

Relational practices and reflexivity: Exploring the responses of women entrepreneurs to changing household dynamics.

Journal:	<i>International Small Business Journal</i>
Manuscript ID	ISB-17-0061.R2
Manuscript Type:	Full Paper
Keywords:	gender, family, reflexivity, household dynamics, entrepreneurship, women, agency
Abstract:	This qualitative study explores how and why women, positioned as mothers, wives or carers, navigate changing household dynamics, related to care and reproductive resources, and become entrepreneurial. Drawing on relational reflexivity, we show how women's embodied, intimate relations with important others in the household form the focal point for entrepreneurial activities, and offer evidence of their entrepreneurial agency. Our analysis reveals the emergence of three relational practices that result in a new venture as the entrepreneurial response of women. We critically evaluate normative analyses on gender, entrepreneurship and household.

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Introduction

While scholars have recognised the household as a context built on familial relational ties that influence entrepreneurial experience and venture development (Alsos, Carter and Ljunggren, 2014; Renzulli, Aldrich and Moody, 2000), it is also evident that the private domain has been devalued and poorly understood. Feminist theorists have exposed how gender roles, related to caring and motherhood, have been assumed to limit the possibilities for entrepreneurial agency, and impact on women's access and positioning in organisational settings (Calas, Smircich and Bourne, 2009). Women have been associated with the body and the work of intimate care for the bodies of others (Shilling, 2003), and therefore often understood as disruptive and unwelcome, transgressing the social norms by bringing the private world of reproduction (Ashcraft, 1999) into the public sphere.

We critically evaluate such assumptions in an effort to dispel the misconception that gendered structures automatically distort or act as a break on venture creation. Our research objective is to explore the different ways changing household dynamics (birth, separation, family upheaval) situate the entrepreneurial opportunities that can face women living their lives as wives, mothers and/or carers. Women, as a category, form the basis of our analysis; however we argue that actors are not social dopes but rather are to differing extents active in the way they confront social structures (Clegg, 2006). Following work in realist social theory we contend that persons make reflexive choices about *what* matters. Reflexivity allows us to explain different motivations and how choices are made because 'agents have to diagnose their situations, they have to identify their own interests and they must design projects they

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3 deem appropriate to attaining their ends' (Archer, 2003: 9). Households that are constituted
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5 by relational ties exist as a feature of the relational reflexivity of women constituted by their
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7 gendered selves (as wives, mothers and or carers) in respect of the important others (partners,
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9 husbands, children, siblings) with whom they share their personal lives and concerns,
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11 throughout their life course (Marlow and McAdam, 2012; Donati and Archer, 2015). Thus,
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13 we argue that women's familial roles involve an embodied, intimate relationship between
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15 mother and child, spousal partners and caring roles that can form the basis of a shared *modus*
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17 *vivendi* – the realization of a way of life they would find satisfying and sustainable – whereby
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19 conceptions of familial care motivate and frame ventures that at one and the same time builds
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21 on and reframes the foundations of the household in their lives.
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26 We contribute to research on gender, entrepreneurship and the household, by invoking
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28 relational reflexivity to explain the entrepreneurial responses of women whose lives are
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30 affected by changes in the household, and negate categorizations imposed on them through
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32 ways that emphasize the 'motivations and agency of actors in society' (Wallace, 2002 : 275).
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34 Rather than seek to understand the interconnectivity of household–business regarding
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36 resource acquisition and business growth, we follow the recommendation of Jennings and
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38 Brush (2013) by considering the significance of the relational dimension of the household as
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40 the focal point for entrepreneurial activities, through the conceptualization of the relational
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42 configuration of changing household dynamics (Elder, 1994; Emirbayer, 1977). Our
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44 empirical analysis reveals three agentic relational practices 'Recomposition', 'Separation'
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46 and 'Consolidation'. These are not mutually exclusive but rather stem from the configuration
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48 of household dynamics across the life course, and result in a new venture, as the active
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50 entrepreneurial response of women. The article is structured as follows. First, we begin by
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52 considering recent work to frame discussions of gender, entrepreneurship and household.
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54 Second, we offer an elaborated explanation of the links between life course trajectories and
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3 relational reflexivity. Third, we provide details of our sample, methods and data analysis. In
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5 the fourth section we present our findings and analysis on agency and responses of women
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7 entrepreneurs to household dynamics. The last section concludes.
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10 11 12 13 **Gender, household dynamics and entrepreneurship** 14

