

Spousal Roles on Motivations for Entrepreneurship: A Qualitative Study in New Zealand

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Abstract Little is known about the role the spouse plays in an entrepreneur's motivations for entrepreneurship. A gender comparative qualitative study is presented, based on interviews with 68 entrepreneurs (45 men and 23 women) in New Zealand. A continuum of spousal support is described—those whose spouses are co-founders, supportive spouses, and unsupportive/ambivalent spouses. Findings show that women and men tend to have different expectations of their spouse when contemplating starting a business. A woman looks to her husband for business advice, for support, and encouragement and considers the effects that starting a business may have on her spouse. A man tends to assume support is forthcoming, and some men start businesses without explicit spousal support. Contributions to theories of family business are made.

Keywords Co-founders · Entrepreneurs · Gender · Motivations · Spouse · Support

Introduction

While the family and the business have been studied as two separate systems, recently more awareness has been placed on examining the importance of the interface between the business and the family (Duncan et al. 2000; Heck et al. 2008; Hennon et al. 1998; Masuo et al. 2001). In fact, Dew (2008) found family businesses have featured strongly as a theme in his review of research in the *Journal of Family and Economic Issues* over the past 20 years. This study

centers on the role that business founders' spouses play in relation to their motivations for entrepreneurship. In this study the term spouse is used as an umbrella term for wife, husband, partner, or a de-facto partner. Spouses have been the subject of research in family research; such as, financial risk taking behavior (Jianakoplos and Bernasek 2008), work-family balance (Kirkwood and Tootell 2008), satisfaction with leisure time (Garcia et al. 2007), inclusion and control (Stewart and Danes 2001) and tensions, conflict and satisfaction (Amarapurkar and Danes 2005). Other related areas of research focused on the role of spouses inside the home, particularly in relation to time use studies regarding household management and housework tasks (Winkler and Ireland 2009). With respect to the entrepreneurship literature, the role of spouses on motivations for entrepreneurship has received scant empirical attention (Maccauley 2006; Marshack 1994; Muske and Fitzgerald 2006; Poza and Messer 2001). More empirical research has been called for about how different types of family involvement at the start-up stage influence the founder's performance (Sharma 2004), and for more understanding of the role of the support people around entrepreneurs, particularly the differences between male and female entrepreneurs (Philbrick and Fitzgerald 2007).

While studies have focused on the wives of male entrepreneurs, little research has looked at the role female entrepreneurs' spouses play in entrepreneurship. This is of growing importance as over recent years the incidence of women's entrepreneurship continues to rise globally (Langowitz and Minniti 2007). Researchers asked whether there are *invisible men behind the scenes* who contribute to business in the similar ways that females do in male-owned businesses (Philbrick and Fitzgerald 2007). Only one empirical study has observed women playing the dominant role in the family business (in 11% of the ethnic family

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businesses studied), with their husbands helping out (Alcorso 1993). Calls have been made to further investigate the spouses of female entrepreneurs and to understand whether they contribute similarly or differently than the wives of male entrepreneurs (Philbrick and Fitzgerald 2007). There are two key research questions that this study aimed to answer:

- What is the role of spouses on an individual's motivations for entrepreneurship?
- Do these roles differ for female and male entrepreneurs? If so, how?

Theoretical Framework

These research questions can be interpreted through a number of theoretical perspectives and from the empirical studies conducted to date. The role of spouses in entrepreneurship intersects three interrelated fields—entrepreneurship, family studies and gender studies fields. From these fields there are a number of theories or models that are relevant and useful to the current study.

The Family FIRO (Fundamental Interpersonal Relationship Orientation) model is one such model. This model has been adapted from a group development model and applied to the family and family business settings. It is based on a systems view of family businesses and includes three dimensions of family interaction—inclusion, control, and integration (Danes et al. 2002). A study of husbands and wives on family farms has given support to this model, suggesting that both a sense of inclusion and the ways in which control is managed are important in achieving integration in the family business (Danes et al. 2002). For example, a study of resort family businesses investigated the relationship between inclusion tension to be a predictor for both husbands and wives in relation to family conflict and found this depended on factors such as age, locus of control and sales (Stewart and Danes 2001). In a similar setting, couples who owned farms have been studied to investigate relationships between business tensions, conflict, and spousal satisfaction (Amarapurkar and Danes 2005). Farm women's roles have specifically been observed (Danes and McTavish 1997). Others propose a sustainable family business model as a research tool to aid in understanding the family and businesses and the intersection of the two—the family business (Stafford et al. 1999).

Family business researchers have proposed other theoretical models to help expand our understanding of family businesses. One such perspective is a family embeddedness perspective (Aldrich and Cliff 2003). This concept is based around the idea that people are part of networks of social

relations and “do not decide to start a business in a vacuum” (Aldrich and Cliff 2003, p. 577). Aldrich and Cliff (2003) go further to suggest that the family embeddedness perspective model shows that family system characteristics comprise three interrelated components: transitions (e. g., marriage, divorce, childbirth); resources (e. g., financial, human, social); and norms, attitudes, and values. Within this final category there are norms with respect to the interaction between family members, attitudes toward work and family and instrumental and terminal values. These family system characteristics in turn may impact on the business start-up process (and their outcomes) (Aldrich and Cliff 2003). While this review outlines two such frameworks within the field of family entrepreneurship, there are many other approaches (for a more complete review of family business frameworks, see Heck et al. 2008). Recent research has highlighted the need to bring these various perspectives together in order to advance research in the area (Heck et al. 2008).

