



Reviewing Representations of the Ubiquitous “Entrepreneurs Wife”

Robert Smith and Lorraine Warren

INTRODUCTION

The Rose Review of female entrepreneurship (Rose 2019: 2) highlighted an “*unacceptable disparity between female and male entrepreneurship*” in the UK which effects entrepreneurial gender equality, resulting in significant levels of unrealized potential. According to Rose, statistically only one in three UK entrepreneurs are female. Extant research suggests entrepreneurship is embedded in collaborations and relationships between people. Yet to date, too much emphasis has been placed on the “male centric” ideology of entrepreneurship (Ahl & Marlow, 2012; Deacon, Harris, & Worth, 2014); and on the heroic entrepreneur (Anderson & Warren, 2011) when the entrepreneur patently operates within such relationships. Using the statistics of Rose (2019) it is evident that if only in three UK entrepreneurs are female then two-thirds of male

R. Smith (✉)
Aberdeen, Scotland

L. Warren
Southampton, UK

entrepreneurs will have a wife involved in the business to a certain extent. Thus, despite the growing appreciation of the powerbase and dynamics of entrepreneurial activity and a developing academic interest in the socially constructed and gendered nature of entrepreneurial narrative and identity (Al-Dajani, Bika, Collins, & Swail, 2014) the pivotal role played by the wives of entrepreneurs is an under-researched phenomenon. Such wives (Basu, 2004; Bowman, 2009; Martin & Guarnieri, 2014) play a significant role in the lives, achievements, and successes of entrepreneurs and influence their unfolding entrepreneurial identities and narratives. Nevertheless, the ubiquitous “*Entrepreneurs wife*” is a silent, and arguably silenced, entrepreneurial actor, as evidenced the paucity of academic articles on the topic. Moreover, there is a growing literature on how media representations of female entrepreneurs are portrayed (see Achtenhagen & Welter, 2011; Eikhoff, Summers, & Carter 2013; Nicholson & Anderson, 2005; Radu & Redien-Collot, 2008) negatively and trivialized in comparison to their male entrepreneurial peers. We seek to establish if the wives of entrepreneurs are similarly constructed.

The term “*Entrepreneurs wife*” (singular) or “*Entrepreneurs’ wives*” (plural) is potentially controversial, possessing as it does a narrow specificity, assuming a patriarchal dominance vis-a-vis the ascribed gender of the entrepreneur. There are only a small number of studies which touch upon the topic such as those of Basu (2004), Bowman (2009), and Martin and Guarnieri (2014) as discussed in the literature review below. This highlights an evident gap in the literature worthy of further research. Thus, what we know at present is that there is a dearth of research into this entrepreneurial category despite there being numerous media representations of said wives that either present them in a less than flattering light, or worse ignores them. This research investigates this research gap to synthesize a protean literature and by examining what the representations actually tell us. Therefore, our main contribution is to posit the “*Entrepreneurs wife*” as an entrepreneurial typology in her own right; and as a construct worthy of further research. Additionally, the significance of this contribution is to shed light on the importance of wives to the success of their partners. Consequentially, we explore an interesting construction of gender at work and neglected gendered identity. We seek to raise awareness of this often invisible, yet stereotypical figure.

This chapter focuses on academic and media representations of “*Entrepreneurs wives*” and in doing so uncovers some generic features relating to the manner in which they are marginalized, exploited, etc.

In the process, we explore an under-researched area of entrepreneurial narrative and identity to shed new theoretical and conceptual light on the “private lives” of entrepreneurs. The research focus is both upon the wives and media representations of them. This makes it necessary to synthesize an explanatory literature. A more nuanced understanding is necessary because at present the wife of an entrepreneur is either ignored or she is treated as an appendage when in reality they play a significant role in the development of the business. This chapter seeks to address two research questions from the literature reviewed, namely—How are “*Entrepreneurs wives*” portrayed in the media and in academic discourse? And—What can we learn from the study?

SOME BRIEF METHODOLOGICAL CONSIDERATIONS

The review methodology used is qualitative in nature and consists of a mixed methodology of netnography (Kozinets, 2009; 2010) and media analysis techniques (as per Altheide & Schneider, 2013) including “ethnographic content analysis.” Netnography is helpful for studying under-researched topics, enabling unobtrusive and covert ways to gain deeper insights into opinions, motives, and concerns (Langer & Beckmann, 2005).

We began by examining well-known celebrity entrepreneurs and their wives such as the late Gordon and Ina Baxter, Sir Richard Branson and his second wife *Joan Templeman*; Alan Sugar and his wife Anne Simons; James Caan and his wife Aisha; Peter Jones and his wife Tara; and Sir Philip and Christina “Tina” Green. Lady Green is an entrepreneur in her own right. Ina Baxter was a positive role model for female entrepreneurship (see Smith, 2017). However, issues of selection were complicated by the fact that the iconic Branson was previously married to *Kristen Tomassi*; *Lady Green* was previously married to businessman Robert Palos; and because all are high profile celebrity entrepreneurs/CEO’s (See Guthey, Clark, & Jackson, 2009; Muda, Musa, Naina, & Borhan, 2014 for a wider discussion of this phenomenon). It quickly became apparent to us that to better understand the phenomenon we had to conduct an extensive review of such representations and the academic literature.