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16 The manner in which family and household influence business activities has been
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18 explored at length both by researchers studying family enterprises (e.g. Discua Cruz,
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20 Howarth and Hamilton, 2012) and enterprising households (e.g. Alsos et al, 2014; Carter,
21
22 2011; Jayawarna, Rouse and Macpherson, 2014; Wheelock and Oughton, 1996). The
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24 household is influential as expectations, hopes or motives and more importantly as networks
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26 of family and friends who remain active in actors' lives. Indeed, families evolve over time
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28 because new members are born, grown-up children may leave the family home, couples may
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30 separate and older generations pass away (Alsos *et al*, 2014). Much of this research has
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32 focused on the nature of resources and capabilities in terms of financial, emotional or human
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34 capital that emanate from household dynamics and influence family-business interactions and
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36 decision-making. While this work offers important insights in explaining economic behavior
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38 and growth, there is little emphasis on the gendered assumptions and institutional biases
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40 associated with changing household dynamics (e.g. birth, death, separation, family upheaval)
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42 that affect processes of social valorization and experiences of entrepreneurship, particularly
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44 as they relate to care and reproductive resources at certain points across the life course
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46 (Jayawarna et al, 2014).
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54 Feminist scholars have recognized gender as a fundamental component of social order
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56 with material and ideational effects which functions in society to create differential outcomes
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3 for men and women (Gunnarsson, Dy and Van Inghen, 2016, Risman, 1998). The way we are
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5 embodied enables and constrains our practices, performing social roles and interacting with
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7 others (Archer, 2003, Shilling, 2003). Risman (1998:294) emphasizes the structured nature of
8
9 social life in which “women [and men] fill different positions in institutional settings, work
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11 organizations or families”; such positions are associated with various social roles and cultural
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13 expectations regarding the rights and duty of action which are critical in terms of resource
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15 distribution – whether resources are defined as access to opportunities or actual material
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17 goods – and experiences of work. Studies have documented how gender and entrepreneurship
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19 lie at the intersection between the private world of home and family and the public world of
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21 business and work (Bourne and Calás, 2013; Eddleston and Powell, 2012; Lewis, 2013).
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23 Women are involved in the bodywork of intimate care of others bringing the private world of
24
25 reproduction (Ashcraft, 1999) into the public setting of organization. Women’s ‘embodied
26
27 potential for maternity’ (Gatrell, 2008: 2) may thus render them unwelcome within
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29 professional settings where they are defined by their reproductive capacity, which evokes ‘a
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31 sense of woman as saturated by her body and existing only in and through her body’ (Witz,
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33 2000: 11).
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40 Gender roles instilled by gender socialization processes, and enforced throughout the
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42 life span by the gendered nature of work, organizations, and institutions (Ahl, 2006) result in
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44 different household and labour market positions, creating a sexual division of labour
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46 (Bradley, 2007). Research suggests that men are prescribed greater responsibility for
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48 breadwinning and women greater responsibility for the household, family and care giving,
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50 while institutions reward and support their labour differently (Jennings and Brush, 2013). In
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52 this context, women’s entrepreneurship has been associated in many cases with homeworking
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54 and the label of ‘mumpreneur’ (Ekinsmyth, 2011), as a way that enables women to determine
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56 the conditions of labour and secure, as a result, flexibility around the execution of business
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3 and domestic responsibilities. However, such arguments are not ‘a cause for celebration’
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5 (McRobbie, 2009: 157) as there are detailed accounts of how domestic and care
6
7 responsibilities are not something that women overcome on the way to entrepreneurial
8
9 success (Lewis, 2015). Women entrepreneurs may commonly conduct business while caring
10
11 for children/elderly persons simultaneously or invest nonstandard hours in their business (Dy,
12
13 Marlow and Martin, 2017). Gender roles are therein built into the organization of life, with
14
15 mostly women to retain the organizational role of the household (Acker, 2006), regardless of
16
17 woman’s income or career status (Thébaud, 2016).
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21 It has been demonstrated these social biases and gendered expectations of domesticity
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23 are detrimental for women in terms of creating or growing new ventures (Bourne and Calás,
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25 2013; Bruni, Gerardi and Poggio, 2004). Hence, those who do not conform to the normative
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27 entrepreneur – an unencumbered male professional – find their legitimacy constrained by
28
29 their subject position (Jayawarna *et al*, 2014). Not surprisingly, wives, mothers or carers are,
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31 as a result, ‘already culturally devalued identities’ (Bourne and Calás, 2013: 435), opposing
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33 the view of what an entrepreneur should be (Ogbor, 2000). Household dynamics (birth, death,
34
35 family upheaval) associated with the “skill in mothering and its metaphorical extensions”
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37 (Haraway, 1990:36), such as care and familial responsibilities for others, precipitate
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39 inequalities that position women in the household as ‘Othered’. Our aim is to contribute to
40
41 this research by exploring how women positioned as wives, mothers or carers in the micro-
42
43 environment of the household make sense and navigate changing household dynamics that
44
45 require them to find new ways in which to adapt and develop their household relations that
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47 can also create economic outcomes. To develop such arguments we introduce relational
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49 reflexivity (Donati and Archer, 2015), which enables us to consider women’s actions within
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51 the social contexts they find themselves.
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Life course trajectories and relational reflexivity

