

**Work satisfaction of the self-employed: The roles of work autonomy,  
working hours, gender and sector of self-employment**

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Studies on segregation in employment are suggestive of higher levels of job satisfaction in female-dominated occupational settings. This research investigates whether this effect is replicated in self-employment. We explore whether satisfaction differentials are related to differences in autonomy and working hours. Our hypotheses are tested using data from the European Social Survey (ESS). The final sample consist 1,079 males and 326 females. Our research suggests that differences in job satisfaction among self-employed men and women should not be attributed to gender but to gender composition of sector. Our study contributes to our understanding of gender within a sectoral perspective and the significance work autonomy and level of working hours to improve work satisfaction of the self-employed.

Keywords: gender; female entrepreneurs; satisfaction; work-life balance; autonomy

Subject classification codes: Original articles

## Introduction

Research examining the job satisfaction of wage-and-salary workers repeatedly reveals gender differences - a phenomenon that has been termed the 'paradox of the contented female worker' (Hull, 1999). Despite the fact that they tend to earn less, receive poorer job-related benefits and are offered fewer opportunities for promotion and progression, women tend to be more satisfied at work than men (Hodson, 1989; Clark, 1997; Sloane and Williams, 2000; Sousa-Poza and Sousa-Poza, 2000; Bender *et al.*, 2005; Kaiser, 2007; Aletraris, 2010). It has been argued that gender segregation - the concentration of women and men into jobs, occupations and sectors that are dominated by members of their own gender - is a leading cause of gender differences in job satisfaction. Specifically, women tend to be employed in jobs and sectors that offer greater opportunities for work-life balance than are available in male-dominated occupations and industries (Scandura and Lankau, 1997; Bender *et al.*, 2005). Since flexibility and control over working time arrangements are highly valued job attributes, workers that have greater perceived work-life balance are more satisfied with their jobs than those with fewer opportunities to balance home and work life (Asadullah and Fernández., 2008). This would suggest that the greater job satisfaction observed in women employees stems from their concentration in jobs and sectors that enable them to strike a balance between family and work. Said differently, differences in satisfaction should not be attributed to a *gender* gap per se, but to differences in job characteristics concentrated in different industries and sectors. Those characteristics include flexibility, shorter working hours, and greater control over working schedules.

While gender differences in the job satisfaction of the employed has been the subject of much research, there are few published studies examining gender differences in the satisfaction of self-employed workers. For this reason, there is a lack of understanding of job satisfaction among the self-employed, especially from the perspective of gender-segregated

sectors. Drawing on data from a representative European sample, this paper addresses the following research question: what is the relationship between gender and job satisfaction among those in self-employment in female-dominated and male-dominated industries? Attention is paid to job characteristics such as work autonomy and level of work hours. Specifically, we investigate levels of segregation in female-dominated and male-dominated sectors, the characteristics of work associated with those sectors and links between those characteristics and job satisfaction. In the next section, the previous research into gender and job satisfaction is reviewed. The links between gender segregation and job satisfaction are explored to support the development of a range of hypotheses. Next, the data is described and the methodology discussed. Subsequently, the analysis and findings are outlined. The final section concludes and discusses the implications for future research.

### **Gender and Job Satisfaction**

Job satisfaction—loosely defined as the level of contentedness of an individual with the various components of their work (for example, salary, work environment and working hours)—is known to exert a powerful influence on workers' general wellbeing, productivity and performance (Ybema *et al.*, 2010). Generally, higher satisfaction levels are associated with flexible working hours (Scandura and Lankau, 1997), shorter working hours (Clark, 1997), greater job autonomy (Benz and Frey, 2004) and opportunities for skill utilization (Morrison *et al.*, 2005), while there is mixed evidence on the role played by earnings (Clark, 1997; Sloane and Williams, 2000).

Interestingly, women appear to be happier at work despite holding jobs that are worse than men's in terms of pay, autonomy, progression and promotion prospects (Hodson, 1989; Clark, 1997; Sloane and Williams, 2000; Sousa-Poza and Sousa-Poza, 2000; Bender *et al.*, 2005; Kaiser, 2007; Aletraris, 2010). The literature indicates a range of explanations to

account for the ‘paradox of the contented female worker’. For example, it has been suggested that the characteristics associated with ‘women’s work’ such as flexibility, reduced hours, and opportunities for part-time employment offset the loss of objective job rewards (Bender *et al.*, 2005; Booth and Ours., 2008). There is evidence that higher pay increases the job satisfaction of men, but not of women (Sloane and Williams, 2000), and that women value the intrinsic elements of work (such as good relations with managers, the work itself, and the presence of work-based friendships) more highly than do men (Clark, 1997; Markiewicz *et al.*, 2000). Others have drawn on discrepancy theory to argue that the paradox is a result of women’s lower expectations and experience in the labour market (Lawler, 1973). Given that women are used to poorer jobs, they expect less from work, and are therefore happy with what they have.

