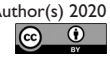
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Heroines of enterprise: Post-recession media representations of women and entrepreneurship in a UK newspaper 2008–2016

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Abstract

This article analyses contemporary media representations of female entrepreneurs in the daily UK broadsheet 'The Times'. While existing research shows how the media ignores or trivialises entrepreneurship of women, our focus is on the emergence of the successful female entrepreneur, an increasingly prominent, heroic media genre. We suggest that this is one response to the recession of 2008 and the broader neoliberal context in which women are positioned as central to economic recovery. We interrogate this recent expression of entrepreneurial femininity, adopting a critical perspective on postfeminism to reveal the values and ideals associated with this privileged form. We argue that this version of entrepreneurial femininity is the female equivalent of the mythologised male hero – accomplished, hard-working and successful at work and home. Implications are explored in terms of the expectations associated with entrepreneurship done by women, and the extent to which these challenge gendered norms; whom this 'privileges'; who this excludes; and the negative impact such hegemonic femininities have on recognising and supporting 'alternative'/heterogeneous forms of entrepreneurship done by both women and men.

Keywords

entrepreneurial femininities, gender, media, postfeminism

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Introduction

This article explores post-recession media constructions of women and work as reflected in the figure of the female entrepreneur. It considers if and how a postfeminist sensibility informs contemporary newsprint media representations of women entrepreneurs. Media representations of active and powerful women are ideologically and stereotypically framed (Mavin et al., 2010) and aligned to dominant hegemonic relations, producing and reproducing images of women engaged in 'feminine' activities (MacNeill, 1988). According to MacNeill, patriarchal systems of semiology orchestrate hegemonic relations and enable various types of signs, transmitted to mass audiences, which are neither neutral or natural. Our focus is on how the female entrepreneur is orchestrated, exploring the prevalence and type of entrepreneurship presented, as well as the values and assumptions embedded within the narratives about women entrepreneurs. We provide a theoretically informed critique of entrepreneurial femininities, while also extending current debates about postfeminism, through revealing one way in which postfeminist sensibilities are confirmed and reproduced, becoming common sense and normalised. This study is timely and important, due to cultural shifts brought about by the 2007/2008 global recession which disproportionately affected women in a variety of ways (see Adkins, 2008; Adkins and Dever, 2014)

Within the UK context, the recession led to job losses in sectors dominated by women, (retail and services), such that they lost jobs at a much faster rate than men (Gill, 2014). The resulting austerity measures led to cutbacks in public spending which meant wide scale public sector job losses, (another sector dominated by women), as well as the removal of in-work benefits such as tax credits and child care support upon which many working women depend (Hogarth et al., 2009; Rake, 2009; Trades Union Congress (TUC), 2015). Alongside public sector cutbacks, the UK government brought in a range of labour market activation policies designed to 'get people working again', ushering in new forms of labouring subjectivity, particularly for women (Adkins and Dever, 2014; Gill, 2014; Peck et al., 2012). A dominant focus was the opportunities offered by UK 'enterprise culture', reflected in the pro-enterprise stance among policy makers, which regards self-employment and small business start-ups as an essential component of the economic recovery. A recent Small Business Federation (2016) report reveals how this is specifically targeted at women, encouraging more women to start their own businesses with their potential economic contribution made explicit in policies to encourage:

> the same level of female entrepreneurship as in the US, resulting in an additional £23 billion gross value added to the UK economy. In England alone, 150,000 extra businesses would be created per annum if women started businesses at the same rate as men. (p. 5)

Such initiatives reveal how women are prioritised as essential agents of economic recovery (Adkins, 2008), with self-employment and entrepreneurship (D'Arcy and Gardiner, 2014) actively encouraged to increase the economic productivity of women, while also increasing gender equality (Adkins, 2012; Elomaki, 2015). This reflects a broader postfeminist context, and the increasing entanglement of postfeminism with neoliberalism (Gill and Scharff, 2011), which has provided fertile ground for ideas about centrality of women in the business world to become established (Chen, 2013; Negra, 2014). Women entrepreneurs thus, constitute the ideal neoliberal subject and are increasingly encouraged to start businesses for the benefit of themselves, society and the economy. However, critical attention must be paid to the type(s) of entrepreneurship promoted.

Likewise, there are calls to interrogate representations of masculinity and femininity in entrepreneurship (Byrne et al., 2019). This article provides such an interrogation, specifically exploring the role of newsprint media in the promotion of entrepreneurship to women. We focus on the types of entrepreneurship presented/privileged and the key messages informing positive narratives about

the benefits of certain types of entrepreneurship. Positioning women as central to post-recession economic growth raises important questions about how this is accomplished and accepted as common sense, while demonstrating how the media reproduces the dominant view that empowerment of women is achieved through entrepreneurship (as economic growth) and that certain ways of doing this are better than others.

Our study was prompted by the observation that women now appear to be taken seriously as respected business leaders and entrepreneurs (Negra, 2014) in their own right, appearing more frequently and presented as highly successful. This is in stark contrast to findings from existing research, with both entrepreneurship and organisation scholars revealing highly gendered media depictions that disadvantage women. For example, depictions of both leadership and entrepreneurship suggest women are invisible, marginalised and trivialised (Eikhof et al., 2013; Mavin et al., 2016), and stereotyped (Mavin et al., 2010). Within this research, there is limited engagement with the debates about postfeminism, and the broader neoliberal context, in shaping media depictions of women and work. Thus, the emergence and celebration of the successful female entrepreneur could signify progress. However, as research on postfeminism makes clear, it is important to examine the values and principles underlying the rise of such ideal entrepreneurial femininities, to reveal who they privilege and exclude, and, how they reconfigure gender relations in terms of the expectations of, and assumptions made about, women.

Consequentially, the aim of this article is to analyse post-recession representations of women and entrepreneurship both in terms of the prevalence and type of entrepreneur(ship) presented, to explore if and how they are informed by postfeminism/postfeminist assumptions. Adopting an interpretivist approach, we seek to reveal the extent to which the representations are expressive of a postfeminist sensibility (McRobbie, 2009), providing an example from one national UK newspaper, spanning a time period of eight years immediately following the recession. Through our analysis, we bring a critical perspective on postfeminism to our understanding of entrepreneurial femininities, contributing to contemporary debates concerning hegemonic forms of entrepreneurial femininity. We, therefore, extend current analyses of media representations of women entrepreneurs focusing upon the role of postfeminism and the influence of the broader socio-political context in such representations. In so doing, we identify who is excluded and how gender relations are reconfigured and related implications. We also make an incremental contribution to theory (as per Eisenhardt, 1991 and Eisenhardt and Graebner, 2007) by analysing, reflecting and theorising on the cases or narratives of respected female entrepreneurs and by challenging and extending existing knowledge (Eisenhardt and Graebner, 2007; Whetten, 1989). We address the what, how and why questions as well as the contextually important ones of who, where and when as per Whettoen's framework of theory building (Whetten, 1989). We establish a contribution by virtue of the novelty and originality of our topic, grounded in extant literature and challenging accepted social constructions of entrepreneurship of women. We do so by constructing the argument for the existence of the heroic female entrepreneur as an intertextual framework, underpinned by the use of a supporting rhetoric within the narratives and point to both a synthesised and progressive coherence across the extant literature and empirical data (Locke and Golden-Biddle, 1997).