Recognizing the importance of context in studying entrepreneurial activities has led scholars to support the notion that individual's life transitions and events have a bearing on entrepreneurial intentions and career dynamics (Davis and Shaver, 2012). More specifically, whilst women entrepreneurs may share a common basis for their experiences by virtue of their social position within social hierarchies, including the household, (Gunnarsson, 2011, Bradley, 2007), their actions are influenced by various intersecting structural and cultural contexts in which they are embedded over their personal, family and business life courses (Elder, 1994). Studies of social exclusion in entrepreneurship have addressed how issues of race/ethnicity, and class among others complicate those of gender, and may affect the set of action alternatives (Essers and Benschop, 2009). In turn a marginal positionality – for example women with caring responsibilities and people of color whose actions are challenged by hegemonic conception of the entrepreneur– constrains the accrual of human, social and economic capital, posing structural barriers to entrepreneurial activity (Dy et al, 2017). These are expressed in family and background relations, personal histories and migration that some women experience during their life-courses (Carter, Mwaura and Ram, 2015). Put simply, the life course of individuals is embedded in and shaped by socio-historical influences expressed through shared relationships over individual's lifetime. However, and importantly, women's entrepreneurial actions are not fully determined by their structural and cultural contexts but also rely on the active agent (Clegg, 2006) creating 'gendered choices' (Risman, 1998: 297), subjectively interpreted courses of action within the structurally conditioned space of possibilities in which they find themselves.

Archer's (2003, 2012) work on human reflexivity adds considerably more depth into this analysis because reflexivity echoes the past experiences and life trajectories of actors.

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3 Contrary to theories of reflexivity in late modernity (Beck, Giddens and Lash, 1994) that
4 associate reflexive capacities with increased individual expressivity and the decline in the
5 significance of social structures (such as gender, race, class) in shaping life experience,
6 Archer (2012:6) highlights the intensified role of structural and cultural contexts considering
7 reflexivity 'as the process mediating the effects of our circumstances upon our actions'.
8 Through their reflexive deliberations actors assess social demands and choose to act in ways
9 that allow them fallibly to satisfy personal concerns they subjectively value. More recent
10 work by Donati and Archer (2015) has extended ideas on reflexivity to offer an assessment of
11 the relational subject. This they define as someone who is 'constituted by the relations he/she
12 cares for, that is the subject's concerns' (2015:55). Lives are lived interdependently (Elder,
13 1994) and the relational organization of close relationships affects all household members
14 and their interactions (Rouse and Kitching, 2006). Donati and Archer (2015:153) argue that
15 'relational reflexivity consists in orientating the subjects to the reality emergent from their
16 interactions by their taking into consideration how this reality is able to feedback onto the
17 subjects'.