Some studies have demonstrated that women who work in male-dominated workplaces and occupations have reduced levels of job satisfaction (Hodson, 1989; Clark, 1997), and that the job satisfaction of women grows as the concentration of women in the workplace increases (Sloane and Williams, 2000; Bender *et al.*, 2005). One suggestion for this finding is that women that work predominately alongside men have higher expectations; their ‘cognitive comparison processes’ expand the gap between their personal prospects, needs and standards, and actual experiences of work (Cooper and Artz., 1995). For instance, in a comparison of women in high status and low status occupations, Zanna *et al.* (1987) found that women who compared themselves to men (as opposed to women who used a female reference group) felt more deprived and dissatisfied at work, and experienced larger gaps between what they had, what they felt entitled to, and what they expected to have. In other words, the reported higher levels of job satisfaction of women exists because these women have predominately female reference groups and they are engaged in employment that provides them with a bundle of job characteristics that they value.

## **Self-employment, work characteristics and satisfaction**

The paradox of the contented female is also found among business owners. Women-owned businesses are typically much smaller than those owned by men; they are more likely to be organized as sole traders than corporations, occupy lower status portions of the job market, cater to local, rather than global markets, are generally less profitable, less sustainable and have lower levels of growth and sales (Powell and Eddleston, 2008). Yet, research suggests that women business owners are just as satisfied as their male counterparts, if not more so (Eddleston and Powell, 2008). Studies indicate that, in general, the self-employed are more satisfied at work than regular employees because their daily lives involve greater autonomy, flexibility and opportunities to apply their skills (Hundley, 2001; Benz and Frey, 2004, 2008).

Early organizational studies argue that a range of core job characteristics have a positive role in influencing job satisfaction (Hackman and Lawler, 1971; Fried and Ferris, 1986). These core characteristics are work autonomy, variety, task identify and feedback (Hackman and Lawler, 1971). Investigations into entrepreneurial satisfaction have also taken job characteristics as their starting point. Studies on self-employment intentions and motivations highlight the role of characteristics such as the need for achievement, work autonomy and flexibility in prompting entry into self-employment (Edelman *et al.*, 2010; Carsrud and Brännback, 2011). It is suggested that there is a positive relationship between these characteristics and motivation, job performance and job satisfaction. More recently, Schjoedt (2009) tested the core job characteristic theory as proposed in Hackman and Lawler (1971) found that work autonomy, variety and feedback are positively related to entrepreneurial satisfaction.

Women business owners in particular greatly value factors such as freedom, flexibility and autonomy because these are perceived to allow women to pursue a career while balancing their family roles simultaneously (DeMartino and Barbato, 2003). Autonomy

in terms of the way in which work is arranged can help to minimize the intrusion of family into work – and vice versa (Shelton, 2004) - thereby augmenting the career satisfaction of women (Benz and Frey, 2008). Many women are pushed to follow the entrepreneurial path due to obstacles found in their paid employment such as career development and growth, pay gap, working hours and inability to find work-life balance as noted in Forson (2013). Dawson and Henley (2012) note that a higher proportion of women than men are pushed towards business start-up due to their dissatisfaction of their current employment and perceive that business ownership will provide greater flexibility to balance work and family life. This statement is supported by empirical studies that demonstrated that female migration to self-employment is influenced by the desire for more family friendly work, greater independence, autonomy and control (Patterson and Mavin., 2009; Dawson and Henley, 2012). Ekinsmyth's (2013) study of “mumpreneurs” found that these women followed the entrepreneurial route due to their need to create a dual identify where family and business are mutually enriched. Buttner (1993) noted similarities between the genders, however she found that women are more motivated towards fulfilling family needs whilst men are more focused on economic motives. More recently, Eddleston and Powell (2008) support these assertions. A recent study of entrepreneurs (Dawson and Henley, 2012) found that men are more motivated by financial motivation and women are value more on the importance of managing family commitments. Women tend to enjoy the work-family synergy where enrichment to entrepreneurial success is obtained whilst men enjoy the synergy where family support is found at home (Eddleston and Powell, 2008; Powell and Eddleston, 2008; Eddleston and Powell, 2012).