The article is structured as follows. First, we review the existing literature on gender, entrepreneurship and the media, which is supplemented with similar organisation studies (OS) research on women as business leaders. This is followed by a summary of current research on postfeminism, aligning our position with that of critical feminist scholars who regard postfeminism as a cultural discourse requiring further interrogation. We then articulate the gap we are addressing, providing the rationale for our empirical focus on one newspaper, before outlining the methodology and presenting the analysis. This article concludes with a discussion of the findings and the implications for contemporary debates about entrepreneurial femininities.

Media representations of women entrepreneurs

The media, especially newsprint, plays a critical role in the cultural and social production of meaning (Adamson, 2017), shaping expectations and providing frameworks for interpretation. It is both sense making and sense-giving, influencing what people expect of themselves and others (Mavin et al., 2016). In respect of women entrepreneurs specifically, it influences the strength and direction of their own entrepreneurial aspirations in terms of what is desirable and attainable (Eikhof et al., 2013). Media representations also influence the perceptions and expectations of others with whom they are likely to interact, whose actions and decisions directly affect the business success of women (Eikhof et al., 2013). This raises important questions about the impact of expectations generated by the media, and the extent to which these reproduce and/or challenge masculinised, and other dominant norms, surrounding entrepreneurship.

Several studies (Achtenhagen and Welter, 2011; Eikhof et al., 2013; Radu and Redien-Collot, 2008) attempt to answer such questions through the analysis of magazine and newspaper articles. These studies reveal that where women entrepreneurs are visible, the type of entrepreneurship presented is marginalised and trivialised. The net result is the reproduction of gendered stereotypes, perpetuating the mythologised heroic male entrepreneur (see Orlandi, 2017), whereas entrepreneurship undertaken by women reflects a retreat to the home with a focus on family and domestic responsibilities (Achtenhagen and Welter, 2011; Eikhof et al., 2013; Radu and Redien-Collot, 2008). These arguments form the foundation of our argument in this article. Moreover, such domestically centred forms of entrepreneurship are presented as offering emancipation from the corporate 'rat race' and an emotionally satisfying route to accomplishing work-life balance. This is emancipation within highly constrained terms however, which is more likely to entrench and exacerbate existing gender inequalities, through the reproduction of the public/private patriarchal dichotomy. Such representations also assume heteronormativity and the middle-class privilege of 'choice', masking the heterogeneity of entrepreneurship undertaken by both men and women. Likewise, the invisibility, marginalisation and trivialisation of entrepreneurial activities of women fails to provide a positive source of identification for potential female entrepreneurs, making them less likely to consider entrepreneurship as a serious career option (Achtenhagen and Welter, 2011; Radu and Redien-Collot, 2008).

While the body of research focusing specifically on media representations of women entrepreneurs is limited, similar findings are revealed in studies of media representations of women business leaders. The close relationship between the fields of entrepreneurship and leadership in respect of gender is proposed by Patterson et al. (2012), who suggest the convergence between the two disciplines enables a fruitful exchange of ideas. This convergence is especially notable in the empirical focus of media representations where often, the women studied by OS scholars are recognised as both 'business leaders' *and* 'entrepreneurs', for example, Karren Brady (Kapasi et al., 2016).[1] Both fields of study are also concerned with challenging and disrupting the patriarchal backdrop of the business world, to illuminate the gendered practices that sustain unequal power relations (Patterson et al., 2012).

Consistent with studies of women, entrepreneurship and the media, leadership research also reveals how women are positioned first and foremost by their gender, reinforcing stereotypes based on dualistic categorisations and essentialist assumptions. The focus is not on their leadership skills, but their age, marital status and role as wives and/or mothers and domesticity (Patterson et al., 2012). Research on popular culture also shows how women business leaders are glamorised, fetishised and sexualised (Bell and Sinclair, 2016). This stands in stark contrast to media portrayals of male leaders, where similar non-work issues remain invisible (Patterson et al., 2012) and there is not the same obsession with appearance. In addition to both the trivialisation and objectification

of women, there is also an emphasis on individual performance and a neglect of structural factors (Lang and Rybnikova, 2016). For a woman, becoming a successful business leader rests largely on her capacity to recognise and overcome her own shortfalls (Kapasi et al., 2016).

Limitations of existing research

The research summarised above reveals how entrepreneurship of women, and business leadership, is often positioned as less serious, purposeful or professional than their male counterparts. This results in marginalisation of entrepreneurship by women, characterised as a lifestyle choice and confined to feminised sectors (Marlow and McAdam, 2013), reinforcing gendered stereotypes and primary responsibility of women for all things domestic. This (re)produces perceptions that women are not to be taken seriously as entrepreneurs, while also affirming the masculine, heroic ideal associated with entrepreneurship.

While this contribution is invaluable, highlighting the exclusionary effect the idealised masculine norm has on women, less attention has focused on critically examining the multiple femininities that arise from such analyses. Subsequently, there is little consideration of the broader neoliberal and postfeminist context, with women positioned as a unified category, and 'the other' to men. This sustains the binary distinction between men and women, instead of shifting debate to a consideration of femininities and masculinities, how they adapt and evolve, who they privilege and who they disadvantage. It is increasingly argued that any analyses of female entrepreneurship that do not recognise gender as a human property, with myriad articulations, homogenise women as a category and ignore how gender manifests in all entrepreneurial phenomena (see Marlow and Martinez Dy, 2018 for a fuller discussion). This has prompted calls for more contextualised and interdisciplinary research embedded within more informed theoretical frameworks (Marlow and Martinez Dy 2018; Rouse et al., 2013).

Lewis (2014) shifts the focus away from binary distinctions between men and women, examining multiple entrepreneurial femininities utilised within academic research on gender and entrepreneurship using a postfeminist framework. Rather than focusing on how women are excluded visa-vis men, Lewis analyses how they are included, thus, capturing the varied and multiple forms of entrepreneurship undertaken by women. It is suggested that women occupy one of four entrepreneurial femininities each characterised by varying degrees of masculinity and femininity. The four categories are the following: individualised, maternal, relational and excessive – all of which are constituted through the doing of both masculinity and femininity through the integration and embodiment of conventional feminine and masculine aspirations and behaviours. Within her study, Lewis reveals the variety of ways *appropriate* entrepreneurial femininities are accomplished. However, not all femininities are created equal, revealing the hierarchical arrangement of these femininities. Lewis finds an ongoing privileging of White, middle-class, heterosexual femininity, but stresses that these variants are enacted within a context of the continued dominance of masculinity, requiring further research and analysis of how some femininities are more valued and privileged than others. Before reviewing other relevant studies that aim to do this, we first provide a summary of the different uses of postfeminism in order to clarify our theoretical framework.