SYNTHESIZING LITERATURE ON ENTREPRENEURS WIVES

The extant literature on gender and entrepreneurship focuses on the traditional assumption that the entrepreneur is a man (Ahl & Marlow, 2012) albeit there are many ways of doing gender differently (Mavin & Grandy, 2012). Nevertheless, the female as entrepreneur (as an exaggerated expression of femininity) is not the only possible entrepreneurial role available for a woman. Hamilton (2006) argues that the role of women in family businesses is relatively under investigated. This fact underpins our lack of understanding of the role played by the wives of entrepreneurs. One of the issues that obscure wives from view is the fact that at present there is not an appropriate theoretical base in relation to the topic. This may be because too often researchers concentrate on the procedural and business elements of the entrepreneurship paradigm at the expense of the more deeply personal driving forces (see Down, 2007; De Vries, 2009 for examples of significant exceptions). The monograph of Down (2007) was seminal because he incorporated family and personal life of the entrepreneurs he studied as part of his research design. Similarly, the work of De Vries (2009) is refreshing because he considers deeply personal issues such marriage, love, and sex as variables in the life choices of entrepreneurs and CEOs in their quest for authenticity. This review, of necessity focuses on a wide range of topics and themes to highlight the nuances of the “wives” literature and media representations of them. A detailed trawl of extant literature revealed that it was diverse and characterized both by its paucity and specificity. The literature either merely touches upon the topic or deals with specific business issues. Perhaps this is to be expected, given the novel nature of the topic. Indeed, there is an evident dearth of literature that deals specifically with the topic per se. Extant studies span the media and academic domains and although there are many negative representations of wives, overall its focus is on the supportive role of women. We examine both media and academic representations.

Media Representations

Such representations are found in media and press coverage of entrepreneurs including biographies, books, and in the popular press—particularly tabloids. The most visible representations of the

“*Entrepreneurs wife*” are found in biographies and tabloids which concentrate on celebrity, male entrepreneurs.

Biographical and tabloid representations: We restrict our search to a UK based context to avoid cultural and regional factors which may influence the data collected and therefore the nuances of the research. We analyzed these publicly available representations albeit the issue of celebrity may skew the established entrepreneurial narrative because of the nature of journalistic practices (both because of often salacious nature of investigative journalism and the intrusive nature of the paparazzi) and because celebrities are equally celebrated and vilified and accordingly exert an influence that is pervasive, but difficult to evaluate and explain. According to Guthey et al. celebrity actions, personalities and private lives function symbolically to represent significant dynamics and tensions prevalent in the contemporary business environment. In such narratives, the story becomes more than about them and their partners as the inherent themes of heroism, villainy are amplified because of the perennial nature of the manufactured backlash against them. *A scoping-pilot study was conducted using the above named. Emergent themes were of bossy, overly directive wives and the media stories were often articulated as “slurs,” “jibes,” and “accusations” against the masculinity or manhood of the male entrepreneur. Accusations of greed, dishonesty largesse, hedonism, extravagant lifestyles, and conspicuous consumption predominated with the anti-capitalist “Fat Cat” slur (Cammett, 2005; Littler, 2007) being commonplace. It was evident that with high profile, celebrity entrepreneurs the stories were more about societal criticisms than about the individuals’ legitimate entrepreneurial narrative and that the stories were potentially biased and infused with what “Tabloid Intimacy” (Littler, 2007). Male billionaire entrepreneurs with interests in and expensive investments in horse breeding-racing, vintage cars, yachting, and flying were specifically singled out for vilification by journalists. We surmised that as a theme it was not so much negativity about the entrepreneurs themselves per se but more of a socially constructed societal aversion to hedonism, avarice, and conspicuous consumption. Celebrity entrepreneurs’ wives are treated pejoratively and subject to discrimination and prejudice. In biographies of entrepreneurs and in the popular press representations of “*Entrepreneurs wives*” are often pejorative and pervaded by stereotypical representations of a derogatory nature such as the WAG category [Wives and Girlfriends] (Bullen, 2014; Johnson &*

Kaye, 2004) and the “Mistress” (Alexander, 1987). Such claims are patriarchal, misogynistic tropes of a derogatory nature and include stereotypes such as gold-digging (Siegal, 2004; Vera, Berardo, & Berardo, 1987) and reflect common sense interpretations of observed and reported behaviors. What such tropes elide is the complexity of the exchange between partners as alluded to in this chapter. Partners can clearly exploit each other or be perceived to be doing so. That the wives of celebrity entrepreneurs are used by the media to further their stories, is hardly surprising nor is the fact that much is made of the “trophy-wife” (Vera et al., 1987) and the wife as a mechanism for tax avoidance. Other common stories relate to extravagant lifestyles, hedonism, and conspicuous consumption (Veblen, 2005).

Nevertheless, the majority of stories were positive and relate to fidelity and successful, long-term, loving relationships with childhood sweethearts. Fidelity is a strong theme in the narratives, and this resonates with the arguments of Stanley (2000) who found that successful millionaire couples have long-standing marriages. Only a small number relates to infidelity and womanizing. Some wives are cast as “domestic goddesses” and “home-makers.” There is a discernible UK media bias in the coverage and many of the themes and their nuances may only be applicable in UK cases.

Representations in the popular press: In the popular press and in the genre of “How to books” there is a focus on women’s roles and tensions in personal and business relationships and thus relational dynamics. There is a focus on relationship advice to overcome the challenges and obstacles facing the wives of entrepreneurs. This literature consists of journalistic articles and books (see Hirshberg, 2010, 2012; Hymowitz, 2012; Williams, 2012). As such the tone and message is different from academic articles. The article of Williams (2012) stresses that the “spouses” of an entrepreneur are critical to their success, but their exploits are often unsung. Williams debunks the myth of an idyllic lifestyle of high income, time off, and extended vacations arguing that the entrepreneurial life is a tornado of long hours, high risk, and uncertainty. Williams stresses that despite good intentions, entrepreneurs can be the world’s worst spouses, typically investing the majority of their time and interest in their companies, even during prosperous times. Furthermore, she highlights the high incidence of personal wealth loss, marital troubles, and divorce that can accrue from failed business marriages. Hirshberg (2010) highlights the high divorce rates of entrepreneurs, citing common causes