Studies of segregation in employment have uncovered differences in the attributes of female-dominated jobs and male-dominated jobs (Bond *et al.*, 2004). Men's work, for example, offers greater occupational prestige and earnings, but also demands longer working hours and higher job pressures. Women's work offers greater flexibility but is poorer in terms

of earnings and prestige. At the same time, there appear to be links between occupational segregation and job satisfaction. For example, men employed in female-dominated occupational settings (childcare, for example) express higher levels of job satisfaction and job-related self-esteem, and lower levels of job-related depression than men working in mixed-sex settings (Wharton and Baron, 1987; Hodson, 1989). It is argued that the higher job satisfaction of those in female-dominated jobs is linked to the greater flexibility and shorter working hours offered in those jobs (Bender *et al.*, 2005). In addition, women in female dominated jobs perceive greater levels of autonomy and influence than those in male-dominated jobs because of their constrained comparison groups (Zanna *et al.*, 1987; Hodson, 1989).

We argue that sector of business should be considered when examining gender differences in satisfaction among the self-employed. It is common for researchers in entrepreneurship to treat the self-employed as a single, homogenous grouping, whereas, in reality, ‘the self-employed’ comprises a disparate assemblage of individuals. Importantly, self-employed women and men are crowded into gender-segregated sectors (Sappleton, 2009; Zalevski and Maruyama, 2010; Strohmeier and Tonoyan, 2005). While self-employed men are found in virtually all industrial sectors, the self-employed jobs in which women are concentrated—cleaning homes, caring for children, sewing and so on—are effectively commercial replications of the unpaid work that women do in the home (Sappleton, 2009). Extrapolating the findings on gender, satisfaction and segregation in the employment to the self-employed context, it is reasonable to suspect that there are gender differences in the satisfaction levels of self-employed people that are linked to segregation. In other words, women and men that are self-employed in the same industries should report similar levels of job satisfaction. Satisfaction should be higher among individuals that are self-employed in female-dominated sectors, spurred by the higher perceived autonomy and shorter weekly



working hours in these sectors. In general, it is expected that these work characteristics will have a significant impact on the overall work satisfaction levels of the self-employed. We therefore, propose the following hypotheses.

*H1a: In the aggregate, satisfaction levels are significantly higher among self-employed people working in female-dominated industries compared to those in the male-dominated industries*

*H1b: For males, satisfaction levels are significantly higher among self-employed people working in female-dominated industries compared to those in the male-dominated industries*

*H1c: For females, satisfaction levels are significantly higher among self-employed people working in female-dominated industries compared to those in the male-dominated industries*

*H2a: In the aggregate, autonomy levels are significantly higher among self-employed people working in female-dominated industries compared to those in the male-dominated industries*

*H2b: For males, autonomy levels are significantly higher among self-employed people working in female-dominated industries compared to those in the male-dominated industries*

*H2c: For females, autonomy levels are significantly higher among self-employed people working in female-dominated industries compared to those in the male-dominated industries.*

*H3a: In the aggregate, weekly working hours are significantly shorter among self-employed people working in female-dominated industries compared to those in the male-dominated industries*

*H3b: For males, weekly working hours are significantly shorter among self-employed people working in female-dominated industries compared to those in the male-dominated industries*

*H3c: For females, weekly working hours are significantly shorter among self-employed people working in female-dominated industries compared to those in the male-dominated industries.*

*H4a: There is a positive relationship between autonomy and job satisfaction for self-employed men in male-dominated sectors*

*H4b: There is a positive relationship between autonomy and job satisfaction for self-employed women in male-dominated sectors*

*H4c: There is a positive relationship between autonomy and job satisfaction for self-employed men in female-dominated sectors*

*H4d: There is a positive relationship between autonomy and job satisfaction for self-employed women in female-dominated sectors*

*H5a: There is a negative relationship between weekly working hours and job satisfaction for self-employed men in male-dominated sectors*

*H5b: There is a negative relationship between weekly working hours and job satisfaction for self-employed women in male-dominated sectors*

*H5c: There is a negative relationship between weekly working hours and job satisfaction for self-employed men in female-dominated sectors*

*H5d: There is a negative relationship between weekly working hours and job satisfaction for self-employed women in female-dominated sectors*

## **Methodology**

The hypotheses are tested using data from the fourth round of the European Social Survey which was first published in 2010 and which relies on fieldwork collected during 2009. The European Social Survey (ESS) is an academically-run social survey conducted on a biennial basis via face-to-face interviews across 30 European nations (European Social Survey, 2014). The questionnaire includes a core section consisting of 120 items, plus a rotating module made up of a further 120 items. Issues covered in the questionnaire include political participation; socio-political orientation; social exclusion; ethnic and religious allegiances; social capital; and health and wellbeing. A supplementary questionnaire designed to evaluate the validity and reliability of the items in the main survey is also delivered. The ESS survey achieves high response rates, typically of 70 per cent or more, and its sampling procedure ensures representativeness.

