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### Abstract

**Purpose:** This paper discusses the impact gendered media representations of entrepreneurs may have on the reality of female entrepreneurship. It analyses the representation of women entrepreneurs in a women’s magazine. Media representations influence, firstly, whether women perceive entrepreneurship as desirable and attainable, and thus impact the strength and direction of their entrepreneurial aspirations. Secondly, media representations shape how key stakeholders such as bankers or clients view and interact with female business owners, thereby impacting women entrepreneurs’ business relations and opportunities.

**Design/methodology/approach:** The paper reviews research on media representations of women entrepreneurs, gender inequalities in entrepreneurial activity and work before presenting an in-depth qualitative analysis of a magazine series reporting on female entrepreneurs.

**Findings:** Our analysis reveals how the woman’s magazine in question portrays female entrepreneurship as focused on traditionally female activities and pursuits and as domestically-centred. Relating these findings to evidence on gender inequalities in entrepreneurial activity, the paper raises important questions about the impact of media representations of women entrepreneurs.

**Originality/value:** The paper demonstrates the benefits of understanding entrepreneurial activity as work and includes analytical perspectives from the sociology of work in the analysis of media representations of entrepreneurship.

**Key words:** Entrepreneurship, gender, media representations, women's magazines, women's work

**Category:** Research paper

## **1. Introduction**

This paper discusses the impact gendered media representations of entrepreneurs may have on the reality of female entrepreneurship which remains characterised by underrepresentation and inequality. Women owned businesses account for just 17% of UK businesses and are typically concentrated in crowded and low value services sectors, operating on a part-time basis and located within the home (Marlow and McAdam, 2013; Marlow, 2002; Cliff, 1998). This reality of female entrepreneurship is intricately linked to media representations of women entrepreneurs. Media representations shape what people believe women business owners typically do and how they experience it in two important ways. Firstly, they influence whether women perceive entrepreneurship as desirable and attainable and if so, what type of entrepreneurship they pursue. The impact of media representations on entrepreneurial aspirations is so convincingly evidenced (e.g. Levie, 2010; Radu and Redien-Collot, 2008; Hindle and Klyver, 2007) that UK governments looking to increase female business ownership have identified the use of female role models, such as Martha Lane Fox, as a key policy mechanism (Women's Enterprise Task Force, 2009; Small Business Service, 2003). Secondly, perceptions of women entrepreneurs determine how those who may influence the success of women business owners – financiers, clients, suppliers, business collaborators – interact with them (Carter *et al.*, 2007). Media representations of female entrepreneurs thus not only mirror existing gender inequalities in entrepreneurial activity, but also provide the interpretive framework for reproducing these gender inequalities. To understand and address both the underrepresentation and the distinctive experiences of women entrepreneurs it is, therefore, important to relate media representations of women entrepreneurs to the reality of female entrepreneurship.

Recognising the importance of media representations of women entrepreneurs, a growing number of studies have analysed these representations and their impact on perceptions of female entrepreneurship (e.g. Achtenhagen and Welter, 2007; Ahl 2007, 2004; Bruni *et al.*, 2004a,b). These studies have shown that business media, newspapers and research publications portray female entrepreneurship as less purposeful, professional and successful than its male counterpart (Achtenhagen and Welter, 2007; Ahl, 2007, 2004; Bruni *et al.*, 2004a,b). Despite recognising the importance of media representations of female entrepreneurship two important gaps exist in current research.

Firstly, women's magazines have so far been omitted from analyses. Read by around 35% of women in the UK (Stevens *et al.*, 2007) and increasingly focusing on work- and career-related topics (Summers and Eikhof, 2012), women's magazines have been shown to influence individual and collective perceptions. They aim to entertain, but in doing so powerfully sanction anything from outfits and products to lifestyles, relationship models and career ambitions as societally accepted and desirable (Ballaster *et al.*, 1991; Bardwick, 1980). Their features on work and careers can thus shape women's perceptions of female entrepreneurship in the same way as their beauty coverage influences women's attempts to alter their appearances (Park, 2005; Wykes and Gunter, 2005). By shaping perceptions of what female entrepreneurship is and how attractive and accessible it is perceived to be, women's magazine coverage is relevant to academics' and practitioners' understanding of female entrepreneurship and to any attempt to address gender inequalities in entrepreneurial activity.

Secondly, gender inequalities in any economic activity are linked to gendered aspects of work, for instance the kind of work men and women undertake, the locations and sectors they typically work in or the allocation of paid and unpaid work within households (e.g. Rouse, 2011; Glucksmann, 2009; Bradley, 2007). Analysis of such work characteristics not only features prominently in

gender-theory informed sociology of work, but also in an emerging body of entrepreneurship research (e.g. Rouse, 2011; Jennings and McDougald, 2007). Work is an essential component of those ‘contemporary processes of social and cultural change in the entrepreneurship context’ that we can better understand through analysing media discourse (Achtenhagen and Welter, 2007, p. 193). Nevertheless, work-centred perspectives are curiously under-utilised in current analyses of media representations of entrepreneurs.