The gender studies literature offers yet another perspective. Women have been found to think relationally when making decisions about their careers (Lirio et al. 2007; Mainiero and Sullivan 2006). Brush (1992) has extended these concepts to the case of female entrepreneurs and labels this an integrated perspective. The major premise behind this perspective is that women perceive their businesses as a cooperative network of relationships, rather than as economic units. That is, for a woman, business relationships cannot be separated from family, societal and personal relationships and “the business is integrated into the woman business owner's life” (Brush 1992, p. 16). This perspective stems from the work of Gilligan (1982) who theorized that women and men have different conceptions of self and, therefore, have different ways of thinking about relationships. This author's interpretation of these perspectives leads to the proposition that there may be gender differences in relation to how the spouse affects an entrepreneur's motivations for starting a business.

Literature Review

Role of Spouses in Motivations for Business Start-Up

A review of prior studies show that entrepreneurial motivations generally revolve around four key drivers: (a) a desire for independence; (b) monetary motivations; (c) factors related to family; and (d) those related to work (DeMartino and Barbato 2003; Segal et al. 2005). Results of gender comparative studies show that independence and work-related motivations appear to be universal motivators for both women and men. Some gender differences have been found in monetary-related motivators. The majority of

gender differences relate to the family as a motivator (Kirkwood 2004). Thus, the family is a strong factor in a woman's motivations for becoming an entrepreneur (Buttner and Moore 1997; Kim 1996; Mallon and Cohen 2001). Gender differences exist in combining wage and domestic labor (Buttner and Moore 1997; Still and Soutar 2001), family policies and family obligations (DeMartino and Barbato 2003), the fit with domestic commitments (Greenfield and Nayak 1992), and child-rearing (Cromie 1987). The conclusions of these studies all point to women requiring flexibility between their roles as professionals and as mothers. This becomes a factor in their motivations for leaving paid employment to become entrepreneurs (Mallon and Cohen 2001).

In the few studies that specifically address the spouse's impact, there are indications that they may play an influential role in motivations for entrepreneurship. Discussions with a spouse about "dreams, time demands, and financial risk" have been found to be important to a business start-up (Van Auken and Werbel 2006, p. 59). In a study of ethnic family businesses, decisions to start a business were often made "in the context of narrowly defined, traditional gender roles within the family" (Alcorso 1993, p. 102). It has also been contested that many male-owned businesses would not become established (and succeed) without help from the female spouse (Alcorso 1993; Baines and Wheelock 1998; Rosa and Hamilton 1994). The help of a spouse has also been found to be particularly important in the start-up stages of the business (Wheelock and Baines 1998).

One of the key instances where the spouse plays a significant role in motivations for entrepreneurship is among those who co-founded and/or co-own a business with their spouse. Copreneurs can be defined as any couple who share a work and personal relationship—this does not necessarily mean they must co-own the business (Fitzgerald and Muske 2002). Fitzgerald and Muske (2002) noted the definitional issues surrounding the term copreneur and suggested their broad definition appreciates that while spouses may work only a few hours in a business, they may hold a great deal of power over the operation and direction of the business. Research on these copreneurs is relatively limited (Cole and Johnson 2007) and has often been published in the popular press rather than in academic journals (Smith 2000). In their multiple method study, Baines and Wheelock (1998) found that 21% of their 200 respondents were co-owners of a business with a spouse. However, when a subset of these business owners were interviewed, only 6 of the 21 spouse-owned businesses studied could be classed as copreneurs where equal sharing of tasks and responsibilities exists (Baines and Wheelock 1998). Others have similarly observed that husbands view themselves as leaders when they are working in these types of business;

whereas, women are more engaged in administrative tasks (Marshack 1994). Copreneurial businesses are found to be dynamic, where over time spouses may move in and out of this arrangement of working and sharing responsibilities for the business (Muske and Fitzgerald 2006), even after divorce (Cole and Johnson 2007).

Role of Spouses in Established Businesses

The majority of research on entrepreneurs' spouses has focused on their roles in the later stages of business. Research has focused on the number of wives who work in their husbands' businesses (Danes and Olson 2003), leadership roles (Danes and Olson 2003; Poza and Messer 2001), and interpersonal dynamics (Danes et al. 2002). It is common to find the spouses of male entrepreneurs formally working in the business or informally providing unpaid labor (Baines and Wheelock 1998). Gender differences exist in the types of work that spouses of male and female entrepreneurs undertake within the business (Alcorso 1993). The work performed by the spouses of male entrepreneurs is often administrative (Baines and Wheelock 1998; Maccauley 2006) and typically unpaid or unacknowledged (Sinclair 2000). These gender differences mirror the traditional roles of women and men, with women adopting a less authoritative role, while men focus more on planning for the future of the business, budgeting, buying, and employing staff (Alcorso 1993), or technical support (Baines and Wheelock 1998). These findings have led researchers to suggest that the spouses of male entrepreneurs are invisible (Philbrick and Fitzgerald 2007).