such as financial strain, neglect, lack of communication, and divergent goals often leading to a toxic cocktail of resentment and anxiety created by putting the family's security constantly at risk. Elsewhere, Hirshberg (2012) addresses topics such as how to handle the failure of a start-up, the strains of serial entrepreneurship, and how to handle extra stresses that happen when a company owner falls ill. She urges entrepreneurs and their families to strive for and focus on the “*magic moments*” which outweigh the negative aspects. In relation to the negative, there are reports of the wealthy wives of businessmen achieving substantial settlements on divorcing their wealthy entrepreneur-husbands (see Baker, 1998). There is also an alternative side to the paradigm as evidenced by Hymowitz (2012) who reported that with the growing rise of female CEO's and entrepreneurs that many husbands choose to become their powerful wives Chief Domestic Officers and “stay-at-home-dads.” Chaserio, Lebegue and Poroli (2014) argue that female entrepreneurs often draw upon emotional support from their partners. The literature search only unearthed one academic study of the term “Entrepreneurs husband” carried out by Nikina et al. (2015) who explored the changes in the role of the husband of Scandinavian female entrepreneurs and how these affect the marriage and their relationship with the business. This identified implicit and specific gender-based patterns of dominance between husband and wife which affected levels of marital harmony and spousal support. These changing roles alter marriage dynamics and influence the men's wife-business relationship. Interestingly, such husbands do not face the same negative levels of criticism.

Academic Representations

The propensity of women to be energetically entrepreneurial has been posited by Smith (2009) in the form of the “The Diva” stereotype. In addition, D'Andria and Gabarret (2017) posit the category of women in entrepreneurial careers. Nevertheless, the gender imbalance in entrepreneurial equality as highlighted by Rose is a palpable and well-established facet of the academic literature (Mulholland, 1997, 2003a, 2003b, 1996). Academic representations of women in business generally relate to aspects of gendered entrepreneurial identity, female stereotypes associated with entrepreneurial identity and to life cycles and stages. Such diverse representations include the Co-preneur, The Good Wife, and the Matriarch.

The gender imbalance in entrepreneurial equality: Women entrepreneurs and women in business suffer from a “double bind” (Litz, 2011) having to take care of the twin and often conflicting professional and familio-marital business dimensions. According to Nye (1988) feminist explanatory theories are steeped in the philosophies of men and the patriarchal, practice of misogyny. It is apparent from readings that women are socialized into acceptance of these norms and behaviors and are thus silenced. This gender imbalance begins before the women even marries and is inherent in relation to wealth creation and accumulation in capitalist western societies, particularly in family business (Mulholland, 1997, 2003a, 2003b). Mulholland (1996) challenged the popular image of middle and upper-class women, being beneficiaries and consumers of wealth and of men as the central agents in wealth creation, arguing that while such women were active in the generation of wealth, they do not receive due recognition, marginalizing them in the management and ownership of wealth. Mulholland blames this on a process of wealth formation in which gender relations are underpinned by patriarchal practices. This ordering propels male kin to positions of power and influence while overshadowing females. Moreover, Mulholland (2003a) examined the relationship between domesticity, emotion as absence and enterprise. She drew on Ochberg’s (1987) argument that contemporary men merely act out their emotional family role to explore the dynamics of the sexual division of labor and the relationship between home and work. Men generally disinvest in domesticity because work activity is so pervasive it invades and colonizes family life ordering domestic life despite most enterprising men drawing a sharp distinction between work and home. Control of the household falls to wives extending a permutation of capitalist logic to the household. The men’s absence from the house and their preference for disengagement from the messy arena of emotional work obscure the extent to which they attempt to regulate. Furthermore, Mulholland (2003b) explored the career paths of husband and wife partnerships in family firms establishing the presence of female kin subordination and male kin domination as wealth is accumulated within the business. Business growth has very different outcomes for wives and husbands. Male partners in parallel with the growth of the business carve out careers as chief executives while female partners are cannot make the transition from the stereotypical image of “helpmate” to company professional. Mulholland suggests that such women are systematically marginalized from the nucleus of organizational power

and are excluded from the family business, its managerial structures, specialization of function, and its bureaucratic processes.

The work of Heikkinen (2014) is of note because she argues that a male manager's career unfolds in tandem with their family life, as well as the norms and gender roles related to family. Heikkinen developed a typology distinguishing four types of female spouses, i.e., supporting, balance-seeking, care-providing, and success-expecting types. Women in business possess overlapping identities and try to present a rational and logical persona as business leaders while avoiding being intuitive and emotive because these feminine traits are inappropriate at work. Such traits belong at home but ironically women can express their femininity and maternalism at work because being a "good mother" is a desired ideal embedded in work and at home (Martin, Jerrard, & Wright, 2019).

This stream of literature is important in illustrating the unequal character of the marriage as the business partnership magnifies the contradictions of the class gender nexus in the coordination of the role of wife and business partner in the family enterprise. Women even from a business family background are disadvantaged even before marrying an entrepreneur or starting a business with their partner. In practice, it is not as straight forward as theory suggests because as Hamilton (2006) reported, there is a tension and confusion around authority between the "entrepreneur-husband" and wife stressing that while there is complicity between both, far from being marginalized through the forces of patriarchy or paternalism, wives engage with and narrate alternative gender discourses and practices that paradoxically evidence complicity and resistance to patriarchy. Marital tension is evident in the literature.