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37 Articulated through the lens of relational reflexivity, women entrepreneurs in our
38 study positioned as mothers, wives or carers negotiated the household dynamics associated
39 with care and reproductive resources in relation to important others, in ways they deemed to
40 be relationally best in order to sustain the 'relational goods' generated in the household. This
41 is how women entrepreneurs make what has been described as 'imaginative contact with a
42 possible opportunity' (Ramoglou and Tsang, 2016: 424). Based on the conceptualization of
43 the relational configuration of household dynamics we identify three emergent relational
44 practices that reveal how women in our sample, by being relationally reflexive, endorsed
45 their personal projects and concerns linking household gendered structures to their agency.
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3 What we see are business start-ups with an emergent effect; that is, they are built on symbolic
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5 exchange and were created as a response to 'satisfy primary needs' in the household.
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10 11 **Methodology**

12 13 *Research context and participants' profile*

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17 Our orientating research question started with asking the following: "*how might we*
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19 *conceive of entrepreneurship in the context of women positioned as wives, mothers or carers,*
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21 *confronted with household dynamics, such as birth, separation, death or family upheaval?"*

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23 This necessitates an understanding of the relational configuration of the household and an
24
25 examination of the women's relational practices that enable us to explain how their actions
26
27 mitigate the gendered structures of changing household dynamics. Our qualitative,
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29 interpretative study was designed to capture the meanings that women attach to their choices
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31 (Archer, 2012) and provides insights into substantive events and experiences forming the
32
33 basis for considering in detail the interplay between contexts and actions (Suddaby *et al*,
34
35 2015). We aim to explore women's gendered selves, and enable their experiences to be
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37 studied without comparison to an 'unmarked male template' (Jackson, 2012:1001) which
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39 negatively affects how their actions are perceived (De Bruin, Brush and Welter, 2007; Ahl,
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41 2006). We recognize that women entrepreneurs are a heterogeneous population (Hughes *et al*,
42
43 2012), their household resources do vary (Dy *et al*, 2017) and the character of women's
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45 entrepreneurial activity itself, including the size and location of their ventures, is often
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47 contingent on their family situation (Aldrich and Cliff, 2003, Losocco and Bird, 2012). Our
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49 goal is not to disentangle these social factors that certainly affect their business performance
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51 and growth, but to explicate their active entrepreneurial responses under conditions of life
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53 transitions they all experience in their life course.
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3 In this sense, we see considerable value in exploring entrepreneurship as a reflexive
4 process of engagement revealing the deliberative capacities of individuals in different
5 circumstances as opposed to a largely economic endeavor (Suddaby *et al*, 2015). To explain
6 this process, data were collected by means of in-depth biographical interviews, through a life
7 history methodology (Chamberlayne, Rustin and Wengraf, 2002). Biographical research has
8 the merit of aiding the task of understanding major social shifts by taking into account how
9 novel experiences are interpreted by persons within groups and institutions (Denzin and
10 Lincoln, 1994). From a feminist framing, biographical interviews offer the potential to
11 recognize the diversity and plurality of women's lived experiences and enhance their
12 visibility (Lather, 1991). In turn, they encourage a reflexive understanding of the relationship
13 between individual action and social structure (Archer, 2003) recognizing the part gendered
14 selves play in constructing structures as well as being mediating by them (Stanley, 1993). To
15 approach our participants we contacted women entrepreneurs' networks in the South of
16 England through university's knowledge exchange networks and business partnerships.
17 Additionally, the 'snowballing' method was used to contact acquaintances of already
18 participating women owner-managers. The 15 interviews reported here are part of a project
19 focusing on women business owners' lives, interests and experiences as a basis for
20 knowledge construction. In the sample, participants were all drawn from the UK and ranged
21 in age from 28 to 53 years. They are all white native born (Byrne, 2006). Thirteen
22 interviewees were married and two divorced at the time of the interview. Of those
23 interviewed nine had one child or more. Participants' firms represent various sectors
24 including, landscape design, marine engineering, marketing, automotive services,
25 construction, biotechnology, consultancy, events management, public relations and
26 communication. Table 1 below details the backgrounds of participants. Pseudonyms are used
27 to protect participants' identity and privacy.
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‘Insert Table 1 Here’