Postfeminism

There is no single definition of postfeminism, and it has been used in a variety of ways by researchers from a range of disciplines. Reflecting the fluidity and malleability of postfeminist discourses (Gill et al., 2017) identify three distinct uses of postfeminism. While distinctive, all are characterised by overlaps and contradictions. The first is its epistemological or theoretical

use, aligned with a post-modernist and poststructuralist perspective. As such, it challenges the dualistic thinking of second wave feminist theory, shifting away from hegemonicinism and recognising multiplicity of difference characterised by plurality, fluidity and hybridity (Rumens, 2017). As Gill et al. (2017) note, postfeminism is rarely operationalised in this way with few scholars claiming to be postfeminist theorists. The second use indicates a historical shift with the 'post' indicating the pastness of feminism. This aligns with third wave feminism and reflects the changing concerns of feminists, appropriate for the particular moment. It is thus, part of the continuing historical transformation of feminism offering a contemporary form of feminism associated with 'girl power' and female empowerment. This postfeminism is not antifeminism but represents a new kind of feminism for a new age. Gill et al. (2017) question the analytical potential of this use of postfeminism, defined predominantly by temporality. There is some overlap here with the third use of postfeminism, which indicates a backlash *against* feminism. Here, feminist concerns are considered redundant, reflected in claims that 'all battles have been won' and feminism is no longer relevant (McRobbie, 2009). It reflects a rejection of feminism, which is now regarded as a threat standing in the way of the freedom of women to choose. Powerfully promulgated through media culture, it is an entanglement of feminist and antifeminist ideas (McRobbie, 2009) which as Gill et al. (2017) suggest, makes it difficult to critique.

The limitations of the earlier uses of postfeminism prompt critical feminist scholars to position postfeminism as a cultural discourse, with a focus on '*critically interrogating the ideas and discourses that comprise the common sense of postfeminism*' (Gill et al., 2017: 229). Thus, postfeminism is the *object of study* and not an analytical perspective or theoretical stance. The fluidity and multiplicity of discourses surrounding postfeminism, which at different times complement, compete and contradict each other, has resulted in the disarticulation of feminism through the simultaneous consideration and repudiation of a selective range of feminist concerns. The resulting 'undoing of feminism' rids it of any transformatory potential by divorcing feminism from its political roots, mirrored in the shift from the collective to the individual (McRobbie, 2009). This constitutes, what McRobbie calls, a 'postfeminist sensibility' and reflects a double entanglement of postfeminism and neoliberalism, which serves to define appropriate femininities and how these can be accomplished. A postfeminist sensibility is characterised as being neither definitive nor fixed but agile and dynamic, requiring women to constantly self-monitor and adjust in order to successfully enact the desired postfeminist subject.

Relevant empirical examples illustrating this postfeminist sensibility are studies of the autobiographies of women business leaders/CEO. As noted by Negra (2014), these operate as business self-help books exploring life choices and emotional behavior of women, but chiefly in relation to professional opportunity and advancement, with the author in the position of respected role model showing readers 'how to succeed'. Adamson's (2017) study of four autobiographies reveals how business success for women is based on achieving a successfully balanced femininity. This balance relates to their attitudes, behaviours and values, and their feminine and work roles. Negra (2014) conducted a similar analysis of five autobiographies concluding that each, in different ways, vigorously re-essentialise gender norms. In addition, they share a critical blind spot about class with the authors failing to recognise their own privileged position. Where inequalities are recognised, this is accompanied by a disavowal of the role of cultural, social and/or institutional forces in producing inequality. Instead, they focus on the shifting self, converting structural problems into individual ones. Likewise, domestic inequalities are not considered (see McRobbie, 2015). As Rottenberg (2014: 422) suggests, this '*recuperated feminism forges a feminist subject who is not only individualised but entrepreneurial in the sense that she is oriented towards optimizing her resources through incessant calculation, personal initiative and innovation*'.

Several other studies reveal the growing cultural potency of this entrepreneurial feminist subject across a number of different sites/outlets. For example, Swann's (2017) study of a coaching website targeted at women provides another example of how career success is dependent upon self-help, with the coach positioned as expert with the right knowledge, tools and secrets to enable success. In addition, professional credentials are underpinned by a highly feminised communication style, aimed at building rapport and closeness through empathy and understanding. The resulting relational entrepreneurial femininity, which aims to create a sense of community among professional women with similar interests and concerns, is expressive of a synthetic sisterhood (Frith, Raisborough and Klein, 2010). Swann's multi-modal approach reveals the important role of images in the creation of this ideal feminine subject, not only in terms of how this ideal subject is aesthetically embodied (i.e. what she should look like), but also how the nuances of the images (e.g. position on the webpage, the gaze of the role model, the typography), all contribute to produce synthetic sisterhood through a sense of feminine connection. The importance of images in communicating ideals of aesthetic embodiment is also revealed in the study of Pritchard et al. (2019) of marketing/media coverage of 'Entrepreneurial Barbie'. Importantly, they focus on participant responses to the images that cast doubt on the authenticity, attainability and desirability of the entrepreneurial femininity represented. As Pritchard et al. conclude, the rejection of E-barbie as a role model for being too perfect highlights the precarious line women entrepreneurs must tread between being feminine enough, but not too feminine, in order to be taken seriously (Lewis, 2014). While it may be easy to dismiss the relevance of E-barbie as a role model for actual entrepreneurs, the study of Byrne et al. (2019) of a recent policy initiative in France designed to promote entrepreneurship to women through the use of existing role models, highlights similarly unrealistic notions of entrepreneurial perfection. The role models featured were 'entrepreneurial superwomen', who are empowered, enjoyed a work/life balance, overcome obstacles and do good in the world, embodying highly gendered and classed norms of entrepreneurial success.

Collectively, this research reveals the creation of idealised and appropriate entrepreneurial femininities that allow women to *have it all*. It suggests a shift in postfeminism to one that is increasingly neoliberal giving rise to a postfeminist sensibility which stresses: a prioritisation of work; an emphasis on economic calculation, competition/competitiveness; and valorisation of risk and aspiration. These signify appropriate ways to think, feel, behave and dress, based on a cost-benefit calculus and are increasingly enacted in the economically productive realm of work and business. This reflects the growing centrality of work and rising importance of economic identities in constituting the self, as well as the extension of economic rationales and business logic to typically non-work areas of life and the self. Success is both individualised and internalised, with a focus on the psychic life of the individual, the role of positive affect and the importance of aesthetic labour (Gill et al., 2017; Pritchard et al., 2019; Rottenberg, 2014; Scharff, 2016; Swann, 2017). These are key to entrepreneurial success, achieving a successful balance between work and family life, each of which are, and indeed should be, satisfying. In their pursuit of happiness, women should desire both professional success and personal fulfilment, revealing an evisceration of the public/private distinction, and the psycho-social (and deeply personal) side of neoliberal governance. This is emphasised by Rottenberg (2014: 429) who argues that

> The quest for not just a sane equilibrium but a satisfying equilibrium further inscribes an entrepreneurial subject and market rationality – since in order to be successful and content, even for a period of time, efficiency, motivation and cost-benefit calculus are paramount.