The Co-preneurial heroine: When one considers hidden dimensions of the role of women in business and particularly in relation to entrepreneurship theory, the obvious theoretical plank is that of Co-preneurship (Bensemann & Hall, 2010; De Bruin & Lewis, 1994, 2004; Marshack, 1994) whereby couples share ownership, commitment, and responsibility for a business. As it stands the theory is used to represent a heroic union whereby both the male entrepreneur and his wife engage equally in the marriage and the business. However, it is not universally applicable as it does not cover every example of a marriage where the wife is involved in the business. As a theory, it has considerable utility because it is ostensibly asexual and agendered and relates to both heterosexual and homosexual couples, married or not. However, the assumption of gender equality within co-preneurial businesses is merely a taken-for-granted one

in that little research has been conducted into the balance of responsibilities in such ventures. The category of “*Fellowship Tales*” (Smith & Neergaard, 2015) is of relevance as it allows a dual entrepreneurial voice to co-preneurial couples.

The Good Wife: Wives can be devoted to both marriage and the business without being a co-preneur. Many wives help their entrepreneur-husbands without having a specified role in the business. Other relevant theoretical categories include “*committed couples*” in business (Ashton-Hodgson, 2005); the “*CEO spouse*” or wives of owner-managers (Poza & Messer, 2001); and the “*good wife*” (Lewis & Massey, 2011). Lewis and Massey looked beyond the “*visible women*” (those running businesses as owner-managers or partners) to a focus on the invisible without clearly acknowledged and/or formalized roles. Such wives play critical, often unseen, unpaid, and unacknowledged “*behind the scenes*” roles in line with the notions of “*wifeliness*” and the “*idealized wife*” (Russell, 2005). Goffe & Scase (2015) refer to the entrepreneurial category of the “*Women in charge*” for whom entrepreneurship is a means to achieve economic and social independence. They refute the notion of a single entrepreneurial experience arguing that the causes and consequences of business start-up are conditioned by the extent to which women are committed to traditionally prescribed roles.

Martin and Guarnieri (2014) highlighted the existence of extensive research into the “assistant” or “helpers” role often assumed by the entrepreneur’s wife (Basu, 2004) but nevertheless the literature is underdeveloped. Basu (2004) distinguished between business aspirations in relation to those with business-first, family-first, money-first, and lifestyle-first aspirations, arguing that family background affects entrepreneurs’ aspirations and in particular their stage on the family life cycle. Bowman (2009) highlighted the unwritten, gender-based “deal” and explored how wives make sense of the conflicts between their husbands’ intense engagement with entrepreneurial business activity and their own belief in the idea of egalitarian intimate relationships. Bowman counselled against looking at family life in isolation from market work, or vice versa because there is a danger of distortion in relation to our understanding of both. Bowman found evidence of the continuation of the gender-based deal in contemporary business practices. She stressed that belief in this deal not only shapes the choices that individual men and women make but shapes the nature of market and non-market life. This so-called deal has become naturalized and inevitable. As a result, the rules that govern resource use

and the accumulation of different forms of capital have not been negotiated and remain non-negotiable. The study of Martin and Guarnieri (2014) scrutinized the role of “the wife” of a small business owner in occupational risk management. They found little differentiation in social relationships that characterize the business and the small business owner (and obviously the personal dynamics of their relationship). Martin and Guarnieri established that male entrepreneurs rely heavily on their wives to fulfil regulatory and other business obligations such as complying with risk management and health and safety and regulations. As result, the ubiquitous “*Entrepreneurs Wife*” is expected to take charge of the detail and to delegate tasks to allow her husband to run the business smoothly. The wives possess an elevated status within the family and the business but face resistance, restrictions, and limitations to the performance of their role. Indeed, as a genre, wives are conscientious in fulfilling her duties while overcoming organizational and symbolic challenges.

Also, relevance is the doctoral thesis of Cosson (2017) who studied the roles played by wives weaving the thread of work and family life in crafting a family business. They do so in dynamic, complex, and often invisible ways exercising power in a commonsensical way, circumventing entrepreneurial identity. Cosson suggests that wives are often not comfortable inhabiting an entrepreneurial identity and that the demands of entrepreneurial ideology are met more readily by husbands than wives. Instead, women “reflect back” to men their heroic masculine discourse. Cosson argues that wives exert a powerful force in undermining succession planning and are influential in trying to manage it while crafting the future of the business via a “*discourse of choice*.” For Cosson, the uncoupling of gender from traditional precepts is overstated and rather, women achieve uneven recognition and status, highlighting the coexistence of equality with enduring masculine privilege.

The Matriarch: Smith (2014, 2018) posited the stereotypes of the “Matriarch” and “The Dowager” to signify life stages in the evolution of the identity of the wives of entrepreneurs. What unites these stereotypes is that they are both important, positive gendered entrepreneurial role driven identities. In addition, the study of Moulton and Anderson (2005) into the mature, enterprising women with reduced domestic responsibilities who exploit specific “*windows of entrepreneurial opportunity*” evident in women’s life stages is also of interest. Similarly, Stirzaker and Sitko (2018), using positionality as a lens explored the complexity of the lived multiple identities of older women entrepreneurs (50+) paying

attention to how they engage with intersecting discourses surrounding enterprise culture and aging while constructing their identities. The outcomes of these dimensions are largely positive and demonstrate the life enhancing benefits of these overlaps. Again, tension is a key theme in the discourse particularly between the storied identities of “*mother*” and “*entrepreneur*.” They demonstrated a synergy between the intersection of older women entrepreneurs’ social identities and their entrepreneurial identity, albeit dependent upon the context and stage of life for these women, underpinned by both agency and external factors.