The first author collected the biographical accounts in the participants’ workplace or her office. Each participant was asked to tell a life story focusing on their current and previous working/life contexts from the point of early aspiration and natal background through to their education and current family situation and employment. Biographical interviews tend to begin with an open-ended question such as, ‘Can you take me through your life and employment, starting with information of your natal background, taking into account significant life experiences and employment transitions?’ To enhance the depth and complexity of the accounts being developed, our interchange was informed by an analytical framework with guide questions and suggestions of probes and directions for further discussions. This allowed us to expand upon key themes and ensure a degree of standardization among participants (Chamberlayne et al, 2002). Participants reflected upon themselves in relation to their work and life situations explaining how in their own subjectivity made decisions – for instance if they had a child or experienced some other significant family or life transition – and their current understanding of work and personal life within the objective social situations they found themselves. It was following discussions with the second author that both authors came to agreement that such representations of life transitions provided access to each individual’s rehearsal of their own ‘project’, how they fitted into the actions chosen as well as the outcomes of their endeavor. The interviews lasted 90 to 150 minutes each, were tape recorded, transcribed and sent back to participants for possible corrections (Oliver, Serovich and Mason, 2005).

Data analysis

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3 We analyzed our data using an iterative process (Edwards, O'Mahoney and Vincent,
4 2014), moving back and forth between the data and the existing literature to capture the
5 gendered structures under which women entrepreneurs found themselves and better
6 understand their actions. We stress that the first author initiated the interview as a university-
7 affiliated female who asked questions of self-employed females. The similarity of being both
8 professionals and females eased the discussion of gender issues. The second author, who was
9 not involved in the interaction with participants, was engaged in the analysis and
10 interpretation of these accounts. This allowed us to trace the ramifications of participants'
11 actions in wider contexts and contribute to critical scrutiny and theorizing of transcripts. Data
12 analysis was undertaken in three stages.
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25 First, a coding framework was constructed by the researchers using conceptual
26 categories as thematic codes identified in the literature relating to gendered structures,
27 household dynamics, household/family relations, and life/career decisions. Following this, we
28 coded the transcripts and extended it to include any new themes founded in the specific
29 interview (Holton, 2007). At the end of this first step we had a number of primary codes that
30 summarized the conditions that influenced women entrepreneurs' situation, the household
31 dynamics, and the relational configuration of the household. This enabled us to interrogate
32 the literature and primary data to isolate text extracts from across the range of participants.
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43 In the second step, we sought a deeper structure in this array (Gioia, Corley and
44 Hamilton, 2013). We asked how the identified primary codes could help us understand
45 women entrepreneurs' projects and actions, including options not taken, and the justification
46 of the actions they took. We consequently compared our primary codes across interviews and
47 revisited the data using tables to facilitate this comparison. For instance, we developed
48 individual overviews to better understand women's main concerns and decisions in relation to
49 household dynamics. At the end of this stage we had generated second order themes that
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3 summarized recurrent patterns of relational concerns associated with women's roles as wives,
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5 mothers or careers.
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8 In the third and final step we analyzed how the above characteristics were related to
9
10 the entrepreneurial ways women employed to respond to household dynamics. We distilled
11
12 from the data the ways the above sub-themes associated with women's roles were combined,
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14 including variations within groups. We went back and forth using different definitions of
15
16 practices to group cases according to the ways that women in our sample navigated relational
17
18 concerns, such as entry or exit, in their households. This process helped us review each
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20 biography and led to the identification of three relational practices 'Recomposition',
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22 'Separation', and 'Consolidation'. We use Figure 1 to feature our data structure for emergent
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24 relational practices.
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28 'Insert Figure 1 Here'
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31 Our analysis is not irreducible merely to giving information about a succession of
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33 events but relates to the way women interpret, understand and make sense of their lives and
34
35 thereby initiate action. Unpacking these practices emphasizes the autonomy of agents
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37 showing how relational reflexivity is constituted *in* practice. The data presented below are not
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39 put forward as an illustration of findings or conclusions (Goia et al, 2013); rather they are
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41 offered as a means of stimulating a discussion around the issues of gender, entrepreneurship
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43 and household, to explain how women entrepreneurs, positioned as mothers, wives or carers,
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45 confound boundaries that mark them as 'the other'.
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50 51 **Emergent relational practices: women entrepreneurs negotiating household dynamics** 52