This paper addresses both of the above outlined gaps. Firstly and empirically, it analyses media representations of female entrepreneurship in a UK women’s magazine and critically discusses the impact these representations may have on aspiring women entrepreneurs’ ambitions. Secondly and on a conceptual level, the paper aims to demonstrate the benefits of introducing a perspective informed by the sociology of work to the analysis of media representations of entrepreneurship. In employing a work-perspective the paper illustrates how recognising entrepreneurial activity as work and drawing on gender-sensitive studies on work can increase our understanding of entrepreneurship, male and female, more generally.

The following second section reviews research on media representations of women entrepreneurs, gender inequalities in entrepreneurial activity, women’s magazines and gender and work. After explaining our research methods, we then report findings from a qualitative analysis of a women’s magazine series reporting on women entrepreneurs. The implications of such media representations of female entrepreneurs for women’s individual entrepreneurship aspirations, and therefore, for female entrepreneurial activity in general, are discussed.

## **2. Empirical and conceptual background**

Media representations of entrepreneurs have a powerful influence on entrepreneurial aspirations (e.g. Levie, 2010; Radu and Redien-Collot, 2008; Hindle and Klyver, 2007). Recognising this

influence, a growing body of literature discusses how media representations of female entrepreneurs ‘shape perceptions of society and the business world about the characteristics of a typical female entrepreneur as well as about their business acumen’ (Achtenhagen and Welter, 2007, p. 205; cf. Smith and Anderson, 2007; Bruni *et al.*, 2004a; Langowitz and Morgan, 2003; Pietiläinen, 2001;). These studies demonstrate that media representations operate on two levels. Firstly, they influence whether women perceive business ownership as a desirable and attainable form of economic activity – and if so, what type of business ownership they aspire to. They thus shape the strength and direction of women’s entrepreneurial aspirations (see Radu and Redien-Collot, 2008 for such media influences on entrepreneurial aspirations in general). Secondly, media representations influence expectations and perceptions of women entrepreneurs held by financiers, clients, suppliers, business partners and other individuals whose actions and decisions directly impact a woman’s business success (Bruni *et al.*, 2004a,b). In business media, newspapers and research articles female entrepreneurship tends to be discussed as a deviation from ‘normal’, male entrepreneurship (Ahl 2004, 2007). It is depicted as less purposeful, professional and successful (Achtenhagen and Welter, 2007; Bruni *et al.*, 2004b) and as driven by women’s personal concerns – with the latter generally perceived as less valuable to society than business motivations (Bruni *et al.*, 2004a). Such representations make it difficult for women to establish themselves as serious business partners and are thus clearly detrimental to women’s pursuit of entrepreneurial achievement.

Media representations of women entrepreneurs need to be considered in the context of research on the reality of female entrepreneurial activity. Popular perceptions of a growth in the number of female entrepreneurs in the UK, a view influenced both by growing media interest in successful women and public policy initiatives designed to increase women’s business ownership rates, are not supported by statistical evidence. Recent data suggests that women account for 17% of business owners and 29% of the self-employed – a share that has remained relatively stable since

1999 (Labour Force Survey, 2011; Women's Enterprise Task Force, 2009). Trends in female entrepreneurial activity contrast with the well documented rise of women's employment over the last fifty years, which has seen UK female employment rates 'inching closer to men's employment rates all the time' (Li *et al.*, 2008, p. 3).

But women are not only less likely to be entrepreneurs, their experience of business ownership also differs substantially from that of men (Marlow and McAdam, 2013; Marlow, 2002; Cliff, 1998). Although researchers have stressed the heterogeneous nature of female entrepreneurship (Cliff, 1998), studies have consistently reported that, in comparison with their male counterparts, female entrepreneurs are more likely to work part-time, less likely to be registered for value added tax, less likely to own more than one business and more likely to use their home as a business base (Mason *et al.*, 2011; Small Business Service, 2003; Marlow, 1997). Women-owned businesses also tend to start up with lower levels of overall capitalization, lower ratios of debt finance and are much less likely to use private equity or venture capital (Carter *et al.*, 2013; Carter *et al.*, 2007). While female entrepreneurial experience tends to be judged in relation to male entrepreneurship, which is taken as the norm within the entrepreneurial discourse (Cálas *et al.*, 2009; Marlow, 2002), the gendered nature of assumptions regarding 'female under-performance' has been criticised (Ahl and Marlow, 2011). Indeed, Marlow and McAdam (2013, p.1) argue that the 'assertion that women owned firms under-perform reflects a gendered bias within the entrepreneurial discourse where femininity and deficit are deemed coterminous.'

Because of their potential to influence women's entrepreneurship aspirations, media representations and female role models are regarded as particularly relevant to the underrepresentation and inequality issues outlined above (Levie, 2010; Small Business Service, 2003; Women's Enterprise Task Force, 2009). But, while the potentially positive and negative influences of representations of women business owners in business media, newspapers and

research publications have been discussed, an important medium has so far been omitted from the analysis: women's magazines. In the UK, roughly 35% of women are loyal monthly magazine readers (Stevens *et al.*, 2007). Reaching a considerable share of the female working population, women's magazines shape individual and collective perceptions of gender and 'acceptable' feminine identity (Holmes, 2008; Byerly and Ross, 2006, p. 50; Beetham, 1996). That their coverage of, for example, beauty, appearance and lifestyle issues impacts women's real-life practices is well established in media studies (e.g. Park, 2005; Wykes and Gunter, 2005). As women's magazines increasingly cover work- and career-related issues (Summers and Eikhof, 2012), their interpretive power extends beyond women's personal lives and into their professional lives. Women's magazines can thus both sanction and perpetuate particular representations of women's work and careers and, in so doing, shape women's professional aspirations – including those related to business ownership (Ballaster *et al.*, 1991; Bardwick, 1980). What is needed, therefore, is an analysis of how female entrepreneurship is presented in women's magazines and a discussion of the impact such representations might have on aspiring women entrepreneurs' ambitions.