The resulting neoliberal feminism, informed by market rationality (Rottenberg, 2014), produces a particular and highly gendered kind of self-governing feminist subject through which power

operates, not from above but from within (Gill, 2014). While inequality in the workplace is recognised, social cultural and economic factors are disavowed as forces producing inequality. The solution is for women to work on themselves, becoming active self-regulating subjects who have the freedom, autonomy and choice to reinvent themselves (Adamson, 2017; Gill, 2007). The neoliberal feminist subject is thus mobilised to convert continued gender inequality from a structural problem into an individual affair, transforming the feminist inequality discourse from one of '*equal rights and social justice to a discourse of positive affect*' (Rottenberg, 2014: 433).

Addressing the gap

The emerging postfeminist literature reviewed above demonstrates the value of adopting a postfeminist perspective, with authors calling for more research to critically interrogate the underlying values and assumptions informing contemporary manifestations of successful entrepreneurial femininity. This article is a response to such calls, but our focus is on the newsprint media which remains under explored. While the newsprint media now has to compete for attention with a wide(r) range of media genres for example, digital media, websites, blogs, and so on, a number of features distinguish newspapers from the other forms of media so far subjected to a postfeminist analysis. As Nicholson and Anderson (2005) argue, newspapers remain an important source of influence and play an essential role in the co-production of meaning, acting as both mirror and manipulator: '*effectively providing a codified definition of what should count as reality*' (p. 158). The loyalty of readers is fundamental in ensuring newspapers are consumed on a daily basis; such loyalty is often built upon a long established and trusted reputation, an increasingly rare commodity in the constantly changing world of social media and fake news. This historical continuity is particularly important in the context of this study where we seek to track shifts in emphasis over an eight-year period. Such a task would be much more challenging for other media genres, such as websites, that lack the continuity of an established newspaper and accompanying historical archives. Newspapers target a more general audience, unlike other forms of media such as women's magazines, CEO autobiographies, coaching websites, and so on, and not necessarily those with a specific interest in women entrepreneurs. They reveal how the ideal generates a preferred ideal type. This is important given the influence of such representations on the perceptions and expectations of a variety of actors who may have a direct impact on the success of business ventures of women (Eikhof et al., 2013).

We drew upon *The Times* newspaper covering an eight-year time period since the recession (2008–2016). *The Times* is positioned as a quality broadsheet with a daily circulation of over 420,000 and an estimated daily readership of over 1 million, of which 45% are women (Newsworks, 2019); it is the only daily national broadsheet to have grown its paid-for print sales. In recent general elections, it has supported both the Labour party (under Blair in 2001, 2005) and the Conservatives (under Cameron in 2010 and May in 2017). These characteristics make it an appropriate publication to interrogate given its reputation and reach and that it is supportive of the government's pro-business stance and promotion of entrepreneurship. Also, unlike the *Financial Times*, its engagement with business and entrepreneurship is aimed at a more general audience, not a specialist business audience.

Our empirical focus is on the prevalence and type of entrepreneurship presented, as well as the values and assumptions embedded within the narratives about women entrepreneurs and the extent to which they are expressive of a postfeminist sensibility. In so doing, we provide a theoretically informed critique of entrepreneurial femininities while also extending current debates about postfeminism, through revealing one way in which postfeminist sensibilities are confirmed and reproduced, becoming common sense and normalised.

Methodology

Consistent with our interpretivist position, we adopt a qualitative approach using discourse analysis (Potter and Wetherell, 1987). Following Gill et al. (2017: 232), we take the view that '*words are constructive of and constructed by social realities*'. Thus, we employ discourse analysis focusing on the production of interpretive repertoires (Potter and Wetherell, 1987), or the set of meanings that are drawn upon in talk and text. In addition, we share Sheriff and Weatherall's (2009) position of viewing discourses as practical ideologies – practical because they are commonsensical ways of making experiences meaningful, and ideological in so far, as they support systems of belief or thought that maintain social inequalities. Discourse analysis supports the exploration of how people talk about particular phenomena, identifying recurring patterns and analysing their rhetorical function. We take an etic not emic, approach in our analysis in that it is underpinned by a conceptual framework based on neoliberal postfeminism, rather than the more grounded approach of developing a data driven conceptual framework (Gill et al., 2017).

Our empirical focus is on one UK broadsheet newspaper, *The Times*, covering the time period from 2008 to 2016. Our rationale for choosing one newspaper is to negate differences in editorial focus and journalistic styles. Previous entrepreneurship studies have analysed articles from a single newspaper or magazine to examine, for example, discourses of patriarchy and femininity of Indian entrepreneurs (Iyer, 2009), gender inequalities in entrepreneurship (Eikhof et al., 2013) and the cultural politics of celebrity motherhood and austerity (Allen et al., 2015).

Access to *The Times* archive was obtained through a subscription. Using the own internal search facility of newspaper, articles were retrieved using a variety of search terms: women and entrepreneurship; female entrepreneur; business woman and self-employment. Throughout the search, links to other similar articles were automatically highlighted and retrieved for inclusion. Through this process, all articles related to women and entrepreneurship between 2008 and 2016 were collated and sorted, with the final sample comprising 72 articles (see Table 1). While all of the articles were accompanied by at least one image, a multi-modal analysis of the photographs and the narratives was beyond the scope of this article.[2]

Analysis

Acknowledging the ideological function of media texts in the creation of 'common sense', our analysis follows the approach of Potter and Wetherell (1987) who regard language use and the generation of text as discursive practices, which create and support certain systems of beliefs that sustain social inequalities. The important question for us empirically is what function the text serves. This can be related to the local discursive context, for example, how to behave, as well as having a wider ideological function expressive of underlying values/beliefs. Revealing the function of texts rests on identifying the interpretive repertoires used, which consist of relatively cohesive clusters of terms and phrases that enable sense making (Sheriff and Weatherall, 2009). This is particularly suited to the analysis of media texts, given the demands for concise compressed narratives, simplified storylines and polarisation of positions, whereby '*Sense making . . . is produced largely by condensing collective interpretive repertoires*' (Sorensen, 2017: 6). Exploring consistencies and variation within and between interpretive repertoires, reveals the collective function they serve in the construction of the successful woman entrepreneur. Attention is also afforded to what is *not* said to reveal the implicit assumptions associated with the successful entrepreneurial subject.

There were two distinct stages to the Discourse Analysis (DA) which commenced with a reading of each article. This first stage of coding entailed each author reading and summarising the same five articles individually, which were then checked collectively to ensure consistency and to

Table 1. Sample details showing article title, date and author.