From a comparative close reading of the literatures there are obvious trait-based behaviors evident in the literature—namely acceptance of limitations, commitment, consciousnesses, crafting gender accepted familial narratives, delegation, independence, longevity of relationship, perseverance, responsibility, resistance, and “reflecting back” accepted gender-based roles (the masculine entrepreneurial halo). Several articles focus on relationship advice and overcoming challenges (emotional, financial, organizational, and symbolic) and obstacles (including confusion in relation to issues of power and authority, divorce, the negative perception of female entrepreneurs, marital problems) to entrepreneurial and personal success. All these can be accommodated under the rubrics of external context and individual agency. The overall message is that it is overfocused on the taken-for-grantedness of wives or discriminatory dominant/subordinate relationship. Despite these studies, there is an evident gap in the literature relating to how “*Entrepreneurs wives*” are portrayed in the popular press, media, and academic discourse. Overarching themes include “invisibility” and “indifference.” To recap, there are four main obstacles to its acceptance as an established and legitimate research category, or entrepreneurial type in her own right.

1. The invisibility and indifference emanate from media-inspired negative perception of female entrepreneurs in comparison to the eulogized male entrepreneur (and his blinding halo). This underpins the lack of acceptance of wives as serious entrepreneurial actors because if the entrepreneur is considered male-gendered then associated female entrepreneurial types are thus less worthy;
2. The “double bind” whereby women are expected to shoulder domestic responsibilities as well as professional ones prevent the wife from adopting a more visible role. This results in a “gender deal” whereby women who shoulder responsibility for supporting their

- husband's entrepreneurial ambitions reflect in that glory and make that narrative their own;
3. This is magnified by male entrepreneurs' overreliance on their wives for domestic and professional tasks thus masking the wife from view in both business and family; and
 4. These factors combine to create tensions which accrue around both personal and business relationships and dynamics. There is a definite tension between the forces of marginalization and empowerment and a focus on roles and a tension between performing support and help-based tasks and taking the initiative versus planning and scheming.

CONSIDERING EMPIRICAL REPRESENTATIONS OF ENTREPRENEURS WIVES

Smith and Warren (2018) analyzed the "Management Today" *data set* (<https://www.managementtoday.co.uk/top100entrepreneurs>) consisting of the top 100 UK entrepreneurs (male and female) by wealth, mining it for salient data. It proved difficult to locate details of the male entrepreneur's wives with over half of the entrepreneurs on the list having no publically available information on their wives. It was necessary to extend and expanded the research parameters to include internet searches, searches in the press and biographies to obtain usable data on the wives. They conducted searches to locate internet and newspaper articles on the subjects. This trawl also located Facebook and LinkedIn profiles which were mostly privacy protected. It was necessary to extend the search to company websites to locate a photograph of the subject to confirm and corroborate that the entries related to that individual. When this process failed separate searches of Bloomberg and Companies House helped identify spousal details. Where these searches failed to locate such details, we removed the subjects from the database. It is of note that only eight subjects had photographs of themselves and their wives in the public domain. Data collection proved to be problematic because although we know a lot of background detail on celebrity entrepreneurs who have published biographies, or feature in the press, we know little about less visible entrepreneur and their partners. So, unless the entry related celebrities locating even the names of wives, let alone details of their personal lives was difficult. This phase highlighted that wives are often

markedly “invisible.” While we appreciate that many female entrepreneurs use “hiding” as a mechanism to remain invisible from critical scrutiny (Weidhaas, 2018), being invisible to the media is not the same as being invisible in a gendered sense. It is a distinct form of invisibility.

One of the problems is that as a category it is quite broad as there is no such thing as the ubiquitous wife. A few stories relate to wives who are entrepreneurial in their own right. A small proportion had other professional careers with no apparent link to their husband’s businesses fitting the category of “*The Independent Woman*” (Siegal, 2004). Privacy is a key theme with many of the newspaper or internet articles expressing that the entrepreneurs, their wives, and families were intensely private. Reasons for this include—(1) Many business families avoid interviews with journalists preferring to keep their family stories private and to control their own narratives; (2) Many avoid social media for the same reasons; and (3) In an age of prenups and nondisclosure agreements family secrets remain private. Also, if divorce, turmoil and feuding feature then tabloid press exposure follows with the entrepreneur and family being pilloried. While female entrepreneurs are frequently asked about their domestic arrangements (see for example Hamilton, 2013; Lyer, 2009; Eikhoff et al., 2013) male entrepreneurs are seldom asked about such. Despite the negativity uncovered in representations of wives long-standing spousal relations enhance entrepreneurial performance.

Smith and Warren (2018) also considered the overarching category of “significant others” (Williams, 2012), encompassing a more universal, generic signifier which covers all partners/spouses of entrepreneurs. It avoids the loaded and gendered stereotype associated with wives per se. However, although it is ostensibly asexual and agendered it has yet to feature significantly in either sociological and/or gender research. According to the Collins online dictionary the term “significant other” is defined as “...a person having importance in, or influence on, another’s life”; and “a person with whom one has an intimate, often long-term and usually sexual, relationship.” The term implies intimacy, shared values, and stability. It is surprising that there is an absence of literature on same-sex entrepreneurial couples.

A protean socially constructed typology of “*Entrepreneurs wives*” emerges in the form of an enacted, storied identity with associated trait-based behaviors, ideologically and role-based positions set against obstacles and challenges (see Fig. 14.1 below).