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54 The biographical narratives of many of our participants offered insight (albeit
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56 partially) into the transitions surrounding their personal lives as they struggled to build and
57
58 sustain family life as a feature of the household. Confronted by household changes associated
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3 with care and reproductive resources, including separation, child birth, unemployment,
4 financial instability and crisis these women help to illustrate relational feedbacks in respect of
5 these shifts in circumstance that highlight the transformative effect of the household as a
6 context for entrepreneurship (Calás *et al*, 2009).
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11 The transformative consequences of the feedback loop into the relational dynamics of
12 the household confirm the role of each of the women in subjectively choosing to respond to
13 these changes and in the nature of the family relational composition because such actions are
14 a feature of the subjects and the social ties, as mothers, wives or carers, that bind them
15 together. But, this is not a pneumatic process: ‘the social relation is intrinsically reflexive, in
16 the sense that it “is always bent back” on to the subjects that are in the relation. However,
17 reflexivity can be minimal, impeded, distorted, or fractured and in that case so, too, will be
18 the relationality between the agents/actors’ (Donati and Archer, 2015: 29). Here we argue the
19 reflexive mode of the women in relation to significant others entailed a positive feedback
20 because they actively considered interactions on the basis of prior life course experiences and
21 because they deliberated the impact of new ways of doing things for what might follow.
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36 We specify three relational practices characterizing how some women, positioned as
37 wives, mothers or carers, responded to changing household dynamics. These reveal the re-
38 organization of relations to sustain the ‘relational goods’ that created normative conformity in
39 the midst of household dynamics. In this context, we see relational subjects – women
40 positioned as wives, mothers or carers – operating on a personal – relational register that
41 inculcate gendered selves (Risman, 1998) in ways that are subversive and have positive
42 entrepreneurial outcomes (Calás *et al*, 2009).
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54 ***Relational Re-composition***