While it may be invisible, this spousal labor is often vital to the financial performance (Van Auken and Werbel 2006) and indeed the survival of some businesses (Baines and Wheelock 1998). Statistics highlight gender differences—only 35% of the spouses of female entrepreneurs take any part in the business, while 60% of male-owned businesses have help from a spouse (Miettinen 1986). The low incidence of female entrepreneurs' spouses working in the business is highlighted in one study in which there were no such examples in a sample of 21 businesses (Baines and Wheelock 1998). Others obtained similar findings, where 57% of wives worked in the business (22% worked 20 or more hours). Around half of these wives were in paid roles and 60% also had jobs outside the family business (Danes and Olson 2003). Research also concludes that many wives of male entrepreneurs give up their own careers to help their spouses (Burke and Belcourt 1989). A spouse may also move into the business once it became successful (Muske and Fitzgerald 2006).

Recent research highlights a lack of understanding of spouses who are not involved in managing the business (Philbrick and Fitzgerald 2007). While spouses of male

entrepreneurs do not often have significant involvement in the leadership of the business, they are nevertheless vital to the functioning of the business (Marshack 1994) and may have a great deal of invisible power (Gillis-Donovan and Moynihan-Bradt 1990). There has also been a focus on the roles that males and females play within family businesses and their roles within the family (Fitzgerald et al. 2001; Lee et al. 2006a, b).

The Business-Family Interface

In addition to spouses working in businesses, there are also potential effects on the functioning of the family. The role that business ownership plays in a person's life has been found to be associated with the division of labor within the household (Hundley 2001). Evidence of such traditional roles within the household has been found in studies of copreneurs, where traditional gendered roles were maintained in the business and at home (Smith 2000). Women have historically undertaken the majority of the childcare role, and this appears to continue after moving into entrepreneurship (Lee-Gosselin and Grisé 1990; Marlow and Strange 1994). While many copreneurs report that they are satisfied with these arrangements (Marshack 1994), this adherence to traditional roles means that there are many examples of women in family businesses operating a third shift. This is where they are working in the business and in paid employment, as well as managing the household (Lee et al. 2006a, b).

Managing multiple roles can then lead to work-family conflict. The support given by spouses has been found to be important in reducing work-family conflict among female entrepreneurs (Kim and Ling 2001; Marcinjus et al. 2007) and in facilitating the functioning of families (Philbrick and Fitzgerald 2007). Family businesses may allow greater ability to balance work and family, indicated by the lower levels of childcare that is outsourced when women work in the family business compared to those women who work outside the family business (Avery et al. 2000). The relationship between family success and business success has been found to be significant. Family success has been observed as positively impacting on the success of the business but the reverse does not apply (Masuo et al. 2001). A further study concluded that the way partners deal with conflict may impact on the success of the business (Danes et al. 2000).

New Zealand Context

New Zealand is the setting for this study (population four million). It is important to present some background

information on New Zealand entrepreneurial climate as this is the context for the study and may have an impact on the interpretation of the findings in this study. New Zealand is a country of small-medium enterprises (SMEs) with 19 or fewer employees (Ministry of Economic Development 2007). The SME sector plays a significant role in the economy both in terms of wealth creation and in employment (Ministry of Economic Development 2007). Ninety-six percent of all enterprises in this country employ 19 or fewer employees, and 87% employ five or fewer employees (Ministry of Economic Development 2007).

New Zealand is also widely regarded as being highly entrepreneurial in comparison to other countries. The last Global Entrepreneurship Monitor (GEM) with data from New Zealand found that it had the highest percentage of opportunity entrepreneurs of all 35 participating countries. This suggests that entrepreneurs in New Zealand are primarily pulled into entrepreneurship rather than pushed into it (necessity entrepreneurs; Frederick and Chittock 2006). This high level of entrepreneurship (particularly opportunity entrepreneurs) may impact on the findings of this study because of the higher number of people who are open to entrepreneurship as a career option. The New Zealand Government believes that an enterprise culture is a priority in the promotion of businesses' entrepreneurial and innovative capabilities (Hull 2003). It has implemented a number of initiatives such as BIZ, an advice centre started in the late 1990s (Massey and Jurado 2005), and the Small Business Advisory Group, a nine-member group of business owners that makes recommendations to government. New Zealand also has one of the simplest and quickest online processes for incorporating a business (www.companies.govt.nz).

New Zealand has comparatively higher numbers of female entrepreneurs than other countries, ranking fifth highest in the 34 countries studied in the Global Entrepreneurship Monitor (Minniti et al. 2004). New Zealand shows less of a gender gap (50% of men and 46% of women) in women's participation in entrepreneurship when compared with other countries (Koellinger et al. 2008). This high participation of women in entrepreneurship has not been due to government measures—the government has not provided any specific forms of assistance for women to become entrepreneurs. However, one government initiative includes a focus on women in enterprise in a five-year action plan for women (Ministry of Women's Affairs 2004).