Article number and headline	Date	Journalist
1. Female entrepreneurs take care over location	14 February 2008	Carly Chynoweth
2. Guide for women entrepreneurs	03 April 2008	Unattributed
3. Nurturing the business of change	28 November 2008	Fay Schopen
4. Michelle Mone: the secret rituals that rule me	10 May 2009	Gillian Bowditch
5. Women: grow your companies	10 April 2011	Sandra O'Connell
6. Women are doing it for themselves	4 November 2011	Anushka Asantha
7. Sisters must do it for themselves	22 April 2012	Sandra O'Connell
8. Bra Queen: I will unhook from a solo Scotland	29 December 2012	Mark Macaskill & Jason Allardyce
9. Self-made women paid more than men	27 January 2013	Kathryn Cooper
10. Female bosses wear trousers in pay league	27 January 2013	Kathryn Cooper
11. Features: Silicon Sisters	07 April 2013	Jessica Brinton
12. News: Hi-tech women raise low profile: leading female entrepreneurs are storming the male bastion of IT	21 April 2013	Sandra O'Connell
13. So what happened to girl power?	21 April 2013	Gillian Bowditch
14. Women more successful than men at getting bank loans	08 June 2013	Kathryn Hopkins
15. Mumpreneurs give recovery a woman's touch	15 September 2013	Kathryn Cooper
16. Women ride the wave of start ups	03 November 2013	Kiki Loizou
17. It's time to break down the barriers	19 November 2013	Andre Spicer
18. Jacqueline Gold: We've liberated women in the bedroom, the boardroom's next	14 December 2013	Rachel Sylvester & Alice Thomson
19. What I've learnt: Karren Brady	01 February 2014	Abigail Radnor
20. Leading the way for women in business	08 March 2014	Juliet Samuel
21. Features: How I made It: Alicia Navarro, co-founder of skimlinks	30 March 2014	Hattie Williams
22. Sexism and silicon valley	26 April 2014	Rhys Blakeley
23. Entrepreneurs back beauty site	11 May 2014	Kiki Loizou
24. Entrepreneurs touched by an angel	18 May 2014	Sandra O'Connell
25. Times magazine: Kathryn Parsons and the new networkers	14 June 2014	Murad Ahmed
26. Features: secret angel paves the way for our first trillion dollar company	22 June 2014	Kiki Loizou
27. We all need successful Modern Entrepreneurs and they need us	04 July 2014	Ana Botin (CEO of Santander UK)
28. We've got all the right tools to do the job, and do it well	06 July 2014	Kate Bassett
29. Its not about the money	20 July 2014	Eleanor Mills
30. Its time to invest in firms run by women	09 August 2014	Danielle Sheridan
31. Goodbye Steve, hello Stephanie	28 September 2014	Baroness Patience Wheatcroft
32. Crowds line up behind women to taste success	22 November 2014	Jack Malvern
33. Who says that a plumber has to be a man	27 November 2014	Hazel Davis
34. Power Dressing	02 November 2014	Claudia Croft
35. Karren Brady: A boardroom striker gets a premier league transfer	09 November 2014	Unattributed

(Continued)

Table 1. (Continued)

Article number and headline	Date	Journalist
36. News: fame & fortune: Paula Rowan	01 February 2015	Linda Daly
37. Pay gap closing as more women join millionaires club	17 February 2015	James Hurley
38. Pass it on: the secret of my huge success	22 February 2015	Kiki Loizou
39. Let us show you the way	22 February 2015	Unattributed
40. Please don't take our tax breaks away	01 March 2015	Kiki Loizou
41. Triumph against odds for start-up queens	06 March 2015	Kiki Loizou
42. Mone sends out the wrong message for a female role model	8 March 2015	Gillian Bowditch
43. Skinny line between success and failure	17 March 2015	Josephine Moulds
44. Fame & Fortune: tragedy fed my drive to be a mumpreneur	06 June 2015	Donna Ferguson
45. All dressed up and ready to take a risk	03 May 2015	Kiki Loizou
46. News: female friendly: UK leads way on women's start ups	14 June 2015	Nicholas Hellen
47. Have-a-go-heroes started with nothing	26 July 2015	Sandra O'Connell
48. From Little acorns to country enterprises	23 August 2015	Sandra O'Connell
49. Women fret but fare better than men	18 September 2015	Miles Costello
50. Michelle Mone: is it because I'm blonde?	11 October 2015	Stefanie Marsh
51. Features: there's no need to do it like a man	21 October 2015	Kiki Loizou
52. Growth boost for female entrepreneurs	21 November 2015	Sandra O'Connell
53. You deserve a medal for this	15 November 2015	Laura Onita
54. Features: The women who push the right buttons	29 November 2015	Audrey ward
55. Let these trailblazers show you the way	21 February 2016	Unattributed
56. The view from Leeds: stop whining and get on with it	27 March 2016	Kiki Loizou
57. Women being left at the starting line	21 April 2016	James Hurley
58. Women are told to fight back against the geeks	26 April 2016	Rhys Blakely
59. Roller babies entrepreneur breaks out the bubbly	10 May 2016	James Hurley Dominic Walsh
60. Martha Lane Fox: last year was good, I didn't go to hospital	09 May 2016	Chris McAndrew
61. Fame & fortune: Working in the family B&B was my apprenticeship	31 July 2016	Larissa Nolan
62. What I've learnt: Deborah Meaden	13 August 2016	Ben Machell
63. Features: Fame & Fortune: luxury to me is doing what I want	24 December 2016	Anna Mikhailova
64. Women are shying away from asking men to back them	19 December 2016	Josephine Moulds
65. Sisters end up doing the fundraising for themselves	18 December 2016	Laura Onita
66. Mellon shows how brutal it is at the top	28 February 2016	Jennifer Lawrence
67. Why we came to treasure Ireland	18 September 2016	Sandra O'Connell
68. Meet the boffin who can bring a brainchild to life	20 November 2016	Kiki Loizou
69.£50,000 a head for female entrepreneurs	13 November 2016	Oliver Shah
70. OECD urges aid for female start-ups	11 September 2016	Gabrielle Monaghan
71. Get a career facelift in the country	4 September 2016	Sandra O'Connell
72. Women held back by biology, not sexism, insists Mone	14 October 2016	Marc Horne

OECD: Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development.

discuss any discrepancies. Here the focus was on providing a summary of the article; identifying key themes/core messages; identifying illustrative quotes. Supplemental Table 2a provides an example of this first stage of coding which is based on a sub-sample of five articles from the sample. These five have been selected as between them they illustrate each of the interpretive repertoires which were identified in the next stage of the analysis.

The second stage of the DA was to refine and define our focus on the specific function of the text, both practical (i.e. what to do) and ideological (i.e. underlying values), reflecting the transition from a categorisation of *content within* each article, to the abstraction of theoretically informed (i.e. postfeminist) themes/interpretive repertoires *across* the sample as a whole. This involved in-depth discussions between all three authors where we focused on both articulating the postfeminist characteristics/content of the key themes (see Supplemental Table 2a, column 3), as well as noting duplications and elaborations, tensions and contradictions. This provided the basis for generating the interpretive repertoires, which were reviewed and modified as the analysis progressed before finally arriving at an agreed set of interpretive repertoires which we felt best captured the data. This resulted in the identification of an overall meta-narrative common to the whole sample, and four, more specific, interpretive repertoires which were found with varying degrees of emphasis throughout the sample. Supplemental Table 2b provides an example, again using the sample of five articles used in Supplemental Table 2a, to illustrate the transition from initial coding through to the identification of interpretive repertoires.

Findings

Before commencing with discourse analysis findings, a number of observations about the sample over the time period studied are worth noting. Most obvious is the increasing popularity of articles from 2008 to 2016. While articles on women and entrepreneurship are scarce from 2008 to 2013, averaging two per year, in 2013, there is a significant increase; a trend sustained until 2016. This is captured visually in Figure 1 below. Far from being invisible, this shows that women entrepreneurs are increasingly a focus of articles in *The Times*, raising both their individual and collective visibility, while also promoting the value of entrepreneurship and self-employment to its readership.