In addition to the absence of women's magazines as an empirical focus, reviewing literature on gendered experiences of entrepreneurship exposes a conceptual shortcoming: entrepreneurship is analysed as a specific form of economic activity, but not as work (see though, Rouse, 2011; Jennings and McDougald, 2007). The exclusion of a work-perspective is significant, as research on gender and work complements and has the potential to extend entrepreneurship research. Five themes of gender and work research are particularly relevant. Firstly, while gender seems to be less of an issue in new professions, high levels of occupational segregation remain (Bradley, 2007). Women continue to be over-represented in occupations centred on allegedly female skills such as caring or catering that yield low pay and little recognition (Banyard, 2010). Secondly, women's work that is undertaken in domestic spaces tends to be perceived as not 'real' or 'serious' work (Kirkwood and Toothill, 2008; Rouse and Kitching, 2006; Holmes *et al.*, 1997). Consequently,

women working at home tend to work in shared rather than dedicated domestic spaces and are often expected to undertake house- and care-work as well (Sullivan, 2000). Thirdly, regardless of their occupation, women are much more likely to work part-time (European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions, 2007) and to work from home in an attempt to combine careers with caring responsibilities (e.g. Eikhof, 2012). However, and fourthly, combining work and life in the same space frequently leaves workers feeling simultaneously guilty towards their family for working at home and towards their employers or clients for still not 'getting the job done' (Bøgh Fangel and Aaløkke, 2008; Kylin and Karlsson, 2008). Fifthly, and finally, both part-time and tele-working significantly impede career progress, which has been identified as a prime reason for women to downshift or withdraw from economic activity altogether (Goulding and Reed, 2010; Stone, 2008; McKenna, 1997). Such retreat from the economic sphere negatively impacts gender equality in individuals' personal relationships as well as publicly throughout society (Bradley, 2007).

To understand and address gender inequalities in female entrepreneurial activity, we argue, it is important to take those gender issues into account that arise because such entrepreneurial activity constitutes work. In analysing media representations of women business owners we therefore need to be sensitive to how female entrepreneurs at work are presented. Important foci are the content and location of work, skills, working hours or work experience and location. The analysis presented in this paper deliberately takes such work-related aspects into account.

### **3. Data and analysis**

Women's magazines are created by their editors, advertisers and features writers and targeted at a particular female demographic. The analysis presented in this paper centres on a UK-based women's monthly magazine, *eve*. At the time of study, *eve* was one of the leading women's monthly



magazines with an average reader age of 37 and readers' average household income of £46,237 (eve magazine, 2008). The magazine described its readership as:

'intelligent, independent and stylish women in their 30's [... who are] key consumers for luxury global brands. They are well educated, aspirational and demanding of themselves, interested in personal development and an increasingly broad range of experiences. They are also individuals with time pressures and busy lifestyles for whom 'time for me' and 'treats for me' are essential rewards for their efforts and commitment.' (eve magazine, 2008)

The magazine *eve* was chosen for two reasons. Firstly, *eve* had a target audience for which, given its socio-economic background as described above, business ownership might be a realistic option. Secondly, one of *eve*'s flagship features was a monthly feature, 'Women Doing Their Own Thing' (WDTOT), which reported on women who left corporate careers to become entrepreneurs and which portrayed these female entrepreneurs at work, describing work content, work experiences and overall work-life settings. As the analysis presented in this paper is exploratory in the sense that both the empirical focus (women's magazines) and the conceptual perspective (representation of entrepreneurship as work) are new, generalisability of findings is not the main aim of the research. However, future research might fruitfully compare representations of women business owners across several women's magazines.

According to Moeran (2003), editors are relatively independent from advertisers in deciding about the content of magazine features. The WDTOT features are thus the result of conscious editorial decisions about including or omitting aspects from available narratives and of presenting those narratives in a particular way. In line with common approaches in the qualitative analysis of media outputs (Bryman, 2004), WDTOT can thus be understood as presenting a purposefully shaped

representation of female entrepreneurs at work. To study these purposefully shaped representations, we conducted a content analysis of 17 WDTOT features published consecutively in *eve* between 2006 and 2008. Content analysis seeks to unveil underlying themes, perceptions and meanings of texts by investigating what information is presented and how (Bryman, 2004; Mayring, 2002) and is gaining prominence in entrepreneurship research (e.g. Achtenhagen and Welter, 2007; Ahl, 2007; Smith and Anderson, 2007; Nicholson and Anderson, 2005). Each WDTOT feature was four pages long and consisted of a main article, pictures and three columns with information on the respective industry. In a first step, two researchers analysed half of the articles for emerging themes regarding the description of the businesses, the business owners at work and the language used. Based on this analysis, a preliminary coding scheme was devised. In two subsequent rounds of data coding this scheme was revised and reapplied following the mostly inductive processes recommended for qualitative data analysis (Bryman, 2004; Flick, 1996). The final coding scheme combined aspects typically recorded in entrepreneurship research (e.g. type of business, start-up costs, source of start-up capital) with aspects focused on in the sociology of work (e.g. work content and location, skills, work experience; Table 1). Coding and analysis focused on content as well as the phrasing and language used (see Ahl (2007) for the importance of the presentation of information in descriptions of entrepreneurs). Below we use direct quotes from the articles (marked by double quotation marks) to illustrate our finding(s); article titles (in Italics) are used to refer to specific articles.