Methodology

Given the limited understanding that exists about the role of spouses in motivations for entrepreneurship, a

qualitative method was considered to be the most appropriate approach for this research. Qualitative methods are particularly useful in areas that are not well advanced theoretically (Paulin et al. 1982). Other researchers support the use of qualitative approaches when researching the role of family in entrepreneurship (Aldrich and Cliff 2003). The complex decision to become an entrepreneur lends itself to an interview which allows for “full expression of the interrelationships between the many variables that can impact on one person’s ultimate decision to start a business” (Stevenson 1990, p. 442). A qualitative research interview’s purpose is defined by Kvale (1996) as attempting to understand a topic from the subject’s viewpoint, and “to unfold the meaning of people’s experiences, to uncover their world” (p. 1). An interview is a mutual effort on the part of the interviewee and interviewer and, therefore, it is important also to gauge the effects of the context surrounding the interview. This social context of the interview is vital, which is important to consider in when making sense of data (Silverman 1993). In this study, semi-structured interviews were chosen because they are considered to be a good method of gaining people’s perceptions (Stainback and Stainback 1988). Interpretive researchers view the relationship between researcher and participant as important and necessary (Benny and Hughes 1970; King 1994). It is recognized that all researchers bring “our biases, assumptions, patterns of thinking, and knowledge gained from experience and reading” (Strauss and Corbin 1990, p. 95).

Definitions

In this study, an entrepreneur is defined as someone who is the founder of a new for-profit business that employs at least one other paid employee. There are many different views on what constitutes an entrepreneur (see, for example Carland et al. 1984; Gartner 1990) and no consensus definition has been settled on. The definition used in this study focuses on the founding role, one that arguably requires more risk to the individual (and their spouse and family) than other forms of business ownership; such as, purchasing or inheriting an existing business.

The Sample and Data Collection

The sample emerged from a quantitative study that used the *New Zealand Business Who’s Who*—a listing of businesses and their owners in New Zealand. The selection process was based on entrepreneurs who met this definition, had started their businesses no longer than 10 years prior, and also on the practical need to minimize travel expenses. The retrospective nature of this study is undoubtedly a limitation (discussed in the section on limitations). Interviews

were held in five of New Zealand’s largest cities—Auckland, Wellington, Christchurch, Dunedin and Invercargill. This author interviewed all 75 participants in a face-to-face format. Seven participants were single at the time of starting their business so they have been excluded from further analysis. Therefore, this paper reports on the experiences of the 68 entrepreneurs who had a spouse. Face-to-face interviews were selected as the most appropriate means of data collection, because the nature of entrepreneurial motivations are often complex and intertwined (Mallon and Cohen 2001; Marlow and Strange 1994; Shane et al. 1991). Motivations for entrepreneurship can also relate to other personal events in one’s life that require a degree of trust between the interviewer and the participant so that the participant is comfortable about divulging this information if appropriate. Ethical approval was gained for this study. The researcher assured participants that under no circumstances would their identity or the name of their company be identified.

Prior to the interviews, the author conducted a literature review to understand the issues surrounding the role of the spouse in entrepreneurial motivations. A semi-structured interview schedule was drawn up and two pilot interviews were conducted in order to help develop the questions and add further questions as issues emerged from these interviews. The resulting questions were designed to gauge individual opinions and, therefore, were broad and open-ended. Interviews ranged in time from 45 min to over three hours, and one part of the interview focused on the participant’s spouse. Most interviews lasted approximately 90 min and all were tape-recorded and transcribed. Some demographics of the sample are presented in Table 1, which shows that male and female participants were relatively similar across most demographics such as industry, sales, and ethnic origin. Gender differences lie in the number of participants who had children at the time of starting their business. Just over half of the women had children at this time, while 87% of men did so.

It is important that the sample’s composition be compared to New Zealand businesses and entrepreneurs. The sample is relatively representative in terms of industry sectors in New Zealand. The service sector makes up approximately two-thirds of the economy and the primary and goods-producing industries have been relatively stable or decreasing slightly from 2001 (Statistics New Zealand 2007). The sample is overly representative of people of Pakeha or European origins. Maori are New Zealand’s native people, accounting for around 15% of the total population (Statistics New Zealand 2001), while this study comprises just over 5% Maori. In terms of age, the sample is older than the median population as it is a study of adults only. In 2006 the median age of New Zealanders was 36, and statistics show that the population is aging (Statistics

Table 1 Sample demographics by gender (*N* = 75)

	Men (<i>n</i> = 47)	Men (%)	Women (<i>n</i> = 28)	Women (%)
Ethnic origin				
Pakeha/European	45	96.7	26	92.9
Maori	1	2.1	1	3.6
Other	1	2.1	1	3.6
Age				
Under 35	1	2.1	5	17.9
35–39	7	14.9	6	21.4
40–44	11	23.4	3	10.7
45–49	8	17.0	5	17.9
50+	20	42.6	9	32.1
Industry				
Service	25	53.2	17	60.7
Manufacturing	8	17.0	3	10.7
Retail	4	8.5	2	7.1
Other	10	21.3	6	21.4
Annual sales NZD (1NZD = 0.62 USD)				
Under \$100,000	7	14.9	4	14.3
100–500,000	9	19.1	10	35.7
500,000–1 million	18	38.3	8	28.6
Over 1 million	11	23.4	5	17.9
Undisclosed	2	4.2	1	3.6
Parents owned business	23	48.9	18	64.3
Married or with a partner	45	95.7	23	82.1
Children at time of start-up	41	87.2	15	53.6

New Zealand 2008). The sample contains a relatively large proportion of participants who are over 50 years of age (42% of men and 32% of women). These issues are returned to in suggestions for further research.