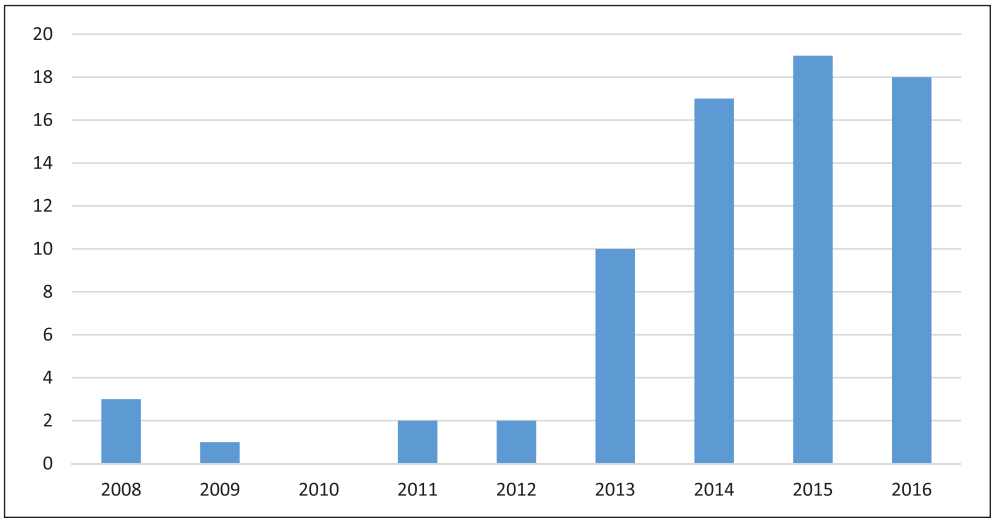


Figure 1. Number of articles, 2008–2016.

There is also remarkable uniformity and consistency across the sample, concerning the types of entrepreneurship presented, with a clear preference for high-growth, high wealth-creating businesses, predominantly from professional occupations and sectors. Only one article features entrepreneurship in the context of a manual occupation, that of plumbing. Thus, in addition to no longer being invisible, neither is the type of entrepreneurship presented trivialised or marginalised. Having said this, the articles do not make any mention of class or privilege. There is a lack of acknowledgement of structural issues and also no consideration of ethnicity, disability, and so on. The women presented are relatively homogeneous, excluding those for whom entrepreneurship is a necessity with limited earnings potential.

Discourse analysis findings

Our analysis revealed an over-arching meta-narrative and four specific interpretive repertoires, which collectively express a strong postfeminist sensibility.

Over-arching meta-narrative: Women as heroines of enterprise. All articles positively portrayed successful entrepreneurship which, without exception, was promoted as something good for women, good for society and good for the economy. Heroic metaphors were frequent and pervasive, often presented in the article title or strapline, with talk of 'conquering', 'trailblazing', 'pioneering', 'leading the way', 'breaking down barriers' and 'global missions' to 'build an empire'. Success was often linked to overcoming adversity, both personally and professionally, and the capacity to turn failure into success. All articles relied heavily on the use of these women as role models, and 'experts', whose function of inspiring others was often explicit. Some of these were celebrity entrepreneurs, who featured multiple times. Other articles focused on several women and frequently took the form of top 10 style lists, ranking them in order of success, wealth and/or influence. The women were often quoted extensively, providing insights on how to succeed through entrepreneurship as a route to fulfilment and happiness, thereby allowing them to have it all. It is noteworthy that the majority of the entrepreneurs discussed in the articles were White, middle-class and very wealthy. Consistent with the aspirational function of the articles, there were no attempts at critical reflection or debate to consider the pitfalls and risks associated with entrepreneurship.

This over-arching heroic narrative was underpinned by four key interpretive repertoires, each expressive of different aspects of a postfeminist sensibility, designed to persuade that more female entrepreneurship is a good thing, and that there is a knowable, learnable and universally applicable set of criteria for success. The repertoires identified are summarised in Supplemental Figure 2.

Supplemental Table 3 presents a meta-analysis of the interpretive repertoires which is structured in accordance with outline detailed in Supplemental Figure 2. What follows is a discussion of each by a discussion of each of the interpretive repertoires, with readers encouraged to refer to the appropriate section in Supplemental Table 3 for illustrative quotes taken from across the sample.

Interpretive repertoires

Promotion of entrepreneurship as a route to greater equality with men. Reflecting the postfeminist concern for the feminist cause of gender equality, the need for more female entrepreneurs is positioned as an equality issue in three ways. First, there are not as many women as men starting or owning their own businesses, and more women should be encouraged to pursue self employment/entrepreneurship to overcome barriers to their unequal representation in this field. This imperative is repeatedly linked to a broader economic growth agenda, as identified by politicians, with women

positioned as central to economic recovery. Second, becoming an entrepreneur is suggested as a means to tackle the gender pay gap. Several articles focus explicitly on the financial rewards entrepreneurship can bring, with some suggesting women entrepreneurs earn more than men. The promise of high earnings is also suggested less explicitly by the reporting of what each of the women were worth. Third, several articles suggested that becoming an entrepreneur enabled women to escape the sexism of corporate culture and the boardroom. Thus, more women starting businesses would tackle existing gender inequalities in terms of the number of businesses owned by women compared to men, earnings of women compared to men, and by avoiding the glass ceiling and boardroom sexism, characteristic of large organisations. This last point relates to the next repertoire, on the emancipatory potential of entrepreneurship.

Entrepreneurship as an emancipatory and egalitarian 'space'. Entrepreneurial success is traditionally positioned as meritocratic – resting on individual efforts and suggesting anyone can be successful if they work hard enough (Jones, 2014). This is coupled with a denial of any gender-based discrimination they, or other women, face in starting their own business. The clear message is that women who do face discrimination should '*stop whining and get on with it*'. Indeed, being a woman entrepreneur is advantageous because entrepreneurship provides women with a route to empowerment providing freedom of choice and the capacity to self-govern. This empowerment extends to the flexibility and autonomy entrepreneurship provides, enabling women to fulfil, and find fulfilment in, all of their roles in terms of work, wife, mother. Being an entrepreneur means a better work-life balance, and a way to 'have it all'.

Beyond generic comments such as these, there was very little mention of the practical challenges this posed within the domestic realm. When this was problematised as a dual burden or an issue of inequality (in four articles), the solution was for women to 'work harder' in order to fulfil all of their roles. At other times, the dual responsibilities of women were not problematised or presented as a burden because entrepreneurship was an enabler, providing them with flexibility to perform multiple roles.[3] Similarly, where children were mentioned, they were positioned as an asset in terms of the business advantage they afforded, revealing how the logic of the market has permeated non-work areas of life. Restructuring responsibilities, such that the domestic burden shifted to men, was never mentioned.