INSERT TABLE 1 ABOUT HERE

#### **4. Female entrepreneurs at work in WDTOT**

Published in a women's glossy magazine, WDTOT certainly sought to entertain its readers. However, in telling these stories, WDTOT presented a distinct picture of female entrepreneurs at work and one that is presented in a specific way. This section analyses how WDTOT presented

entrepreneurship and which particular nature of female entrepreneurship it promoted. As a first orientation, Table 2 gives an overview of the article titles, the types of businesses featured, the protagonists' former occupation and marital status.

INSERT TABLE 2 ABOUT HERE

#### 4.1 Aspiration and accessibility

Women's magazines shape individual and collective perceptions of gender and 'acceptable' feminine identity (Holmes, 2008; Byerly and Ross, 2006, p. 50; Beetham, 1996) and create and perpetuate images of what women should aspire to personally and professionally (Ballaster *et al.*, 1991; Bardwick, 1980). In understanding these images, writing style and choice of words are crucial. The analysis of language and phrasing WDTOT used to tell the protagonists' stories revealed that entrepreneurship was presented as aspirational and accessible, each of which are discussed in turn below.

At the beginning of the articles, WDTOT explicitly teamed up readers and protagonists on a career change journey, using variations of the following introductory sentences:

"Why can't your life be more like that – a bit less *Changing Rooms*, a bit more like *Chocolat*?" (*The French mistress*)

"Picture a job where finding the right dark chocolate is crucial to the company's share price." (*A slice of the good life*)

"How do you make an eco-friendly fortune while living in one of the most beautiful places on earth?" (*The snow queen*)

The articles continued in a similar tone, and in doing so, achieved three outcomes. Firstly, by invoking collectively shared ideas of positive, pleasurable settings, the described entrepreneurship scenarios were established as aspirational. Secondly, the phrasing implied that protagonists and readers share the same work-life aspirations and values. Thirdly, the articles signalled that the readers were expected to share the protagonists' aspirations for career change and transition into business ownership. Occurring in isolation, phrasings such as those cited above might have merely been due to stylistic decisions by individual authors. However, their occurrence across articles and authors suggests an editorial decision to present entrepreneurship as a state of economic activity WDTOT readers should aspire to.

Our first key finding from analysing the presentation of the WDTOT content is therefore that entrepreneurship was presented as aspirational. To some extent, such a presentation would be expected from a magazine that seeks to entertain its readers. However, WDTOT clearly overstepped the boundaries of entertainment and portrayed its protagonists as undertaking a realistic career change available to the reader.

Although the businesses featured in WDTOT operated in various industries and differed with respect to production processes, products and resources, they shared several characteristics particularly relevant at the start of a new business and which conveyed a notion of accessibility. Firstly, the protagonists were reportedly able to start their new venture from home or to turn their home into their business location. Secondly, the protagonists were able to work with external contract partners such as laboratories, factories or wholesalers rather than with employees and in-house facilities. Thirdly, the women were able to produce to demand. Fourthly, several protagonists started their business by 'moonlighting', taking advantage of employment-based resources such as salary and wage benefits while preparing to launch their own business. As a

consequence, none of the businesses were portrayed as requiring significant initial financial investment for buying materials, renting offices or production facilities or for employing staff; start-up budgets were downplayed to as little as a £70 investment in a second-hand bicycle (*A slice of the good life*). Start-up capital was reported to have been sourced from low threshold sources such as savings, husbands or families, mortgages and overdrafts, which created the impression that starting one's own business did not require substantial financial resources. Financial risks were downplayed (e.g. "We started off small as we didn't want to risk too much" (*The bag ladies*)) and readers were assured that starting a business was not an irresponsible gamble (e.g. "I'm a risk taker, but within reason" (*From bags to riches*)).

In a similar vein, WDTOT promised its readers that, whatever their current career and qualifications, they had the skills it takes to start a new business. Only five of the 18 WDTOT protagonists were reported to have undergone any type of pre-career change training: a diploma in clinical hypnosis combined with a three-day Doula training, on the job-training as an adventure tour guide, a cookery course, floristry night classes and, notably in only one case, a business skills workshop. None of these trainings would have required previous qualifications or substantial investments of time or money. Instead, the successful WDTOT entrepreneurs were described as "armed with nothing but nous" and as having "not one single formal qualification in business" (*My very own property boom*). Assuring the readers that "you don't need an earth-shattering invention to start a new business" and that "ideas are right under your nose" (*From bags to riches*), WDTOT emphasised the protagonists' individuality as their source for success: "she had the creative flair – so what if she lacked the scientific expertise?" (*The green goddess*). Entrepreneurship was portrayed as requiring not business skills, but "personality" and "passion" (*My very own property boom*).