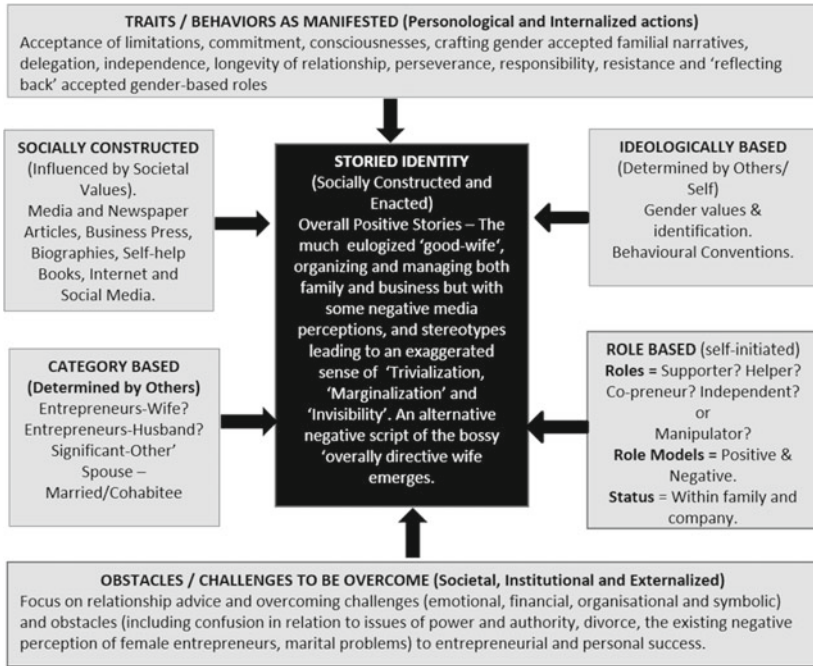


Fig. 14.1 A conceptual model of spousal entrepreneurial identity (Source Smith & Warren, 2018)

FURTHER DISCUSSION, INTERPRETATION, AND CONCLUSION

To answer the research questions, it can be argued that representations of “*Entrepreneurs wives*” are socially constructed in academic literature via exposure to the media and particularly the tabloids. There are two main positions for “*Entrepreneurs wives*”—namely to be (1) vilified; and (2) to be invisible. Being invisible is the one most encountered in this study. To be of interest to the media an entrepreneur has to be a high-net worth celebrity and be prone to scandal or other socially prescribed behaviors (such as committing a criminal act, divorce, having an affair, engaging in a family feud, or other personal fall from grace) which make them news worthy. They are hounded, haunted, and humbled by the media. Significant others and extended family are often considered “fair game”

by the media losing control of their narrative and their identities and damage to their personal and/or business reputations. However, if the entrepreneur and their family choose to remain private and do not fall foul of personal problems, they can control their own narratives and thus identities by opting for privacy and avoiding the press and social media. So, what can we learn from the study? Obviously, from a behavioral perspective, wives can choose to avoid hedonistic and other negative behaviors in their personal and business lives, behaving legally and morally and avoiding negative publicity which taints identities. However, the majority of entrepreneurs and their wives live ordinary family lives and the media glare. This calls for different, qualitative methodologies to be used to develop our understanding of this important phenomenon.

Moreover, the “*Entrepreneur’s Wives*” phenomenon is important because if as identified by Rose (2019) 2/3rds of entrepreneurs in the UK are male then statistically, the vast majority of men will have a wife who contributes formally or informally to the success of the business. If we better understood the ways in which such wives can sustain the success of the business while adding value to the business and wider economy, it would unleash the potential of more women on their entrepreneurial journey. According to Rose (2019: 35) women are as successful as men at sustaining businesses. There is scope to utilize such a potentially skilled and skillful workforce in a business administration and managerial capacity so that they can get the credit, rewards, and recognition that they deserve, positively addressing gender parity. For women becoming an entrepreneur should not be the sole pathway to entrepreneurial success. Tapping into this rich neglected resource is a very real possibility.

One could argue that as a category, “*Entrepreneurs Wives*” is simply too broad to encompass all its sub-types and as such they are not ubiquitous. As a concept, it is certainly a valid one worthy of further study. We have demonstrated that such wives are powerful entrepreneurial actors who perform a variety of roles beyond those of the stereotypical roles of “Mistress” and “Matriarch” (Smith, 2014). Indeed, they perform other traditional archetypal roles of deserving (and sometimes undeserving wives—see Bowman, 2009). Nevertheless, in these days of political correctness and gender (in)equality there is some merit in the “catch-all” category of the “significant-other” as a non-offensive category because from an epistemological, ontological, and axiological perspective human experience cannot always be neatly labelled, nor categorized into discreet entities (Ahl & Marlow, 2012).

CHAPTER TAKEAWAYS

1. This chapter challenges current emphasis on the “male centric” (Ahl and Marlow, 2012; Deacon, Harris, & Worth, 2014) ideology of entrepreneurship; and the entrepreneur as an individual hero (Anderson & Warren, 2011).
2. To be provocative, the ubiquitous “*Entrepreneurs wife*” may well be “a-good-little-helper” and support her husband to achieve his ends, reflecting and basking in his glory but that is only one part of the construct because they exert a hidden agency.
3. This research deepens our understanding of gendered entrepreneurial identities and narratives associated with “*Entrepreneurs Wives*” because developing a deeper understanding of the personal sides of entrepreneurial couples is helpful to policymakers in understanding the entrepreneurial personality (as understood by Chell, 2008) more holistically because of the financial stability that a long-term partnership can bring to an entrepreneurial venture.
4. Moreover, understanding the entrepreneur, and entrepreneurial behavior and practice from a more socialized perspective advances our understanding of entrepreneurial practice and practices.

REFERENCES

- Achtenhagen, L., & Welter, F. (2011). Surfing on the ironing board—The representation of women’s entrepreneurship in German newspapers. *Entrepreneurship and Regional Development*, 23(9–10), 763–786.
- Ahl, H., & Marlow, S. (2012). Exploring the dynamics of gender, feminism and entrepreneurship: Advancing debate to escape a dead end? *Organization*, 19(5), 543–562.
- Al-Dajani, H., Bika, Z., Collins, L., & Swail, J. (2014). Gender and family business: New theoretical directions. *International Journal of Gender and Entrepreneurship*, 6(3), 218–230.
- Alexander, A. (1987). *Governors’ ladies: The wives and mistresses of Van Diemen’s land governors*. Tasmania, Australia: Sandy Bay.
- Altheide, D. L., & Schneider, C. J. (2013). *Qualitative media analysis*. London: Sage.