This survey was selected for three main reasons. Firstly, as a relatively new database, the ESS has been under-used, particularly in contrast to the British Household Panel Survey and its North American counterpart, the General Social Survey, which collect similar data. Secondly, the data is unique in that it contains information about employment status, gender, occupation and industry that are crucial to this analysis. Thirdly, unlike smaller national surveys, data from the ESS can be disaggregated by gender and sector of self-employment whilst maintaining samples of a sufficient size to allow for statistical analysis. Thus, it overcomes the problems of small sample sizes of that have inhibited the use of national databases to examine samples of the self-employed.

The full sample is comprised of 43,000 individuals. The total number of self-employed workers, excluding those in agriculture is 3910. These cases were disaggregated by industry, and each individual allocated to one of four sub-samples: 1) females in female-dominated industries; 2) females in male-dominated industries; 3) males in male-dominated industries and 4) males in female-dominated industries. The sex composition of industries was determined by comparing the European Classification of Economic Activities (NACE) industry codes in the ESS dataset with the sex composition reported in the 2006 European Union Labour Force Survey. Industries that are comprised of at least 65 per cent women employees are considered to be female-dominated, and those comprised of at least 65 per cent men employees are considered to be male-dominated. Individuals working in “balanced” industries (those comprised of between 36 and 64 per cent women) are excluded from this study. Examples of female-dominated industries are health and social care and clothing manufacture. Examples of male-dominated industries are construction and computer and related activities. The final sample of 2,214 self-employed individuals is made up of 1,594 men and 620 women. However, since the modules investigating wellbeing were not

delivered to all individuals, the satisfaction analysis is conducted on 1,079 males (93 in female-dominated sectors) and 326 females (183 in female-dominated sectors).

### ***Dependent Variables***

The ESS contains one direct measure of job satisfaction. Respondents indicate on a Likert scale of 0 (“extremely dissatisfied”) to 10 (“extremely satisfied”) their response to the following statement: “*All things considered, how satisfied are you with your present job?*” Other researchers examining satisfaction using this dataset have relied on this single item as the sole outcome variable (for example, Lange, 2012). While single-item measures do satisfy the requisites of validity and reliability (Wanous and Hudy, 1997; Dolbier *et al.*, 2005), that satisfaction is a multifaceted concept is well established in the literature. For example, it is common for individuals to express satisfaction with their pay but not with their working conditions. For this reason, it is argued that single-item measures grossly overestimate the proportion of people that are satisfied at work (Oshagbemi, 1999). While the ESS survey does not collect detailed information about respondents’ satisfaction with the various components of work, the dataset does include a number of other variables measuring elements of satisfaction and wellbeing such as happiness and levels of optimism. All are ordinal-categorical variables. Since the work of the self-employed tends to spill over into other domains of life, all 17 measures were included in the analysis. The results of the principal components analysis indicated that factors loaded powerfully onto one of four factors with minimal cross loading. Together, the four factors explain over 53 per cent of the total variance in the data. The factors identified were as follows. Factor 1 represents life satisfaction and well being (*life satisfaction*), factor 2 refers to sense of positivity and self-worth (*outlook on life*), factor 3 represents satisfaction with work (*job satisfaction*), and factor 4 relates to work-life balance and pressure at work (*freedom from stress*). A

Standardised Cronbach's Alpha coefficient of all factors achieve a score higher than 0.8 indicating a scale of high reliability (Nunnally, 1978). We have only used the third factor for our analysis as the items related to satisfaction of work. The selected items are summarized in the appendix. For the concept of *autonomy*, respondents were asked to indicate the extent to which they are allowed to decide how their daily work is organised on a scale of 0 ("I have no influence") to 10 ("I have complete control"). Finally, *working hours* is a continuous variable measuring the total number of hours normally worked in a week including overtime.

### ***Independent Variables***

For *gender composition of sector*, sector was coded dichotomously, with 0 representing a female-dominated sector, and 1 representing a male-dominated sector. Regarding *gender*, female respondents were coded 0 and male respondents were coded 1.