Beyond finance and skills considerations, WDTOT emphasised that transitions into entrepreneurship were quick, easy and seamless: "She handed in her notice at work and spent every

spare moment [...] experimenting with recipes until Tunworth [cheese] was born” (*Blessed are the cheesemakers*) or “I made a few phone calls and persuaded the makers to let me sell it. We called it the Hipseat, named the company Hippychick and that was that; I had my own business” (*Toys are us*). In addition, the WDTOT main feature articles were accompanied with step-by-step advice and encouragement on setting up a business. Two columns entitled “My five best decisions” and “Could you do it?” offered industry expert advice on how to start a business in the respective industry. A third column entitled “We did it, too” presented mini-profiles of other women business owners, suggesting that the main article’s protagonist was not an isolated case of successful female entrepreneurship in this area. All three columns further conveyed the impression that businesses are easy to start and run.

The second key finding of our analysis is thus that WDTOT portrayed transitions into business ownership as accessible for *eve* readers: No substantial investments were said to be required; risks and entry barriers were downplayed and readers were assured they did not have to possess or acquire specific skills.

Our analysis of WDTOT’s presentation has thus shown that female entrepreneurship was portrayed as both aspirational and accessible. WDTOT not only invited its readers to dream of a certain work-lifestyle, but offered encouragement and practical information for making this dream happen. The overall impression was that the advice offered by WDTOT was almost all readers would need to start their own business, become successful female entrepreneurs and enjoy a fulfilling and balanced working life.

#### **4.2 Traditional femininity and self-fulfilment**

To analyse the nature of female entrepreneurship WDTOT promoted, we focused on the content and location of the entrepreneurs' work and on their work-life experiences. Before we discuss each of these aspects, we give a brief overview of the career changes featured in WDTOT.

The 17 WDTOT articles reported on 18 women starting their own business (one article featured two women starting the business together). The featured female entrepreneurs had previously worked in predominantly new professions, including as a film producer's assistant, buyer for Disney, client manager in a bank, account director in advertising, hospitality manager, colourist, corporate lawyer, interior designer and teacher. Several protagonists were said to have earned substantial or high incomes in their former positions. Leaving these careers behind, the WDTOT protagonists founded a range of micro businesses including the development, production and wholesale of various products (handbags, organic shampoo, cheese; lavender crafts), a flower shop, a bakery, a cooking school and various other hospitality businesses (see also Table 2).

In these new businesses, the WDTOT protagonists' work content comprised either producing and selling products traditionally associated with women (e.g. handbags, shampoo, food, crafts, flowers) or providing service activities traditionally perceived as female, such as nurturing, caring, entertaining and hosting (e.g. hospitality, wedding planning, doula service) (cf. Banyard, 2010; Ahl, 2007). Female traditions featured strongly as WDTOT entrepreneurs reportedly turned to their grandmothers for inspiration. A typical example was Emma (*A slice of the good life*), who "tried out some of her grandmother's old recipes and soon [...] was selling cakes to friends". Alluding to similar allegedly female interests, Georgia (*The French mistress*) dubbed her business "a celebration of pretty things". With respect to the service providers amongst the WDTOT entrepreneurs, 'caring for others' emerged as the dominating narrative. Jennie (*Let's do lunch*) sold food that "makes [her friends] feel happy, it's like a hug" and hospitality property developer Sue (*My very own property boom*) loved "thinking up little ways to surprise and delight my customers". Holiday organisers

Sofia and Anna described the highs of their work as focussing on their customers' well-being, stating: "I wanted to give people an experience they are totally immersed in" (*The snow queen*) and "The only thing you don't do for them is make love" (*My life is one long holiday*). The intensity with which these portrayals of women's work content focused on traditionally female pursuits and skills, often harking back to housewifery and traditional gender roles, was compounded by statements such as "the most useful technique I learned was to go to offices at the highest levels and burst into tears" (*Easy rider*) and recommendations to simply "trust female intuition" (*A slice of the good life*).

While the WDTOT's entrepreneurs' work content was thus one traditionally perceived as female, it also centred on a particular segment of female activity: upmarket and luxury lifestyle products and services. All 17 businesses catered for middle class consumers who can afford purchases beyond life's bare necessities and whose consumptive choices are influenced by ecological, social and cultural values. As a result, the WDTOT protagonists' work focused on products and services for which, following the concerns of traditionally white, middle class femininity, aspects such as aesthetic appeal, style or personal values are key. Moreover, connotations of effort in work were downplayed. The women's work was not described as, for instance, sourcing materials, writing marketing strategies or preparing tax returns, but as shopping, browsing and chatting with friends, as "jet[ting] off to Milan, Barcelona and New York" and "quietly strolling round bejewelled stores filled with swathes of shimmering fabric" (*The bag ladies*). Under different circumstances, work practices such as designing handbags, cooking wholesome meals or organising weddings might well have been undertaken as leisure pursuits or at least as part of non-work life.