Data Analysis

The QSR NUD*IST Vivo (Nvivo) software package was used to manage the data. Transcripts were coded according to themes and analyzed using a constant comparison approach (Glaser 1992). The data were coded by paragraph and sentence as proposed by Strauss and Corbin (1990). Code notes were initial thoughts about themes, and possible relationships and issues that appeared important to the participants. Analysis began by coding the transcripts and from this categories emerged. Some qualitative researchers avoid numbers altogether but, in this paper the author reported percentages of occurrences and tables with participants’ quotes to provide a sense of the entire range of responses. While some would argue that this is a positivist

approach, the numbers are illustrative only, with the interpretive approach being more concerned with explaining how and why gender differences exist (if they do). Reliable methods and valid conclusions are essential to any good piece of research. In this study, the issue of credibility and transferability was addressed in three main ways: (a) using convergent interviews and native categories, (b) selecting quotes and contrary cases, and (c) in the use of tabulations. Native categories are those that the participants use themselves, rather than those developed by the researcher when interpreting their answers. Data reduction in qualitative research is a necessary task and portions of transcripts have been selected to illustrate the views of participants. Participants’ own categories were tabulated as suggested by Silverman (2000). Given that there were 68 participants, it was necessary to select portions of transcripts to illustrate the opinions and views of participants. Care was taken to mitigate any concerns about the selection of quotations by showing a range of direct quotations (see Tables 3, 4, 5). The issue of dependability was also addressed in three ways: (a) inter-coder agreement, (b) field notes and (c) tape recording the interviews. A postgraduate student who was unfamiliar with the research coded five interview transcripts using seven of the codes (including the spouse). The additional coder was in agreement in 67 coded sections and in disagreement five times. Additionally, field notes were also taken to supplement the recorded interviews and all interviews were tape-recorded and transcribed.

Discussion of Findings

Three distinct levels of spousal support are evident in this study as shown in Table 2. Table 2 indicates a number of initial observations with respect to the incidence of gender differences within the sample. First, more women co-founded their businesses with their spouses. The second observation is that there was a generally high level of support from spouses at the time of business start-up (and were similar incidences of supportive spouses between

Table 2 Spousal support in motivations for entrepreneurship (*N* = 68^a)

	Men (<i>n</i> = 45)	Percentage	Women (<i>n</i> = 23)	Percentage
Co-founders	4	9	6	26
Supportive	35	78	17	74
Ambivalent/not supportive	6	13	0	0

Note: ^a 7 participants were single at time of start-up

genders). Finally, no women started their businesses without spousal support while six men did. While these percentages are useful in the first instance, the purpose of this research is to provide an understanding of how any gender differences are enacted, as well as explaining why they might be apparent.

Each of the three levels of spousal support found in the sample is now discussed in turn, along with illustrative verbatim quotes from participants.

Co-Founders: “Feeding Off Each Other”

Ten of the participants (six women and four men) founded their current business with their spouse. Examples of insights from eight of these participants are presented in Table 3.

There are obviously high levels of spousal support (both tangible and intangible) to be expected if entrepreneurs are co-founding new businesses with their spouses. However, two sub-themes (equality and control) emerged when analyzing the co-founder category. First, some participants desired equality in their decisions about entering the business and subsequent decisions and directions, while the experiences of others highlight that the male spouse is perceived to be in control.

For most of these co-founders, going into business with their spouses was a mutual decision that had been discussed widely and was considered to be in their best interests as a couple (and family). The decision had either been made after some type of crisis at work, or on a return from overseas where neither of the couple had jobs. For example, Trevor started a business with his wife and discussed their ownership relationship in an equal manner, and talked of “feeding off” one another for the betterment of their family. They now work together in the business on a daily basis. He saw their decision to start a business as a

joint one which benefited them both. Similarly, Cara saw starting a business with her spouse as an ideal situation. Her case is particularly interesting as she has a history of owning businesses. Cara operated all of these previous businesses alone, so it is interesting to hear her suggestion she would not have been able to start (and manage) her current manufacturing business without her husband’s involvement (“neither of us could have done it without the other”). This may hint at a lack of confidence in her abilities and reluctance to start and operate the business without spousal support.

The remaining participants who had co-founded businesses with their spouses show less equality in their decisions and one spouse (the husband) appeared more in control of the business. Sue and Todd’s comments illustrate their views on this. Sue found herself in the position of being a co-founder of the business but her husband (now ex-husband) asserted ownership: “It was always his business.” Sue found herself working just as hard as her husband, and appeared to resent the lack of recognition she received from him and others that she was a copreneur. Likewise, Todd co-founded the business with his wife but made it clear that he was ultimately in charge “I run the business, I make the final decisions now, the big decisions.” He spoke of managing his company like a team where he is ultimately the “captain” of the team. One of the female participants offers another similar situation. Kay illustrated how she viewed her husband as being an equal owner in the business, but she did the vast majority (“essentially 99%”) of the day-to-day work in the business. Kay considered he had an important non-working role to play as her “reins.” These reins act as a way of slowing Kay down in some of her decisions regarding the business (such as growing her business further and borrowing more money). She looks to others when making decisions, and takes advice from her husband on important strategic matters.