- Anderson, A. R., & Warren, L. (2011). The entrepreneur as hero and jester: Enacting the entrepreneurial discourse. *International Small Business Journal*, 29(6), 589–609.
- Ashton-Hodgeson, K. (2005). Committed couples in business: A delightful dance between work and home. In T. Sayers & N. Monin (Eds.), *The global garage: Home based business in New Zealand*. Thomson-Dunmore Press: Australia.
- Baker, D. (1998). Wealthy Wives Tales. *ABAJ*. <https://heinonline.org/HOL/LandingPage?handle=hein.journals/abaj84&div=144&id=&page=>.
- Basu, A. (2004). Entrepreneurial aspirations among family business owners: An analysis of ethnic business owners in the UK. *International Journal of Entrepreneurial Behaviour & Research*, 10(1/2), 12–33.
- Bensemann, J., & Hall, C. M. (2010). Copreneurship in rural tourism: Exploring women's experiences. *International Journal of Gender and Entrepreneurship*, 2(3), 228–244.
- Bowman, D. (2009). The deal: Wives, entrepreneurial business and family life. *Journal of Family Studies*, 15(2), 167–176.
- Bullen, J. (2014). *Framing the wag*. In: *Media representations of footballers' wives*. London: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Cammett, M. (2005). Fat cats and self-made men: Globalization and the paradoxes of collective action. *Comparative Politics*, 37(4), 379–400.
- Chasserio, S., Lebegue, T., & Poroli, C. (2014). Heterogeneity of spousal support for French women entrepreneurs. In K. Lewis, C. Henry, E. J. Gatewood, & J. Watson (Eds.), *Women's entrepreneurship in the 21st century. An international multi-level research analysis* (Chapter 11). Cheltenham: Edward Elgar.
- Chell, E. (2008). *The entrepreneurial personality: A social construction*. London: Routledge.
- Cosson, B. (2017). *Crafting a family business: Wives weaving the threads of work and family life*. Unpublished PhD thesis, Swinburne University. <https://researchbank.swinburne.edu.au/file/fl81flb9-b8a0-41eb-81e7-20668c0810d5/1/Barbara%20Cosson%20Thesis%20pdfa.pdf>.
- D'Andria, A., & Gabarret, I. (2017). *Entrepreneurship and high heels, in building 21st century entrepreneurship*. John Wiley & Sons.
- De Bruin, A., & Lewis, K. (1994). Hidden dimensions of women's business: Copreneurship and career constructs. *Work*.
- De Bruin, A., & Lewis, K. (2004). Toward enriching united career theory: Familial entrepreneurship and Copreneurship. *Career Development International*, 9(7), 638–646.
- Deacon, J. H., Harris, J. A., & Worth, L. (2014). Who leads?: Fresh insights into roles and responsibilities in a heterosexual copreneurial business. *International Journal of Gender and Entrepreneurship*, 6(3), 317–335.

- De Vries, M. F. R. (2009). *Sex, money, happiness and death: The quest for authenticity*. Insead Business Press.
- Down, S. (2007). *Narratives of enterprise: Crafting entrepreneurial self-identity in a small-firm*. Cheltenham: Edward Elgar.
- Eikhoff, D. R., Summers, J., & Carter, S. (2013). Women doing their own thing: Media representations of female entrepreneurship. *International Journal of Entrepreneurial Behaviour and Research*, 19(5), 547–564.
- Goffee, R., & Scase, R. (2015). *Women in Charge: The experiences of women entrepreneurs*. London: Routledge.
- Guthey, E., Clark, T., & Jackson, B. (2009). *Demystifying Business Celebrity*. London: Routledge.
- Hamilton, E. (2006). Whose story is it anyway? Narrative accounts of the role of women in founding and establishing family businesses. *International Small Business Journal*, 24(3).
- Hamilton, E. (2013). The discourse of entrepreneurial masculinities (and femininities). *Entrepreneurship & Regional Development: an International Journal*, 25(1–2), 90–99.
- Heikkinen, S. S. (2014). How do male managers narrate their female spouse's role in their career? *Gender in Management: An International Journal*, 29(1), 25–43.
- Hirshberg, M. C. (2010). *Why so many entrepreneurs get divorced: Why the start of a company so often spells the end of a marriage*. www.inc.com/magazine/20101101/why-so-many-entrepreneurs-get-divorced.html.
- Hirshberg, M. C. (2012). *For better or for work: A survival guide for entrepreneurs and their families*. An Inc Original.
- Hymowitz, C. (2012). Behind every great woman—*Bloomberg Businessweek Magazine*—sbcf-famlaw.com <https://www.sbcf-famlaw.com/wp-content/uploads/2012/03/behind-every-great1.pdf>.
- Johnson, T. J., & Kaye, B. K. (2004). Wag the blog: How reliance on traditional media and the internet influence credibility perceptions of weblogs among blog users. *Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly*, 81(3), 622–642.
- Kozinets, R. V. (2009). *Doing ethnographic research online*. London: Sage.
- Kozinets, R.V. (2010). *Netnography: Doing ethnographic research online*. London: Sage.
- Langer, R., & Beckman, S. C. (2005). Sensitive research topics: Netnography revisited. *Qualitative Market Research: An International Journal*, 8(2), 189–203.
- Lewis, K., & Massey, C. (2011). Critical yet invisible: The “good wife” in the New Zealand small firm. *International Journal of Gender and Entrepreneurship*, 3(2), 105–122.