### ***Control variables***

Controls in the analysis include socio-demographic variables (years of education, age, health), family characteristics (parental status, marital status) and firm characteristics (number of employees). Years of education, age and number of employees were all measured continuously. Health was included in the analysis because of its known link with satisfaction (Prottas and Thompson, 2006). Those describing their general health as "fair" to "very good" were coded 1, while those describing their health as "bad" or "very bad" were coded 2. Marital status (married or partnered =1, other=2) and parental status (children living at home=1, no children living at home=2) were also coded dichotomously.

### ***Method of Analysis***

The data is first analysed descriptively, exploring differences between men and women in the female- and male-dominated sectors on demographic and firm-level characteristics.

Independent t-tests are used to assess differences between the subsamples. In the final stage, linear regression analysis using the enter method is used to examine the relationship between the dependent and independent variables.

## **Results**

Means and percentages for selected demographic variables are presented in table 1. Before presenting the analysis, some words about the sample are required. In many instances, there are clearer differences among groups of women and among groups of men, than between women and men based in sectors with similar gender-composition. For example, women and men in the male-dominated sectors have similar mean years of education (10.2 and 11.8 years respectively), as do women and men in the female-dominated sectors (14.3 and 16.5 years respectively).

<Table 1 insert about here>

Our data shows that self-employed women (mean=0.11, SD=1.04) exhibit significantly higher levels of job satisfaction than men (Mean=-0.02, SD=0.94), and the difference is statistically significant,  $t(499.26)=2.01$ ,  $p<.05$ . Furthermore, there are clear differences in job satisfaction on the basis of gender-composition of sector (table 2). Self-employed individuals in female dominated sectors express significantly higher job satisfaction than those in male-dominated sectors, regardless of gender. All in all, there is support for hypothesis 1a, 1b and 1c.

Hypothesis 2 stated that individuals in female-dominated sectors perceive higher levels of autonomy than individuals in male-dominated sectors. The results, presented in table 3, show that on the whole, self-employed workers in the female-dominated and male-

dominated sectors perceive statistically equal levels of autonomy. There is thus no support for hypothesis 2a. However, when the results are disaggregated by gender, differences emerge. Although self-employed men working in the female-dominated and male-dominated sectors perceive similar levels of autonomy, self-employed women in the female-dominated sectors perceive higher autonomy than women in the male-dominated sectors. Therefore, there is no support for hypothesis 2b but there is partial support for hypothesis 2c.

Table 4 compares the weekly working hours of men and women self-employed workers in male-dominated and female-dominated sectors. Men in the male-dominated sectors work the longest weeks (50 hours); this is well above the average of those engaged in full-time employment in Europe (on average 38 hours per week) (Cabrita and Ortigão, 2011). The average weekly working hours of self-employed women in male-dominated sectors (46 hours) and self-employed men in female-dominated sectors (45 hours) are also above the European average, while women in female-dominated sectors work around 33 hours per week. As a whole, and in support of hypothesis 3a, significantly shorter working hours were found in female-dominated sectors than in male-dominated sectors. Both genders indicate comparatively shorter working weeks when they work in female-dominated sectors as compared to male-dominated sectors. These results provide support for hypotheses 3b and 3c.

<Table 2 insert about here>

<Table 3 insert about here>

<Table 4 insert about here >

In order to disentangle the effects of gender, autonomy and working hours on satisfaction, separate regression analyses are run for the male-dominated sector sample (table

5) and the female-dominated sector sample (table 6). In male dominated sectors, the results show a positive relationship between autonomy and satisfaction for both genders – hypotheses 4a and 4b are supported. A similar relationship is not found in the female-dominated sectors, suggesting that while autonomy is a work characteristic enjoyed by both genders in female-dominated sectors, this in itself is not a factor that is perceived to have an effect on their work satisfaction. Therefore, there is no support for hypotheses 4c and 4d.

Although men in both sectors and women in the male-dominated sectors have working weeks that are above the average of full-time European employees, working hours are unrelated to satisfaction levels. We therefore find no support for hypotheses 5a, 5b, 5c and 5d. However, contrary to the conclusions of the extant literature and our own hypothesis we do find a positive relationship between working hours and job satisfaction among women in female-dominated sectors.

Before discussing these results, we note some additional findings. It is worthwhile noting the positive – albeit small – relationship between number of employees and satisfaction levels for men in male-dominated sectors. The data also shows substantial negative relationship between health and job satisfaction among women in the female-dominated sectors only. Finally, females in the male-dominated sectors that have children at home are significantly more satisfied with their work than those that do not; in the female dominated sectors, it is males that have children at home that are more satisfied than those without children.

