed conceptual framework, were linked to the theme of work revolving around life and thus were deemed to have a positive impact upon an individual's WLB.

Question 2: What strategies to they use to maintain a WLB?

Boundaries, both physical and temporal were used as strategies by participants to maintain a WLB and a source of order. Non-work activities were found to be a priority amongst participants in maintaining a WLB. There appeared to be what one could refer to as a "goldilocks zone" when physical working boundaries were discussed. The optimum physical boundary was considered to be a separate building from the family house which could be either walked to in seconds or driven to in 1 or 2 minutes. Such separation allowed for less disturbance when working and encouraged a process of routine due to such separation. The theme of boundaries was associated with the element of personal time and space to care for oneself within the conceptual framework and could be seen to have a positive impact upon one's WLB. Boundaries could also be viewed as a resource as they supported the demands of the individual.

Question 3: How does working from home impact life outside work?

The use of boundaries, both physical and temporal, to maintain a distinction between the work and life sphere enabled participants to maintain order around one's working life and life outside work. Additionally, the conscious choice of allowing work to revolve around family signalled how WLB was structured such that the family domain took precedence over the working domain. The outsourcing of family demands such as the engagement of a 'secret cleaner' by one participant, allowed for less conflict within the home, leading to greater WLB. Participant 6: *"I have a secret cleaner that comes*

in here once a month and cleans our house and my husband doesn't know. The house doesn't annoy him anymore because it is clean all the time, it's a positive". Demands were found to impact negatively upon WLB, thus resources are used, in the above case, financial resources were used, to negate the demands of an untidy home.

Participants also made a conscious choice to leave their work domain and engage in non-work life activities which allowed them personal time, and led to greater WLB.

Question 4: How does working from home affect their career progression?

There was a deliberate choice by participants to keep their businesses small which then allowed them to maintain a WLB, where work revolved around family life. It was also interesting to note that support in the form of mentors was considered extremely important by participants, whether it was a family member or peer to peer support. The mentor provided them with guidelines and a structure on future career progression.

The main themes that emerged: work revolving around life, boundaries, job demands, flexibility and support have been shown to be related to the sub-objectives of the research question. Additionally, the elements of the conceptual framework have been found to indeed impact upon WLB, through their relationship with the themes main themes. WLB was viewed by the participants from the conflicting perspective and Moen *et al's.* (2008) work-life model, formed the background that participants used to continually readjust their WLB such that it suited their particular requirements.

The implications of these finding are that they follow previous research in WLB and self-employment studies, such as those undertaken by Hilbrecht and Lero (2014) and Myrie and Daly (2007). These findings will add to the body of limited academic literature on WLB and self-employment. Additional research on WLB and the self-employed who work full-time from home is necessary to expand learning on this topic.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Join a local business group

It can be quite an isolating experience when one is both and living and working full-time from the home. It is therefore recommended that participants join a business

group that meets either once a week or once a month. One can gain valuable business knowledge and build up a business and support network which will impact positively upon one's business. This will have a positive knock on effect upon one's WLB.

Non-work activities

The importance of being able to both physically and emotionally switch-off from work was repeatedly discussed throughout this dissertation. It is therefore recommended that those who do work full-time from home, whether self-employed or an employee, should make the effort to regularly indulge in non-work activities, as a form of relaxation and rejuvenation. This will also impact positively upon one's WLB.

Adaptation and diversification

Both adaptation and diversification were noted as being important for career progression and viability. Particularly, being located in a rural area, when one is working full time from home and is self-employed, one must be willing to adapt their work life such that their business may remain viable. Additionally, being willing to adapt and be flexible regarding one's WLB is particularly relevant when dealing with a family with young children.

Mentor

The importance of a mentor became really apparent during this dissertation. It provided an individual with a resource that was there to help them succeed in their business and provide them with guidance. Mentors should be made available to smaller self-employed business owners, particularly in rural areas as the advice they provide is invaluable.

IMPLICATIONS OF FINDINGS

Joining a local business group should be something that a self-employed individual working full time from home does upon commencement of their business. There is no time-frame involved here as this should be something that is done concurrently with setting up one's business. There is an opportunity cost associated with not availing of such a valuable local business network. Additionally, by joining a local business group, one could be introduced to a potential mentor which would benefit one's business.

WLB and self-employment are such subjective topics, it is challenging to provide a time frame for a mentor, as each self-employed individual will essentially choose for themselves when such a resource is required. There is also the financial cost of a professional mentor. This is something that only the self-employed individual can decide upon. However, it could be said that the opportunity cost of not engaging a mentor is detrimental to one's business.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX 1: INTERVIEW CONSENT FORM

**AN EXPLORATORY STUDY INTO THE WORK-LIFE BALANCE OF SELF-EMPLOYED
MOTHERS WORKING FULL-TIME FROM HOME
CONSENT TO TAKE PART IN RESEARCH**

Dear Participant,

First and foremost, many thanks for taking the time to participate in my research.