Analysing the locations of work described in WDTOT revealed a clear focus on domestic workplaces. Although all of the WDTOT businesses could conceivably have been located outside the domestic sphere, the majority of WDTOT entrepreneurs worked at home. Businesses were



run from home, production was undertaken at home and homes were turned into business locations. Decisions to relocate economic activity into the domestic sphere were portrayed as conscious and attractive lifestyle choices, emphasising that “the hub of their working life is Lucy’s big kitchen table [where] many of their beautiful handbag ideas are born, fuelled by tea and biscuits” (*The bag ladies*), or that Emma “spends her days in her steaming kitchen perfecting sweet treats” (*A slice of the good life*). Across all articles, WDTOT emphasised an overlap, if not amalgamation, of domestic and business spheres and professional and personal lives. Not only were homes transformed into businesses and houses and cars sold to finance their start-up (*My very own property boom*, *The green goddess*), but friends became clients (*Let’s do lunch*) and clients and business contacts became friends or even husbands (*The green goddess*). In one of the most extensive examples of blurred work-life boundaries (*Toys are us*) wife and husband were business partners, the children were taken to trade fairs to promote the products and even the family bathroom was used as a product storeroom.

Finally, the analysis of data coded as relating to the women’s work experiences revealed three key themes. Firstly, working as a female entrepreneur was portrayed as an enjoyable, pleasant activity, not as hardship or effort. Implicitly assuming that work should be unpleasant, strenuous or energy demanding, the protagonists were quoted as emphasising “my job doesn’t feel like work” (*Art house*) or “it doesn’t feel like work, despite the long hours” (*Let’s do lunch*). Secondly, WDTOT emphasised how becoming a female entrepreneur improved work-life balance. The relocation of work into the domestic sphere played a key role here which, notably, in several cases (re-)asserted the WDTOT protagonists as primary carers. However, fulfilling such traditional roles was not described as potentially problematic, but as a chance to better balance work and life and to fulfil personal preferences: “working from home means I’m always around for the family. It’s brought me back to my roots” (*Blessed are the cheesemakers*). Thirdly, far from providing only a means to earning a living, WDTOT presented work experiences as facilitating personal fulfilment. Work

was described as chiming with the women's personalities, for example in the case of Emma (*A slice of the good life*), who emphasised that "baking did come naturally". Louise (*The green goddess*) reported feeling "100% fulfilled" and Julie (*Blessed are the cheesemakers*) relished the opportunity to work from home because her "heart was always at home at our old farmhouse in the Hampshire countryside". These positive images of work were reinforced by comparisons with the women's previous work experiences. Prior to starting their own business, the women were reported to have worked in "grey, corporate offices" (*The bag ladies*) and as having found themselves "well and truly in the rat race" (*Purple haze*), with work that made them feel "guilty", "frustrated", "bored" and "stagnant" and "zapp[ed] [my] natural get-up-and-go". Against this backdrop, starting their own business was lauded as liberating and energising, for instance stating that "Anna rediscovered her joie de vivre" (*My life is one long holiday*) or quoting Sofia (*The snow queen*) as saying "I have constant sparks of energy and I'm much more creative". Negative experiences were presented as merely temporary occurrences ("hitches", "tricky moments" or "bad days") that were "worth it" because in the end, "the hard slog is paying off" (*The bag ladies*). Promising self-fulfilment and emotional well-being, WDTOT thus depicted female entrepreneurship not only as a pleasant work experience, but as a route to achieving an identity congruity between gender and work.

Summing up our analysis with respect to work content, workplaces and work experiences, WDTOT pictured female entrepreneurship as centred on lifestyle pursuits and activities traditionally stereotyped as female, undertaken at home and appealing to allegedly innate female skills, qualities and personality traits. The protagonists were portrayed as earning a living from doing something they enjoyed as an (integral) part of a desirable lifestyle that befitted their personality. Whatever hard work there might have been was momentary and what remained was a work-lifestyle in which "even the chores are exciting" (*The snow queen*). Moreover, in yielding such work experiences, entrepreneurship was portrayed as liberation from the constraining, negative work experiences endured in professional employment.

## 5. Discussion

Obviously, *eve* is neither an academic publication nor an outlet for serious investigative journalism, but a lifestyle magazine. That *eve* presented work as a lifestyle issue is therefore logical rather than surprising. However, and as discussed in Section 2, media representations in features such as *eve*'s WDTOT have the potential to influence women's personal and professional life choices. Given this influence, representations of female entrepreneurship such as WDTOT's are likely to have a problematic impact on the reality of female entrepreneurship.

Firstly and with respect to the sectors and types of businesses, WDTOT portrayed a particular type of professional transition. The protagonists were described as leaving new professions, which typically feature low occupational segregation by gender, higher prestige and earnings. They transitioned into sectors with typically high levels of occupational segregation across all forms of employment, lower prestige and earnings – all of which are problematic from a gender equality perspective (Bradley, 2007). In addition, the WDTOT newly founded businesses exhibited precisely those business characteristics that contribute to gendered experiences of entrepreneurship: they were home based and under-capitalised, often founded as 'moonlighting businesses' and with little to no entrepreneurial qualifications (Marlow, 1997, 2002).