Table 3 Sample quotes from co-founders

Women	Men
Neither of us could have done it without the other, do you know what I mean?—Cara	Barbara [wife] and I feed off each other. We each have experiences, and we are combining that to the betterment of what we are doing—Trevor
We both knew that we wanted to work for ourselves—Lauren	So we decided that we would do that, we being my wife and I—Julian
Jim and I are equal partners, although essentially 99% of the work is done by me. He is the reins—Kay	Are we going to commit to the business? So we did. We said right let’s do it. Get on with it—Larry
It was always his business even though, it’s a mental thing... even though this person [Sue] is working 40 hours a week (laughs), to help me—Sue	But I run the business, I make the final decisions now, the big decisions I consult with her because she is very wise but the buck stops, got to stop on one desk my desk. And so, you have got [to] have a Managing Director—Todd

Supportive Spouse: “Behind It All the Way”

This second category of support includes spouses who were supportive at the time of start-up but were not co-founders of the business. Approximately three-quarters of the sample of both women and men could be classified in this category and a range of accounts from these participants is presented in Table 4.

The female participants here described seeking advice, being appreciative of the support their spouses had given them and giving credit for their input. As illustrated in the cases of Lisa, Rae, Chloe and Kate, there was strong support from their husbands in their decision to start a business. For example, Kate talked of her husband and brother and said she “couldn’t have had two stronger supporters.” In Rae’s case, she recalled that her “partner was behind it all the way.” Some of the women had husbands who had owned businesses, so they had role models to look to for advice and support in their own entrepreneurial decisions. For instance, Kate “took advice...because my husband was a successful businessman.” These women not only received moral support for their entrepreneurial decisions, but they had the advantage of being able to seek tangible business advice from their spouses who were experienced in business ownership.

Lisa also had strong support from her husband and she described this support as vital as “I don’t think I could have

done it without the support I got from him.” This indicates that for many women spousal support was vital prior to starting a business. Lisa also received practical support in terms of job-sharing once the business was established so the couple could look after their three young children together. Another two women (Jean and Kay) also had support for their entrepreneurial ventures but considered themselves to be “lucky” to have the support of their husbands. Kay recalled: “I suppose my partner encouraged me because he allowed it to happen.” She considers herself to be fortunate to have the support of her spouse, and implies that she didn’t expect to have this support automatically. Her excerpt offers a hint that her husband also had the final say on whether her business went ahead. This is further indicated in the following section where no women started businesses without spousal support.

The tone of many of the comments in Table 4 illustrates the different mode of thinking that male participants had about their spouses in their motivations for starting businesses—being pushed by their spouses or going ahead regardless of support. In only a few cases did the male participants seek out their spouse’s support and advice in starting businesses, as the women did. Vince’s wife was encouraging and he appreciated her support and utilized her as a “sounding board” but also described how he wanted to retain control of the business. For some men, their wives played a significant part in the decision to set up

Table 4 Sample quotes from supportive spouses

Women	Men
Yeah, I don’t think I could have done it without the support I got from him—Lisa	They [his and business partners’ wives] kind of pushed us to do it... without her I would not have been able to do any of what I have done because she has been a good support. Been a good leveler and yeah, she is fantastic—Ralph
I took advice from both of them [husband and brother] because my husband was a successful businessman and my brother was my accountant, so I couldn’t have had two stronger supporters—Kate	Yes, she thought it was a good thing to do. Yes, she thought it was a great thing to do—Ross
My partner was behind it all the way—Rae	My wife was pretty positive. She was. She said ‘if that is what you want to do that is fine’. She didn’t have a problem with that—Don
He is next door but he has been encouraging—Elly	You know I’d have to say that my wife was extremely supportive...but you know things you have to do so you go ahead and do them—Aaron
Yeah, he’s got his own business so that was probably a big thing of how we kind of started was from talking to him—Chloe	My wife was complaining...was on shift work and we never saw each other, and she wanted to start having a family—Simon
I am lucky, I do have that support. I am lucky, I do have that and if we didn’t have that I think we would have to question why we are doing it in the first place...I suppose my partner encouraged me because he allowed it to happen—Kay	I’ve had to take Anita into account all the time even though she’s a workaholic too unfortunately—Wade
My husband is really supportive and that I think is fantastic I am really lucky—Jean	She’s very definitely a sounding board when it comes down to going through stressful situations and things like that obviously. As a partner [she is] very supportive and that’s very helpful... The simplest way of doing things is sole control, for me the ideal size of the committee is one—Vince
[We] both share an interest in business and we can share each other’s vision—Shirley	She was quite supportive. It was just one of those things where we just went, this is what we will do, fine—Pete

a business, and they therefore were somewhat pushed into business. Both Ralph and Simon's wives either "pushed us to do it" or were "complaining" about the current work situation. In these cases, their wives seemed to be considering the effect their employment was having on their spouses' happiness, as well as the impact on their family life. In both cases, the wives saw entrepreneurship as a way of rectifying a problematic situation. Now well established in the business, Ralph recognized his wife's input into the business in terms of support and looking after their young son, while he worked in excess of 100 hours per week.

Other male participants described considering their wives in decisions to start businesses, but in a different way. In some cases, it was apparent that seeking the support of a wife was cursory, as the man was going to continue with the goal of starting a business regardless of whether support was forthcoming. For example, Don, Aaron, and Todd all described their wives as being "supportive" and "positive", but also described the business start-up decision as "things you have to do so you go ahead and do them." As was the case for a few of the men who were co-founders, some of the men who had supportive wives at start-up also spoke of their control in the ongoing business. These gender differences in the way support was enacted may be related to two issues. First, few men have wives who are entrepreneurs so they can't look to them as role models, as the women did. Second, men have historically been the primary breadwinners in relationships, and they may have more responsibilities to provide financially for their spouses and families, and this may impact on their motivations for entrepreneurship.