**<Table 5 insert about here >**

**<Table 6 insert about here >**



## **Discussion**

Studies of waged-and-salaried workers have repeatedly shown that, in spite of lower earnings, poorer job-related benefits and fewer opportunities for promotion and progression, women tend to be more satisfied at work than men. Moreover, research that has accounted for segregation in employment indicates that women that work in female-dominated occupational settings are happier than those in male-dominated settings; differences in levels of autonomy and working hours are among the characteristics that are suggested to account for those differences. In this study, we examined the effect of those characteristics in the context of self-employed workers, examining, in particular differences between men and women on the basis of gender-domination of industrial sector. We argue that this is a necessary endeavour for just as occupational segregation is an endemic and enduring fact of organizational life, men and women are crowded into sectors of self-employment that vary considerably in terms of job characteristics.

Just as women in employment are more satisfied with their jobs than men, this study finds that self-employed women are significantly more satisfied than their male counterparts. However, our analysis also finds that gender differences disappear when gender domination of sector is controlled: in the male-dominated sectors, men and women exhibit statistically equal levels of job satisfaction, and similar results are found for the female-dominated sectors. Furthermore, both genders are more satisfied when they work in the female-dominated sectors. Together, these findings suggest that the job satisfaction of self-employed workers does not differ according to gender, but according to some factor or factors associated with industrial setting.

The data enabled us to test the impact of two such characteristics: level of autonomy at work, and number of working hours. In line with previous research on business owners and entrepreneurs (Benz and Frey, 2008), perceived levels of autonomy among individuals in

both the female-dominated and the male-dominated sectors are very high. The lack of significant differences between the two samples may indicate that autonomy is not a characteristic that can account for the differences in job satisfaction between self-employed workers in the male- and female-dominated sectors. However, the regression analysis revealed that, for individuals in the male-dominated sectors, higher perceived autonomy does increase job satisfaction, and the effect is stronger for females. Previous research has established that autonomy predicts job satisfaction in the self-employed (Hundley, 2001; Benz and Frey, 2004). As noted in the literature, work-life balance is a crucial factor affecting the wellbeing of entrepreneurs (Forson, 2013) and Hollowell *et al*, 2006). Failure to do so can harm the motivation of entrepreneurs as well as business performance (Rouse and Kitching, 2006; Dawson and Henley, 2012). Similarly, autonomy over one's schedule and destiny are frequently cited as primary motives for entering self-employment by both genders (Still and Timms, 2000; Gelderen and Jansen, 2006; Walker and Webster, 2007), with women in particular seeking control over their work arrangements in order to accommodate domestic responsibilities (Mattis, 2005). Qualitative research conducted by Anna *et al*. (2000) also indicated that autonomy was an important career anchor for women entrepreneurs, especially in non-traditional industries.

Why autonomy should predict job satisfaction for those in the male-dominated and not for those in the female-dominated industries is not clear. One possible explanation for the disparity could be the differences in mean working hours across the samples. Our data reveals that on average, self-employed workers in the male-dominated industries work longer weeks than those in the female-dominated sectors. We suggest that when the overall level of weekly work hours is significantly high, the ability and flexibility to organise work related activity becomes more crucial. In other words, in the male-dominated sectors, where long working weeks are the norm, autonomy grows in importance as a satisfier. In contrast, where there is

an abundance of work autonomy alongside a lower level of working hours, the effect of work autonomy on satisfaction is diminished as self-employed workers find that the additional time is sufficient to enable them control over their working arrangements.

We hypothesized that working hours are an antecedent of satisfaction for both genders in both sectors, but report contradictory results. In the male-dominated sectors, working hours exert no impact on levels of job satisfaction for men or women. Similarly, in the female-dominated sectors, we find no relationship between working hours and satisfaction levels for men. Douglas and Shepherd (2000) noted that “successful entrepreneurs must work long and hard hours and put their new venture ahead of their personal and family life... entrepreneurs seem to enjoy their work, and willingly work longer hours even when there is little or no promise of extraordinary financial gain, and they tend to expect the same attitude in others”. Thus, it is possible that working hours do not affect the job satisfaction of those in the male-dominated sectors because their actual experiences and prior expectations of working hours in the industry are easily reconciled. Interestingly, for women in female-dominated sectors, a small, positive relationship between the two variables was found. There is somewhat of a consensus in the extant literature that women migrate to self-employment in order to accommodate family needs (Walker and Webster, 2007), but the results presented above suggest that for women in female-dominated sectors, putting more hours into work actually slightly augments their overall sense of satisfaction. These findings mirror those of Mattis (2005) who found that “women business owners are not so much seeking reduced hours, although that may come later, when they can afford to hire more employees to manage the business on a daily basis. Rather, they are seeking more control over the hours they work”. It is possible that working longer hours promotes for women in female-dominated sectors some other benefits that women are said seek in self-employment, such as personal control,

prestige, or even improved finances (Anna *et al.*, 2000; Marlow, 2002). Clearly, this is an avenue for future research.