Desirable vs undesirable entrepreneurship. The clear focus in all articles was on high-growth businesses, which generated both individual wealth and employment for others. Representations of 'typical' female entrepreneurship were negative with suggestions that women needed to stop opting for lifestyle entrepreneurship; rather, they should be more ambitious in terms of pursuing high-growth, wealth-generating entrepreneurship. It was suggested that women should avoid feminised sectors, where growth potential is inhibited, and move into male-dominated sectors such as tech/IT. A clear indicator of this is the high number of role models from the IT sector, along with the issues covered in these articles, bemoaning the paucity of women coupled with the assertion that any barriers are imagined, as this is a relatively new sector not shackled by the gender stereotyping of more traditional occupations. Success will come to those women who are tough, tenacious and prepared to work hard.

Success as a result of overcoming and exploiting gender differences. There was a re-essentialising of gender differences, with repeated references to the natural traits of women and men and how these were suitable or unsuitable for entrepreneurship. Unsuitable traits can be overcome through work on the self, while suitable traits had to be exploited to help them and other women to succeed.

Unsuitable qualities of women. This was often articulated in terms of what women lack, requiring work on the self to overcome this. This work on the self, took two forms, one related to the interior psyche of women and the other to the exterior practicalities of having it all. A focus on the psyche/interiority was evident in frequent references to the lack of confidence, ambition and aspiration among women. Linked to this, women were also characterised as risk averse, all of which stood in the way of business growth. The message is that women have to mirror masculine aggressiveness and become more like a confident, ambitious male entrepreneur, although they have to take care not to become too much like a man. For example, in the articles focused on women in the IT sector, women often had to be aggressive and pushy in order to succeed, which came with the associated risk of being perceived as not being feminine enough. Similarly, women should not lose touch with their natural caring tendencies by becoming ruthless and concerned only with making money. In relation to the practical demands of having it all, success depends on hard work and resilience, requiring women to juggle more, work longer hours and sleep less. Talent alone is not enough – successful women have to be driven, tenacious and persistent.

Suitable qualities of women: Caring, sharing and balancing in the synthetic sisterhood. In tension with the focus on the self, and the suggestion that gender is not a barrier to success, is the imperative for women entrepreneurs to exploit their natural caring tendencies in order to support other women through networks and mentoring. In this way, women are impelled to not only help themselves, but to also help other women on the road to success, appealing to a collective sentiment of the sisterhood. Although it is argued that entrepreneurship is all consuming and hard work, women must volunteer their time, between balancing personal and career goals, to support other women. It is the natural capacity of women to perform such balancing acts that means they can fulfil all of these roles successfully.

Taken together, the interpretive repertoires constitute a persuasive narrative expressive of the postfeminist sensibility identified by Gill (2007). The appeal to feminist concerns about gender inequality, while simultaneously neutralising any transformatory potential through the almost exclusive focus on the individual, makes this difficult to critique. Entrepreneurship is portrayed as an egalitarian and gender-neutral space, masking the taken for granted assumption of the heroic, male entrepreneur as the norm, against which women are judged. Binary distinctions are reinforced and gender differences cleverly re-essentialised, such that some differences need to be overcome, and some nurtured. The barriers inhibiting high-growth entrepreneurship among women are scripted as internal and the solution, of working on themselves, is highly individualised. The failure to problematise the role of existing structural factors in perpetuating gender inequalities, along with the unquestioned, and often silent, assumption that women remain responsible for the domestic realm, reinforces the patriarchal status quo while increasing expectations relating to the economic contribution and growth potential of entrepreneurship done by women.

Discussion

Our initial motivation for this study was prompted by our observation that women were appearing more frequently in the newsprint media as respected business leaders. We critically interrogated this emergent variant of the female entrepreneur and the associated hegemonic entrepreneurial femininity to which it gives rise. We were influenced by critical research on postfeminism, which shows the pervasiveness of the current postfeminist sensibility and how this is entangled and enmeshed within the broader context of neoliberalism (Ahl and Marlow, 2019; Chen, 2013). Based on our findings, we argue that the successful female entrepreneur constructed in these articles is also expressive of this entanglement, producing a form of entrepreneurial femininity which is

highly individualised and measured purely in economic terms. This is consistent with work by Lewis (2014) on entrepreneurial femininities and that of Byrne et al. (2019) which show a preference for, and dominance of, the '*individualized entrepreneurial femininity*' as compared to the other modes identified by Lewis (i.e. maternal, relational and excessive). However, while Lewis suggests these alternative modes may challenge the hegemony of individualised entrepreneurial femininity, characterised as they are by often contrasting features, our findings suggest that the boundaries between these different modes are not unequivocal. The hegemonic entrepreneurial femininity revealed in our analysis, while being highly individualised and concerned with maximising growth/wealth, also contains key features of maternal and relational femininity, consistent with notions of synthetic sisterhood (Swann, 2017).

Simultaneously, there is also a rejection of key features of these alternative modes. For example, the emphasis on women helping each other and having the 'right' traits falls in the category of relational rather than individualised entrepreneurial femininity; yet, relational entrepreneurial femininity is also characterised by a rejection of a masculine, growth orientation to business and advocates small and stable businesses. This is consistent with the work of Peck et al. (2012), Adkins and Dever (2014) and Gill (2014) in relation to new forms of labouring subjectivity, especially for women. Neither is the dominant entrepreneurial femininity revealed by our analysis characterised by the distancing manifest in the separation between the domestic sphere and the public sphere shown in hegemonic individualised entrepreneurial femininity of Lewis. Rather than challenging categorisations of different forms of entrepreneurial femininity of Lewis, we suggest that this blurring of the boundaries between the different types of entrepreneurial femininities is a reflection of the function/types of texts analysed. Drawing on different characteristics of different types of entrepreneurial femininity optimises the appeal of newspaper narratives, while simultaneously scripting such factors as important contributors to the overarching imperative of business growth and wealth creation. There is a remarkable consistency in the positive portrayal of entrepreneurship (despite the 72 articles being penned by 46 different authors) and at no point was there a critical discussion about the pros and cons of entrepreneurship. It is an idealised and simplified construction, unlike the one which emerges from the empirical realities of the texts in the paper of Lewis.

In considering why this matters, we argue that the creation of common sense through the media informs assumptions and creates expectations as to how women entrepreneurs should behave and perform. Meritocratic principles are reinforced, and success is achieved through work on the self. There is a suggested level playing field between men and women pursuing entrepreneurship and the privileged position of the majority of the women in our study is rendered invisible. Other types of entrepreneurship undertaken by women and men are positioned as inferior thus, failing to recognise the heterogeneity of entrepreneurship. Neither does this highly celebrated entrepreneurial femininity do anything to challenge the patriarchal status quo. The clear message is that women can and should be successful business women, wives and mothers, with very little recognition that this often depends on the buying in of domestic services to look after the home and children. Expressive of the double entanglement of neoliberalism with postfeminism (Ahl and Marlow, 2019; McRobbie, 2009), becoming a successful entrepreneur is positioned as central to one's identity and the most important way to gain fulfilment. This links strongly to the discourse of positive affect espoused by Rottenberg (2014) and the work of Scharff (2016) on the psychic life of neoliberalism. Explicit examples of impact on psychic life, from our sample, include internal barriers to success; a need to be more confident, more risk taking, ambitious and optimistic; a need to be resilient and have the capacity to overcome adversity; a need to offer care and support while being driven and be able to work long hard hours. Thus, if one fails, it is because one has not sufficiently worked on oneself to develop these attributes (as per Scharff, 2016). The implication being that if you do not succeed, you are flawed.