Ambivalent/Not Supportive: "It Was Basically My Decision"

Table 5 indicates that there were six instances of men who started their businesses without spousal support while no women were identified as having started their businesses without the support of their spouses.

For two male participants, their spouses were perhaps less influential in their decisions to become entrepreneurs because of their perceived dominance in their domestic relationships. These men appear not to have considered their spouses in their motivations for entrepreneurship. John illustrated this by saying "my wife knows this about me—that I don't want to work for other people." John's views appear to indicate that he was prepared to go ahead with his business regardless of her opinion. Brent took this theme further, suggesting that his spouse was not particularly supportive of his business start-up: "I won't say that they have been supportive but they have expected it because I have been the dominant figure." Brent's decision to start his current business significantly influenced the family's income; his wife is now unhappy because her friends are able to afford new cars while she is not. It would seem that Brent's decision to start a business had a clear impact on his family, yet he went ahead regardless of his wife's view because of his acknowledged dominance in the family. For other men who did not have spousal support, their wives were "nervous" or "concerned." The reason for these concerns appeared primarily due to the financial pressures starting a business may place on the family. This may also be one of the reasons that there are no unsupportive husbands of female participants as these women were not the main breadwinners for the family and the family was not dependent on the success of the business.

Contribution to the Literature

Contributions to the Empirical Literature

These findings illustrate a continuum of degree of spousal impact on motivations for entrepreneurship. Three distinct levels of spousal support have been described—co-founders, supportive spouses, and unsupportive/ambivalent spouses. First, more female than male entrepreneurs co-founded businesses with their spouses. Around one-quarter of female

Table 5 Sample quotes of ambivalent/not supportive spouses

Men

No [wife didn't influence him]. My wife knows this about me—that I don't want to work for other people—John

It is only with their [wife and children's] support that you can do a thing like this...I won't say that they have been supportive but they have expected it because I have been the dominant figure—Brent

I talked to my wife of course because there was a bit of an investment to be made. But apart from that no it was basically my decision—Toby

My wife was very concerned obviously with one lost business to go into it again and have no income for 6 months—Marcus

The family were nervous—Dave

Probably discouraged...my wife. [She] doesn't really understand business—Monty

participants started their business with their spouse, a similar number to that found in an earlier study (Baines and Wheelock 1998). These co-founders understandably described a great deal of spousal influence on entrepreneurial motivations. The majority of participants had supportive spouses who influenced their motivations for entrepreneurship, and this was the second level of support found. Finally, no women started businesses without spousal support, while six men did so. These men seemed unconcerned for the well-being of their spouses or the effect that starting businesses might have on their relationships. Unlike copreneurs, who have received some research attention, these second two levels have not been explored previously in depth so understanding them contributes to our understanding and allows several conclusions to be made. The author concludes that women and men have different expectations of their spouses when contemplating starting a business. Many women considered the impact of their spouse in their decision to start a business. They sought support, advice, and encouragement from their spouses, and it was only once their assessment had been completed and was deemed satisfactory that they became entrepreneurs. This finding provides empirical support for Brush's (1992) conception that women tend to think relationally about their businesses. Women appeared to be undertaking traditional women's roles in the family of being concerned with relationships and the potential impact of the business on the family as a whole. The seemingly traditional roles of women and men displayed in this study mirror results of prior studies (Alcorso 1993). Some women also had spouses who had prior entrepreneurship experience and were in a position to offer advice.

The male participants appeared to assume that they would receive support from their spouses in their decisions to become entrepreneurs. This could stem from traditionally gendered breadwinner roles. For a man, the motivation (that relates to his spouse) for starting a business appears to be the financial consideration of providing for his family. Unlike female entrepreneurs, few men had spouses who had a history of starting businesses so they could not seek tangible business advice from them in the same ways that many women could. Many men also assumed that their spouses would help out in some capacity after businesses began. Therefore, men's motivations for entrepreneurship may be directly influenced by the assumption that their spouses will work in the businesses (often unpaid) at a later date. This proposition is supported by prior studies, which found that a large proportion of male entrepreneurs have their spouses working for them (Miettinen 1986).

Contributions to Theory

The findings discussed here also contribute to the related theories around family businesses discussed earlier. The

findings show women thinking relationally and from a family embeddedness perspective as prior theory suggests (Aldrich and Cliff 2003; Brush 1992). This difference in consideration of their spouses suggests that men's decisions are less reflective of a family embeddedness view than the female participants. The study also provides empirical support for Brush's (1992) integrated perspective, where women see their businesses as a cooperative network of relationships. The women in this study wanted to assess the impact that their business ownership would have on their spouses and children prior to entering entrepreneurship. It is suggested that should those relationships have been in jeopardy, they may not have continued with the decision to become an entrepreneur. This is indicated in the finding that no women started businesses without spousal support. This finding deserves more research attention as this study does not allow the researcher to determine how many women may have halted their business start-up plans due to a lack of spousal support.