- Littler, J. (2007). Celebrity CEOs and the cultural economy of tabloid intimacy. In S. Redmond & S. Holmes (Eds.), *2007—Stardom and celebrity: A reader*. London: Sage.
- Litz, R. A. (2011). Double roles, double binds? double bind theory and family business research. In A. Carsrud & M. Brännback (Eds.), *Understanding family businesses. international studies in entrepreneurship*, 15. New York, NY: Springer.
- Lyer, R. (2009). Entrepreneurial identities and the problematic of subjectivity in media-mediated discourses. *Discourse & society*, 20(2).
- Marshack, K. J. (1994). *Love and work: How co-preneurial couples manage the boundaries and transitions in personal relationship and business partnership*. Ph.D. Dissertation, Faculty of the Fielding Institute.
- Martin, C., & Guarnieri, F. (2014). The role of the entrepreneurs' wives in the management of occupational risk: A monographic study of the limits of delegation. *Small Enterprise Research*, 21(2), 202–213.
- Martin, L., Jerrard, B., & Wright, L. (2019). Identity work in female led creative businesses. *Gender, Work & Organization*, <https://doi.org/10.1111/gwao.12357>.
- Mavin, S., & Grandy, G. (2012). Doing gender well and differently in management. *Gender in Management: An International Journal*, 27(4), 218–231.
- Moult, S., & Anderson, A. R. (2005). Enterprising women: Gender and maturity in new venture creation and development. *Journal of Enterprising Culture*, 13(3), 255–271.
- Muda, M., Musa, R., Naina, R., & Borhan, H. (2014). Entrepreneur endorsement and advertising effectiveness. *Procedia—Social and Behavioral Sciences*, 130, 11–20.
- Mulholland, K. (1996). Gender power and property relations within entrepreneurial wealthy families. *Gender, Work & Organization*, 3(2), 78–102.
- Mulholland, K. (1997). The family enterprise: Business strategies. *Work, Employment and Society*, 11(4), 685–711.
- Mulholland, K. (2003a). The entrepreneur's wife and family life: 'It's like being a one-parent family'. In K. Mulholland (Eds.), *Class, gender and the family business* (pp. 111–130). Wiley.
- Mulholland, K. (2003b). Gender and the management of family wealth Accumulation: 'He also wants pudding. In K. Mulholland (Eds.), *Class, gender and the family business* (pp. 48–69). Wiley.
- Nicholson, L., & Anderson, A. R. (2005). News and nuances of the entrepreneurial metaphor: Linguistic games in entrepreneurial sense-making and sense-giving. *Entrepreneurship, Theory & Practice*, 29(2), 153–172.
- Nikina, A., Shelton, L. M., & LeLoarne, S. (2015). An examination of how husbands, as key stakeholders, impact the success of women

- entrepreneurs. *Journal of Small Business and Enterprise Development*, 22(1), 38–62.
- Nye, A. (1988). *Feminist theories and the philosophies of man*. London: Routledge.
- Ochberg, R. L. (1987). The male career mode and the ideology of role. In H. Brod (Ed.), *The making of masculinities: The new men's studies*. London: Allen and Unwin.
- Poza, E. J., & Messer, T. (2001). Spousal leadership and continuity in the family firm. *Family Business Review*, 14(1).
- Radu, M., & Redien-Collot, R. (2008). The social representation of entrepreneurs in the French press: Desirable and feasible models? *International Small Business Journal*, 26(3), 259–298.
- Russell, P. (2005). Wife stories: Narrating marriage and self in the life of Jane Franklin. *Victorian Studies*, 48(1), 35–57.
- Siegal, D. (2004). *The new trophy wife*. <https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/articles/200401/the-new-trophy-wife>.
- Smith, R. (2009). The diva cycle as an alternative social construction of female entrepreneurship. *International Journal of Entrepreneurship and Gender*, 1(2), 148–163.
- Smith, R. (2014). Assessing the contribution of the ‘Theory of Matriarchy’ to the entrepreneurship and family business literatures. *International Journal of Entrepreneurship and Gender*, 6(3), 255–275.
- Smith, R. (2017). Reading liminal and temporal dimensionality in the Baxter family ‘public-narrative’. *International Small Business Journal*, 36(1).
- Smith, R. (2018). *The ‘Dowager’ and her role in the governance, and leadership of the entrepreneurial family business*. In V. Ratten, V. Ramadani, L.-P. Dana, R. Hisrich, & J. Ferreira (Eds.), *Gender and family entrepreneurship*. London: Routledge.
- Smith, R., & Neergaard, H. (2015). Telling business stories as fellowship-tales. *International Journal of Gender and Entrepreneurship*, 7(2), 232–252.
- Smith, R., & Warren, L. (2018, November). *The role of the ‘significant other’ in the gendered social construction of entrepreneurial identity and narrative*. ISBE.
- Stanley, T. J. (2000). *The Millionaire Mind*. Bantum Press.
- Stirzaker, R., & Sitko, R. (2018). The older entrepreneurial self: intersecting identities of older women entrepreneurs. *International Journal of Entrepreneurial Behaviour & Research*. <https://doi.org/10.1108/IJEER-12-2017-0497>.
- The Alison Rose Review of Female Entrepreneurship. (2019). https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/784324/RoseReview_Digital_FINAL.PDF.
- Veblen, T. (2005). *Conspicuous consumption*. London: Penguin.

- Vera, H., Berardo, F. M., & Berardo, D. H. (1987). On Gold Diggers: Status gain or loss in age—Heterogamous marriages. *Journal of Aging Studies*, 1(1), 51–64.
- Weidhaas, A. D. (2018). Female business owners hiding in plain sight. *International Journal of Gender and Entrepreneurship*, 10(1), 2–18.
- Williams, D. K. (2012, August 19). The entrepreneurial spouse: The vital role of the significant other. *Forbes*. <https://www.forbes.com/sites/davidkwilliams/2012/08/19/the-entrepreneurial-spouse-the-vital-role-of-the-significant-other/#4860aec630e6>.