There is little mention of the domestic realm and, when this is considered, it is scripted in economic terms, as a possible route to entrepreneurial success for example, through so-called mumpreneurship. Related to this is the lack of recognition of the privileged position of the entrepreneurs featured, nor is there mention of possible disadvantages and risks associated with entrepreneurship. This is problematic at the societal level, in terms of making women responsible for post-recession economic recovery, as reflected in UK policies influenced by the United States (see Rose, 2019; Small Business Federation, 2016), which promote entrepreneurship specifically to women. The overwhelmingly positive portrayal of entrepreneurship fails to recognise both the vulnerability and uncertainty that goes with it, as well as the often limited, earnings from self-employment compared to those in equivalent waged work (Marlow and Martinez Dy, 2018). For some women, entrepreneurship may not be an ideal option and they would be better off in employment, which provides a secure income and access to essential benefits (Jayawarna et al., 2019).

The need to challenge the overly optimistic neoliberal and postfeminist version of entrepreneurship is also highlighted by the pervasiveness of this ideal in other non-western contexts. Gill suggests that these ideas 'travel', being identified in research on China, Bangladesh, Eastern Europe and Nigeria (Lewis et al., 2017), so, although they are positioned as a Western/Global North phenomenon, they are increasingly evident in other national contexts. This ultimately positions successful entrepreneurial femininity as a form of hegemonic femininity, which has become increasingly mobilised since the 2008 economic crisis, but which is drawn upon in other international contexts. This is at odds with the reality of entrepreneurship for many in non-Western contexts, where it is a survival strategy driven by extreme poverty and vulnerability (Marlow and Martinez Dy, 2018). Further promulgation of the Western derived hegemonic ideal, which fails to take account of context and the prevailing social conditions, serves to further marginalise and silence those types of entrepreneurship that fail to measure up to this ideal, as well as creating unrealistic expectations in terms of what entrepreneurs can accomplish.

This last point relates to one of the limitations of this study, the narrow focus on one UK newspaper. More empirical studies of a wider variety of media outlets, both within and outside of the United Kingdom, are needed to test how pervasive this entrepreneurial femininity is. Comparing different newspapers may also shed light on the role of editorial decision making and raises interesting questions concerning the political allegiances of different newspapers. An additional limitation of this article is that it does not list nor discuss who the privileged female entrepreneurs are, nor does it explore the images of the role models accompanying many of the articles. Further study is needed to unpack the impact of authorial voice in terms of what is said about the entrepreneurs and by whom, and how they are presented visually. As an identity, the 'heroic' label is not a performed entrepreneurial identity (Clarke, 2011) but an attributed one in which the role of the, predominantly women, authors is paramount. Future research could explore whether this reflects a shift in the gendered practices of journalism, with more women now writing about 'hard' – that is business – rather than soft – that is lifestyle – issues (North, 2016), and the implications this may have for the stability, fragility and legitimacy of the categorisations created.

We acknowledge that although there is not a recognised body of work on respected women entrepreneurs, nevertheless '. . . *a critical mass of evidence and arguments can be gleaned to legitimately configure the topics for investigation*' (Locke and Golden-Biddle, 1997: 1034). We identify a synthesised and progressive coherence across the extant literature and empirical data. This study fills a gap in the extant literature by addressing an obvious lacuna in terms of both incompleteness and inadequacy. Ultimately, our work benefits from the socially constructed narratives of a new generation of, mainly female, journalists telling better stories of respected female entrepreneurs. Thus, our preliminary contribution to the literature is to construct the argument for the existence of the heroic, female entrepreneur within a coherent intertextual framework underpinned by a supporting rhetoric within the narrative (Locke and Golden-Biddle, 1997). Our work

empirically demonstrates an important phenomenon – namely that of the heroic female entrepreneur as a '*discourse of positive affect*' (Rottenberg, 2014: 433). Using the related concepts of women entrepreneurs, postfeminism and neoliberalism, we argue that positioning women as central to post-recession economic growth raises important questions about how this is accomplished and accepted as common sense. Our analysis and discussion confirm this discourse of positive affect, while demonstrating how the media promotes the dominant view that empowerment of women is achieved through entrepreneurship and economic growth and that certain rhetorical ways of doing this are better than others. In addition, we uncover how postfeminism informs media representations of female entrepreneurs. We add contextually to the studies of Lewis and Byrne et al – who suggest postfeminism informs popular discourse on female entrepreneurs – by demonstrating that this also occurs in another setting, newsprint media. The existence of the emerging concept of the heroic female entrepreneur highlights the presence of differential values and principles underlying the rise of this idealised entrepreneurial femininity. It reveals how the rhetoric privileges mainly White female entrepreneurs excluding other ethnicities, social and sociological classifications and reconfigures gender relations in terms of the expectations on women, and assumptions made about them.

Conclusion

This study provides an alternative narrative to the hitherto dominant media representation of women entrepreneurs as being somewhat marginalised, trivialised and frivolous (Achtenhagen and Welter, 2011; Eikhof et al., 2013; Radu and Redien-Collot, 2008). However, its main contribution lies in narrowing the gap in the literature, as research on gender and entrepreneurship and the media is rarely articulated in postfeminist terms. Our findings challenge some of the claims about the overarching prevalence of deficiency discourses, suggesting that some women in the United Kingdom are increasingly being seen as ideal entrepreneurial subjects. However, within a neoliberal context, this represents the subjectification of women and emphasises agency in its focus on individualism, choice, empowerment and transformation at the expense of more collective and/or political calls to transform gendered, classed and raced social structures. Deficiency discourses are, however, still evident in the way that certain women entrepreneurs and their businesses are 'othered' in these articles, particularly those that do not reflect the 'heroic' and high-growth focus of the women interviewed in these articles. We also illustrate the psychic life of neoliberal feminism (Rottenberg, 2014), in the articulation and production of a postfeminist sensibility – both by these women and those writing about them. Furthermore, our study contradicts previous research, suggesting that women business owners are trivialised in the media. In this context, women are no longer excluded but celebrated, reflecting a particular form of entrepreneurial subjectivity. Thus, our postfeminist lens to research on media and women entrepreneurs also extends current debates about postfeminism, to show how this postfeminist sensibility has become common sense and normalised.

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Supplemental material

Supplemental material for this article is available online.

Notes

1. Karren Rita Brady, Baroness Brady, CBE is a British sporting executive, politician, television personality, newspaper columnist, author and novelist. She is the Chairman of West Ham United FC, a Football club and is Lord Sugar's advisor on the UK version of the TV show 'The Apprentice'.
2. The majority of photographs were of the entrepreneurs featured in the articles and depicted well-groomed/dressed/presented women, an appearance that was heavily invested in in terms of time and money. Most of the women were posed and accessorised, and depicted in 'professional' minimalist settings, with only two depicting women actually doing something related to their business.
3. For example, owning your own business means you can bring your children to work if they are ill.

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