The findings also corroborate and contribute to the adapted Family FIRO model. While the model has been used to investigate family and business dynamics in established family businesses, the findings discussed here suggest that this model may also apply to entrepreneurial motivations. The three dimensions of the model—*inclusion*, *control* and *integration* (Danes et al. 2002)—can be viewed in the data. First, *inclusion* was evident in the numbers of participants who looked to their spouses for advice and support. A desire for *control* of the business was also apparent in some of the accounts from the male participants. On the other hand, some women were striving for *integration* between the family and the business before the business started rather than afterward as it would appear the male participants did. This may be important later as dealing with business and family issues may be easier if spouses have reached the *integration* stage, rather than being concerned with *inclusion* and *control*. The current study concludes that gender plays an important part in the impact of the spouse on entrepreneurship, and those using the Family FIRO model may wish to consider possible gender effects when undertaking further research. The findings may contribute to the Sustainable Family Business Model, which is also focused on established businesses (Stafford et al. 1999). Women tend to gain their spouse's support before starting businesses and this may bode well for the sustainability of businesses in the longer term, given that they have already considered the potential effects of the business on their families. Some men, however, may struggle with the sustainability of businesses if they have not gained the support of their spouses prior to starting a business. While these data were not presented here, there were examples of marriage break-ups and lack of

involvement in their children's lives among a number of the male participants. These findings suggest that early spousal support may impact on family functioning, and as previous studies have found (Masuo et al. 2001), this can in turn influence business success. Additionally, gaining support from a spouse prior to starting a business may lessen any work-family conflict that arises at a later date.

Future Research Directions

Given that little is understood about the role of spouses in motivations for starting a business, there is much scope for further research. For example, do levels of spousal support at start-up differ depending on ethnic origin and culture (e.g., in Asian and Maori cultures a more familial and interdependent culture is important)? Future research could also address specific groups of entrepreneurs. While this study focused on the spouse-related motivators for becoming an entrepreneur this is not to say that other motivators are also important. For female participants, there were other broader family-related motivators that were raised which related to the effects on their children, and these effects should also be considered in future research agendas.

The dynamics of both personal relationships with spouses and their roles in businesses may change over time. Although it was not the specific purpose of the current study to examine such changes, many participants experienced transitions in the level of their spouse's involvement (i.e., starting to work in the business after it was established). Such transitions would be best addressed by researchers employing longitudinal methods as there is prior research evidence to suggest that spousal involvement may change over time (Muske and Fitzgerald 2006). A number of research questions relating to these transitions are posed:

- 1 What is the role of spouses in established business operations?
- 2 Do these roles and levels of support change during the life cycle of the business? What prompts these changes? How does this support change?
- 3 Do female entrepreneurs' spouses start working in their wives' businesses only after the businesses have become successful?
- 4 What causes spouses who were supportive at businesses' start-up to become non-supportive over time?

Conclusion and Limitations

This paper concentrates its attention on the role of spouses in motivations for entrepreneurship. Few researchers adopt

the narrow focus of examining the role of the spouse in start-up decisions (Van Auken and Werbel 2006), and this study contributes rich qualitative data to this emerging field of research. Its purpose has been to focus the analysis further to explore potential gender differences in spouses' roles in entrepreneurial motivations. It also concentrates on the role women's spouses play, as this is an area about which little is known. The main objective has been to contribute to the emerging dialogue on this topic and contribute to both the empirical and theoretical research domains.

A number of points should be considered when interpreting these conclusions. First, there are potential gender effects with respect to the interview process itself. It is possible that the gender differences discussed here are due to the possibility that men are reluctant to admit or discuss the importance of their spouses in their motivations for entrepreneurship. This may be related to the interviewer being an insider in the research process—a woman interviewing women (Neff-Gurney 1991). The second consideration is the effect of the country context. As noted, New Zealand has a high level of entrepreneurship generally, as well as a relatively high participation of women in entrepreneurship. The relatively narrow gender gap between women's and men's participation in entrepreneurship is quite unique. In New Zealand (and other countries with high levels of women's entrepreneurship) women may find it easier to gain spousal support, as it is socially acceptable for women to be entrepreneurs. In light of this acceptability, these findings may show higher levels of spousal support than what we would expect in other countries. Additionally, women in countries with lower levels of women's entrepreneurship may face more subtle societal and cultural barriers to getting their spouses to support their entrepreneurial motivations. This may be a barrier to women entering entrepreneurship. Earlier research has suggested that culture may be an important factor, particularly for people who have had little exposure to entrepreneurship (Hennon et al. 1998).

This study's limitations relate to three aspects. First, it focuses on the start-up of a business, and there is a danger that the retrospective nature of the study has impacted upon entrepreneurs' recall of events that may have been up to 10 years prior. Researchers often have only retrospective accounts to rely on, and there are potential issues with accuracy of recall in many methodologies (Mangione 1995). Similar research by Hamilton (1987) suggests that relying on the 10–15 year recall of founders was a weakness of his study, but not a major defect. Second, there are many interlinked motivations for starting a business, and the spouse is only one possible factor. Thus, there are potentially other considerations that an individual makes when deciding to become an entrepreneur and these factors

also need to be considered. Finally, this study adopts the perspective of the entrepreneur and his/her view on his/her spouse's role in motivations for entrepreneurship. The spouse was not interviewed for the study and, therefore, may have contrasting views on his/her level of involvement in the business. Others have in fact studied both the entrepreneur and spouse using a quantitative approach (Danes et al. 2002). Further research would benefit from examining the role of spouses on entrepreneurship from both the entrepreneur and the spouse's perspectives.

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