A significant positive relationship was also found between number of employees and job satisfaction amongst men that are self-employed in male-dominated sectors. Perhaps employing others acts as a status-based satisfier for these men (DeMartino and Barbato, 2003); alternatively, the increased job satisfaction could be attributed to the fact that these men have additional support to run the company, and therefore have additional time to focus on other activities. Finally, it is worthwhile noting the substantial positive relationship between having children at home and job satisfaction for two of our sub-samples: women in the male-dominated sectors, and men in the female-dominated sectors. In contrast, for self-employed women in the female dominated sectors, and self-employed men in the male-dominated sectors, having children under the age of 18 at home makes no difference to job satisfaction. Why we should observe differences between the samples in this regard is a mystery and worthy of further investigation.

### **Limitations, implications for future research and conclusions**

The limitations of study are first highlighted. Firstly, by using Europe-wide data, potentially important results from single nations may be masked. For example, Kaiser (2007) conducted a study on the job satisfaction of the employed, which uses the European Community Household Panel data of 14 countries, uncovered that the gender gap in satisfaction appears to be an Anglo-Saxon phenomenon that is peculiar to the UK and Ireland. In that study, women in poorer Mediterranean nations such as Portugal were found to exhibit lower levels of satisfaction than men and their female counterparts in the North. Future researchers might therefore wish to seek out large national datasets of the self-employed in order to conduct examinations on single economies. There were also limitations to this study associated with the use of secondary datasets. While it may have been

illuminating to compare the effect of a number of other work characteristics between female- and male-dominated sectors (e.g. earnings or work-life balance), this data was not available. In particular, data on revenues and earnings arising from self-employment would have allowed for an examination of the link between segregation, self-employment returns and satisfaction. This might prove to be a promising avenue for further research. There are also limitations to the analytical approach. We intentionally excluded the self-employed working in the “balanced industries” in order to build a stronger focus for the research questions and hypotheses under our investigation. Further research can fill this gap by comparing the differences and exploring the characteristics and job satisfaction of those in this category. Finally, the lower level of job satisfaction in the male-dominated sectors warrants further investigation.

This study makes several scholarly contributions which suggest implications for future research. First, the research was undertaken in the European context. There is scope for additional research in a variety of international contexts, particularly if large datasets can be identified that facilitate comparisons between groups of self-employed people by gender and gender-domination of sector. For future researchers, we advise that if gender-based comparisons of entrepreneurs are to be undertaken, it is important to perform within sectors analysis. Empirical research on the self-employed tends to treat these individuals as a monolithic category, rarely distinguishing between different samples of the self-employed. Studies comparing women and men are quick to attribute their findings to ‘gender’, but these hasty conclusions “may be a consequence of the sectoral mix of the sample as much a genuine social trends impinging on the small business community” (Rosa and Hamilton, 1994, p. 25). Our research suggests that differences in job satisfaction among self-employed men and women should not be attributed to gender but to gender composition of sector. Self-employed women and men are concentrated in very different industrial settings, and these

settings impinge on the activities of these businesses and the behaviours of the people that run them. The clustering of women and men business owners into gender-segregated sectors may be linked to work autonomy and work hours as well as to a host of other reported 'sex' differences, such as differences in performance, access to funding and social networks. This opens up new scope for future exploration.

## **Appendix**

- Feel I get the recognition I deserve for what I do
- How satisfied with job
- Find job interesting
- Likely to become unemployed in next 12 months
- Get paid appropriately for what I do\*
- Find job stressful\*
- Satisfied with work-life balance

Note: \* Reverse coded.

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**Table 1: Means and Percentages of Selected Variables, by gender and gender composition of sector**

	Female		Male	
	Female-dominated sectors	Male-dominated sectors	Female-dominated sectors	Male-dominated sectors
Mean age	49.7	56.4	52.1	51.9
Mean years of education	14.3	10.2	16.5	11.8
Married (%)	56.1	58.8	67.0	68.9
Single (%)	16.9	8.1	16.5	17.2
Has children (%)	77.3	86.3	78.8	78.3
Mean number of employees	0.8	2.5	2.4	4.6

Notes: Valid percentage reported.