Secondly and with respect to work content, WDTOT promoted women's entrepreneurship as comprised of activities traditionally perceived as female and centring on female skills (Ahl, 2007; Banyard, 2010). Such representations are likely to compound inequalities arising from women business ownership already concentrating on sectors in which 'skills are an extension of what has been naturally learnt through gender socialization' (Bruni *et al.*, 2004a, p. 260) and therefore being regarded as less valuable than entrepreneurship in sectors with higher entry barriers (*ibid.*). Moreover, WDTOT's entrepreneurs focused on middle-class leisure and consumption activities

and upmarket lifestyle products and services, engaging with which WDTOT portrayed as pleasant and fulfilling innate female desires. Compared to the desk-bound and IT supported work practices of the 21<sup>st</sup> century stereotypical professional worker, the WDTOT entrepreneurs' work practices seem almost frivolous. Given that views of femininity and women's activities as 'trivial and impulsive' (Bradley, 2007, p. 160) and as preoccupied by consumption have proved a key obstacle to gender equality in the workplace and business world, such forms of entrepreneurship practices are unlikely to gain women business owners recognition, representation and success on par with their male counterparts.

Thirdly and with respect to workplaces, WDTOT promoted a domestically centred form of entrepreneurship, mirroring existing trends towards using the home as a workplace (Eikhof, 2012; Mason *et al.*, 2011; Eikhof *et al.*, 2007; Felstead *et al.*, 2005). WDTOT posited that the relocation of work to the domestic sphere facilitated a better work-life balance – a claim that is empirically contested by studies exposing tele-workers as feeling 'doubly guilty' (Bøgh Fangel and Aaløkke, 2008; Kylin and Karlsson, 2008). More significantly though, the 1.5 breadwinner household model several WDTOT entrepreneurs retreated to has emerged as a key obstacle to gender equality in the workplace, private and public sphere (Rouse, 2011; Bradley, 2007). At societal level, any retreat of women's work to the home runs the risk of women collectively losing their public voice, thereby ceding ground to what, following Sylva Walby, has been termed 'public patriarchy' (Bradley, 2007, p. 44). Moreover, regardless of its content, work that is undertaken at home tends to be perceived as less serious and as not requiring professional working conditions (i.e. absence of interruptions, availability of dedicated workspaces etc.) (Kirkwood and Toothill, 2008; Rouse and Kitching, 2006; Sullivan, 2000; Holmes *et al.*, 1997). The re-domestication of women's work promoted in WDTOT would therefore also be likely to provide ample breeding ground for intra-household gender inequalities, or, in Walby's terms, private patriarchy.

Overall, WDTOT presented the transitions from corporate careers into entrepreneurship as a liberating move towards empowerment, independence and self-fulfilment. Indeed, the desire for independence, autonomy and control over one's working life is a key motivator for those pursuing an entrepreneurial career (Bradley and Roberts, 2004; Mallon and Cohen, 2001). However, if women were to pursue the specific nature of female entrepreneurship promoted by WDTOT, the overall effect is unlikely to be emancipation, empowerment or even gender equality. Instead a far more likely outcome would be the perpetuation and entrenchment of current gender inequalities and occupational segregation in the workplace and particularly in entrepreneurial activity and work as described in Section 2.

## **6. Conclusion**

The empirical aim of this paper was to analyse the representation of female entrepreneurship in a women's magazine, *eve*, and to critically relate these representations to current evidence on women's entrepreneurial activity and work. Although not included in previous analyses of media representations of entrepreneurship, women's magazines shape women's perceptions of the personal and professional choices available to them and, by presenting certain options as appropriate, desirable and attainable, have the potential to influence women's real-life practices. Media representations in women's magazines thus affect what women understand female entrepreneurship to be and what kind of entrepreneurship they might aspire to. Our analysis showed that *eve's* WDTOT presented and promoted female entrepreneurship as centred on activities and skills traditionally regarded as female and undertaken in domestic work locations. This image of 'Women doing their own thing' was presented as liberation from the career rat-race and as leading to a highly desirable, emotionally satisfying work-life style. However, comparisons with women's current experiences in work and entrepreneurship show that if, adopted by readers, such forms of entrepreneurial activity could be expected to entrench and increase existing gender inequalities in entrepreneurship.

Such concerns emerge as particularly salient when WDTOT's representation of female entrepreneurship is related to current developments regarding work more broadly. The narrative of escaping the corporate world for an allegedly more balanced and fulfilled work-lifestyle centred on traditionally female pursuits is by no means confined to *eve* as a solitary publication. Mainstream media and 'chick lit' lecture professional women on appropriate domestic performances as Yummy Mummies (Fraser, 2007; Pearson, 2006) and networks such as Mumpreneur UK and Mumsclub promote the same type of female entrepreneurship as WDTOT (see, e.g., the current business and product directories on [www.mumpreneuruk.com](http://www.mumpreneuruk.com) and [www.mumsclub.co.uk](http://www.mumsclub.co.uk)). Moreover, WDTOT's portrayal of professional women trapped in the "rat race" of "soulless" corporate careers links with the middle class laments of wanting to overturn a life ruled by work and commute, smartphones and laptops (Eikhof, 2012; Bolchover, 2005; Bunting, 2004). Such ideological and often extensively media-supported interpretative frameworks perfectly complement WDTOT's representation of female entrepreneurship and give these representations particular appeal and pertinence for readers' real life-choices.