Study Description

The purpose of my research is to investigate the work-life balance of self-employed mothers who work full time from home. The study aims to explore how self-employed mothers who work full-time from home experience work-life balance. What strategies do they use to maintain a work-life balance? How does working from home impact their life outside work? How their work-life balance impacts on their career progression.

Your involvement within the research project will be in the form of an interview. This interview will consist of a series of open ended questions. The duration of the interview is estimated to be approximately 40mins. Please respond to all questions to the best of your ability.

- I voluntarily agree to participate in this research study.
- I understand that even if I agree to participate now, I can withdraw at any time or refuse to answer any question without any consequence of any kind.
- I understand that I can withdraw permission to use data from my interview within two weeks after the interview, in which case the material will be deleted.
- I have had the purpose and nature of the study explained to me in writing and I have had the opportunity to ask questions about the study.
- I understand that participation involves agreeing to be interviewed about my WLB.

- I understand that I will not benefit directly from participating in this research.
- I agree to my interview being audio-recorded.
- I understand that all information I provide for this study will be treated confidentially.
- I understand that signed consent forms and original audio recordings will be retained in Sligo in a locked box that only the researcher has access to until the researcher receives the results of their dissertation. After that time, it will be deleted.
- I understand that a transcript of my interview which may contain any identifying material about me will be removed.
- I understand that under freedom of information legislation, I am entitled to access the information I have provided at any time while it is in storage as specified above.

SIGNATURE OF PARTICIPANT

DATE

SIGNATURE OF RESEARCHER

DATE

I believe the participant is giving informed consent to participate in this study

APPENDIX 2: INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS ON THE WORK-LIFE BALANCE OF SELF-EMPLOYED MOTHERS WORKING FROM HOME

QUESTION 1: Why did you choose to become self-employed and work full-time from home?

Janine provides interviewee with definition of WLB:

“Work-life balance is simply how individuals choose to prioritize their work, family, individual and community responsibilities”

QUESTION 2: Do you agree with this definition of WLB?

QUESTION 3: How would you define WLB?

QUESTION 4: How conscious are you of your own WLB?

QUESTION 5: How do you view the process of WLB? Is it a struggle or a juggle?

QUESTION 6: Tell me about your working hours including weekends and holidays?

QUESTION 7: Does work interfere with life or does life interfere with work?

QUESTION 8. Can you tell me about a specific time, in the last month that you have had the time and space to take care of yourself? Is this a priority?

QUESTION 9. Do you have a separate space for your work and how do you feel about having this space (or not)

➤ How does this impact on your work-life balance.

QUESTION 10. What restrictions (if any) do you encounter when trying to maintain a separate work area?

QUESTION 11: What is most important to you when thinking about your WLB?

QUESTION 12: What aspects of your job do you find the most challenging?

QUESTION 13: What elements of self-employment help you maintain a WLB?

QUESTION 14: Tell me about a good day for you in relation to your WLB?

QUESTION 15: How does your job impact upon your family life?

QUESTION 16: How does your job make you as an individual feel?

QUESTION 17: How have your family and work responsibilities impacted upon your career progression?

QUESTION 18: How has running your own business impacted upon your decision making ability in relation to your WLB?

QUESTION 19: It has been observed that setting goals and priorities is important in finding a good WLB. How do you think this may be applied to you?

QUESTION 20: Do you feel that WLB is possible for you? Has self-employment contributed to your WLB?

APPENDIX 3: PERSONAL LEARNING STATEMENT

This has been by far and away the most challenging academic endeavour I have ever undertaken. I have learnt a lot academically, but I have probably learnt more about myself throughout this process. I have both enjoyed and despaired at varying times throughout this dissertation. What I have absolutely learnt though is to just persevere, do not give up and get the job done, to the best of your ability. My tutor said this is just about getting this dissertation finished and over the line and how right she was! I am delighted.

APPENDIX 4: LIBRARY SUBMISSION FORM

Appendix: Submission of Thesis to Norma Smurfit Library, National College of Ireland

Student name: Janine Boyd

Student number: 14126885

School: School of Business

Course: MA HRM

Degree to be awarded: Master of Arts, Human Resource Management

Title of Thesis: An exploratory study into the work-life balance of self-employed mothers who work full time from home

One hard bound copy of your thesis will be lodged in the Norma Smurfit Library and will be available for consultation. The electronic copy will be accessible in TRAP (<http://trap.ncirl.ie/>), the National College of Ireland's Institutional Repository. In accordance with normal academic library practice all theses lodged in the National College of Ireland Institutional Repository (TRAP) are made available on open access.

I agree to a hard bound copy of my thesis being available for consultation in the library. I also agree to an electronic copy of my thesis being made publicly available on the National College of Ireland's Institutional Repository TRAP.

Signature of Candidate:

For completion by the School:

The aforementioned thesis was received by:

Date:

This signed form must be appended to all hard bound and electronic copies of your thesis submitted to your school.