**Table 2: T-tests, means, standard deviations, by gender domination of sector**

Gender domination of sector	Job Satisfaction	Male	Female
Male-dominated (n=1129)	-.04 (.96)	-.04 (.95)	-.05 (1.04)
Female-dominated (n=276)	.21 (.99)	.18 (.93)	.23 (1.02)
T test (df)	-3.97 (1403)***	-2.11 (1077)*	-2.51 (324)*

Notes: \* indicates significant differences at  $p < .05$  level, \*\*\* indicates significant differences at  $p < .001$  level

Male, male-dominated, n=1238, Male, female, dominated, n=108

Female, male-dominated, n=247, Female, female, dominated, n=239

**Table 3: T-tests, means, standard deviations, by gender domination of sector, work autonomy**

	<b>Work autonomy</b>	<b>Male</b>	<b>Female</b>
Male-dominated (n=1786)	9.12 (1.95)	9.18 (1.90)	8.85 (2.15)
Female-dominated (n=395)	9.19 (1.75)	9.24 (1.75)	9.17 (1.75)
T test (df)	-.70 (2179)	-.33 (1573)	-2.05 (603)*

Notes: \* indicates significant differences at  $p < .05$  level, \*\*\* indicates significant differences at  $p < .001$  level

Male, male-dominated, n=1238, Male, female, dominated, n=108

Female, male-dominated, n=247, Female, female, dominated, n=239

**Table 4: T-tests, means, standard deviations, by gender domination of sector, working hours**

	<b>Work hours</b>	<b>Male</b>	<b>Female</b>
Male-dominated (n=1485)	50.47 (17.52)	51.20 (16.84)	46.77 (20.20)
Female-dominated (n=347)	37.10 (18.41)	45.53 (16.65)	33.28 (17.93)
T test (df)	12.29 (502) ***	3.36 (1344)**	7.77 (484)***

Notes: \*\*\* indicates significant differences at  $p < .001$  level

Male, male-dominated, n=1238, Male, female, dominated, n=108

Female, male-dominated, n=247, Female, female, dominated, n=239

**Table 5: Linear regression analysis, job satisfaction: Male-dominated sectors**

Variables	Male			Female		
	B	SEB	$\beta$	B	SEB	$\beta$
(Constant)	-1.317*	.547		-5.254**	1.834	
Age	.015	.019	.183	.115	.074	1.138
Age <sup>2</sup>	-4.465E-5	.000	-.051	-.001	.001	-1.087
Health	-.138	.221	-.022	-.020	.563	-.004
Children living at home	.033	.075	.018	.598*	.269	.258
Married or Partnered	.032	.079	.016	.158	.283	.060
Number of employees respondent has/had	.006*	.003	.072	.015	.011	.128
Work autonomy	.081***	.018	.151	.181*	.078	.220
Weekly working hours	.000	.002	.006	.000	.006	-.015
F of the model	5.519***			2.134*		
R <sup>2</sup>	.051			.150		
Adjusted R <sup>2</sup>	.042			.080		

Notes: \* $p < .05$ , \*\*  $p < .01$  \*\*\* $p < .001$

**Table 6: Linear regression analysis, job satisfaction: Female-dominated sectors**

Variables	Male			Female		
	B	SEB	$\beta$	B	SEB	$\beta$
(Constant)	-1.524	1.907		1.453	1.401	
Age	.088	.061	1.059	-.036	.054	-.420
Age <sup>2</sup>	.000	.001	-1.212	.001	.001	.618
Health	NA	NA	NA	-.997**	.368	-.224
Children living at home	.448**	.238	.238	-.099	.196	-.050
Married or Partnered	-.655	.240	-.325	-.005	.181	-.002
Number of employees respondent has/had	.035	.024	.168	.001	.050	.002
Work autonomy	.048	.072	.072	-.006	.051	-.009
Weekly working hours	-.013	.007	-.216	.012*	.005	.211
F of the model	1.927			2.486*		
R <sup>2</sup>	.146			.122		
Adjusted R <sup>2</sup>	.070			.073		

**Notes:** \* $p < .05$ , \*\*  $p < .01$  \*\*\* $p < .001$ . The variable ‘health’ was dropped from the analysis in the male sample due to lack of variation