Previous studies have stressed that analysing media representations of female entrepreneurship facilitates a more thorough understanding of entrepreneurship in relation to its social and cultural context (e.g. Achtenhagen and Welter, 2007; Ahl, 2007; Smith and Anderson, 2007). A key aspect of such social and cultural context is work, the representations and realities of which remain highly gendered (Bradley, 2007). At a conceptual level, our analysis has shown that, once representations of business ownership are understood as representations of entrepreneurs' work, it becomes possible to analyse interrelations with gendered notions of particular business sectors, skills, work practices and location. A work-perspective can, as illustrated in our analysis, point out that images of home-based female entrepreneurship have to be understood in conjunction with perceptions of women's work in the home as less valuable, closely related to 'trivial' and 'frivolous'

consumption and amalgamated with family responsibilities. Appreciation of the latter image can then lead to a deeper understanding of the obstacles women entrepreneurs might have to overcome to earn recognition as successful business owners. In this respect a particularly insightful future research question might be how images of entrepreneurial success relate to perceptions of men's and women's position in the total social organisation of labour (Glucksmann, 2009), especially where these positions differ between countries or change over time, for instance following the introduction of gender-neutral parental leave legislation. Our analysis of *eve's Women doing their own thing* has therefore demonstrated how including a sociology of work-perspective in these or similar veins can not only advance the analysis of entrepreneurship (e.g. Rouse, 2011; Jennings and McDougald, 2007), but also of its various media representations.

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**Table 1: Coding scheme**

<b>Coding scheme</b>	
Data was coded with respect to (1) its informational content and (2) phrasings/use of language	
<b>Code</b>	<b>Sub-Codes</b>
Protagonist	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Age</li> <li>• Ethnicity</li> <li>• Relationship status</li> <li>• Number of children</li> <li>• Sexual orientation</li> <li>• Descriptions of the protagonists/their personality</li> <li>• Comparisons of protagonists pre/post business start-up</li> </ul>
Characteristics of new business	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Product</li> <li>• Product price (range)</li> <li>• Industry</li> <li>• Outlet</li> <li>• (Number of) employees</li> <li>• Indicators of financial success</li> <li>• Measures of business esteem</li> <li>• Customers/clients</li> <li>• Position in new business (e.g. partner, owner, sole trader)</li> </ul>
Financial capital	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Start-up costs</li> <li>• Source(s) of start-up costs</li> <li>• Financial situation pre/post business start-up</li> </ul>
Human capital and previous career	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Previous occupation/position</li> <li>• Qualification acquired for previous occupation/position</li> <li>• New qualification related to new business</li> <li>• Did starting new business imply a career change</li> </ul>
Social capital	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Other business partners</li> <li>• Informal support</li> <li>• Support from partner</li> <li>• Changes/compromises made by partner</li> </ul>
Work content and work places	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Work content/ Descriptions of work as such</li> <li>• Core workplace</li> <li>• Work attitudes</li> <li>• Motivation to start new career/business</li> <li>• Working hours</li> <li>• Changes in working hours compared to previous career</li> </ul>
Work experiences	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• General work experience</li> <li>• Highs</li> <li>• Lows</li> </ul>
Indicative language/phrasing	



**Table 2: Businesses and protagonists of the ‘Women Doing Their Own Thing’**

<b>Article title</b>	<b>Business featured</b>	<b>Protagonist's former occupation</b>	<b>Protagonist's marital status</b>
The bag ladies	Handbag range Wilbur & Gussie	Film producer's assistant (Bret) and buyer for Disney (Lucy)	No information (Bret); married, 3 children (Lucy)
Ma vie en rose	Flowershop "La Maison des Roses"	Client manager in bank	Married
My very own property boom	Hospitality business development	Hospitality manager	Married, 1 child
The French mistress	Furniture import "The French Bedroom Company"	Worked in public relations	Engaged
Let's do lunch	Cooking school and take away "Soulsome Foods"	Worked in marketing	Divorced
Special delivery	Doula & hypnotherapist	Worked in conference industry	Married, 3 children
The snow queen	Activity hotel "Whitepod" (Switzerland)	Corporate lawyer	Married
My life is one long holiday	Guided tours in Greece, "Walking with Anna"	Office worker	No information
A slice of the good life	Bakery and wholesale "Honeybuns"	Teacher	Married
Purple haze	Lavender crafts shop "Millcroft Lavender"	"High-flying business troubleshooter"	Married, 1 child
Blessed are the cheese makers	Cheese "Tunworth Soft Cheese"	Worked in conference industry	Married, 3 children
The green goddess	Organic shampoo range "Sacred Locks"	Colourist	Married, 1 child
From bags to riches	Handbag range "ZPM"	Worked in sales	Divorced, 3 children
Art house	Paintings	Corporate interior designer	Married, 2 children
Easy rider	Motorbike tours in India "Blazingtrailstours"	Worked for travel insurance company	No information
Toys are us	Children's products mail-order shop "Hippychick"	Worked in marketing	Married, 3 children
The wedding guru	Boutique weddings in Italy "Love and Lord"	Account director advertising	Married, 2 children

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