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3 Relational re-composition explains how some of our participants interjected to
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5 establish a new enterprise with their marital partners when confronted with household
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7 instability. We are interested in the concerns emerging from changing household dynamics
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9 and how these transitions can shape women's entrepreneurial responses. As shown in many
10
11 of the women's accounts their actions were deliberate because instability to the family
12
13 (usually in terms of lost income) required new ways to overcome the resulting household
14
15 dissonance. For Risman (2004:431) 'constraints are, of course, an important function of
16
17 structure, but to focus only on structure as constraint minimizes its importance'. Under these
18
19 circumstances, some of our women interjected showing how their experiences, dispositions
20
21 and hunches were reflexively deployed to head-off a family crisis. The responses of our
22
23 relational subjects confirm the importance of relational reflexivity that enable them to
24
25 monitor their circumstances and explain those times when embedded gendered structures are
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27 challenged (Al-Dajani and Marlow, 2013).
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32 One of our women, Alex, explains how she 're-composed' her marital relationship to
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34 help her husband when he could no longer maintain a regular wage. Alex had, by this time
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36 (and before their marriage), built up a client base from her bookkeeping business within her
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38 local community appreciating what it meant to start from the bottom-up and juggle family
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40 and work life, having also previously been a single parent. We agree with Donati and Archer
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42 (2015: 142): 'relations both are the "mediation" of prior structural and cultural conditioning
43
44 and have emergent powers, of causal consequence in their own right and of their own kind'.
45
46 Alex had an intimate understanding of what it meant to sustain the family in hard times,
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48 which her husband lacked (prior conditioning) while the establishment of a joint enterprise
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50 with him revealed a 'relational good' that could help stabilize their future (intended causal
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52 consequence). The development of this business with her husband whilst she had continued
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54 to organize the household around the needs of her children albeit with considerable difficulty,
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3 had allowed her to develop a role where she used her expertise and love of materials (Alex
4 has a degree in Yacht Manufacture and surveying) to secure the households future, contra
5 adversity. Generating shared relational goods through a business venture allowed them to
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7 dedicate time to a shared concern – the security of the household.
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13 “Then my husband got made redundant. It was just really unreliable and
14 feeling, you sent me a slip saying we’re going to get paid £400 and you’ve put
15 £80 in my bank account. Like how am I meant to run a household on this? So I
16
17 threw my toy out the pram one day and said well I’ll find you work. If you like
18 painting and decorating and tiling and things, I’ll find you work. I’ve done it
19 for the book keeping; I’ll do it for you. It went from me sort of helping out and
20 giving advice and finding the work, to sort of doing all of it.” (Alex, married
21 with children)
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31 Like Alex, other participants also adapted to household dynamics related to family
32 upheaval as they experienced it with their partner’s job. Paula ‘recomposed’ her relationship
33 helping her partner with his business to save it from bankruptcy “*They were very, very dodgy*
34 *ground for a long time*”. This was essential for their life together, as they had recently
35 acquired a mortgage. Paula had grown up in a council house and was the first in her family to
36 go to university and acquire a degree in Business Management. Having been self-employed –
37 sales contractor and advertising magazine owner – she became her husband’s much needed
38 bookkeeper as well as assisting with marketing and sales. This collaboration subsequently led
39 them to start a business, which confirmed the business acumen of Paula, who became a
40 shareholder and managing director.
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54 He ran it by himself for a good 2 years and it was difficult because obviously
55 we had to fund from our own money, it wasn’t going anywhere. We had a big
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3 discussion because we're both concerned that by both working for the same
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5 company, if something happened, we'd lose the house and everything. After
6
7 deciding, I said "make me a director then because I'm not closing my company
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9 down and having nothing". He made me a director, 50% shareholder, all of that
10
11 and then I took over in the business basically. (*Paula, married*)
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14
15 In both cases the threat to the household provided the impetus to monitor what can be
16
17 termed 'the family's *modus vivendi*' (Donati and Archer, 2015:144, *italics in original*). It is
18
19 also illustrative of the wife as business partner asserting control precisely because they have
20
21 an innate appreciation of the household-business nexus (Carter, 2011). Transforming the
22
23 *modus vivendi* is necessary when events call into question the basis of the relational
24
25 configuration in the household. Put another way, 'to establish a *modus vivendi* is initially and
26
27 deliberatively to design a way of life that the subject reflexively deems worth living and, all
28
29 being well, subsequently finds can be lived' (Donati and Archer, 2015:134). The relational
30
31 goods that emerged from the relational configuration of household dynamics indicate the
32
33 agency of these women as reflexive individuals able to be entrepreneurial.
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37 To understand the scope of entrepreneurship (Calás *et al*, 2009) it is necessary to
38
39 realize that our participants' responses are not simply a question of rational choice or use of
40
41 familial networks to start a business (Renzulli *et al*, 2000) but, as argued, involves relational
42
43 subjects – wives, mothers, carers – making active responses to satisfy their concerns in their
44
45 attempt to confound the gendered structures of household dynamics. We can call this
46
47 'dovetailing' of concerns among relational subjects (Archer, 2003) when partners imagined
48
49 *and* actualized their version of the future (Ramoglou and Tsang, 2016). Take Suzie, a
50
51 designer, in her account she notes how her husband, Graham who is an architect recomposed
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53 their relationship to support her first project as a freelancer during her pregnancy. Here we
54
55 see pregnancy as the motivation to change the relational basis of their family that, contrary to
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3 claims otherwise, created the opportunity to re-compose their lives based on the
4
5 complementarity of skills, dedication and co-commitment, which led to this business and then
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7 a second.
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11 Graham is an architect and me, doing kind of design and space layout and this
12
13 kind of thing. It's good for meeting our two skills. So in the seven years, he has
14
15 been my employee really in terms of what we've done (*Suzie, married with*
16
17 *children*).
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20
21 Suzie's example illustrates how some women in the household by leveraging
22
23 relationships, and using the synergy between the household and career projects helps to
24
25 extend their horizons to respond to the gendered structures of household dynamics, as in
26
27 pregnancy. In each case, these women actively confounded the changes to the household; that
28
29 is, they were not stymied by events, but they co-created relational compositions that resulted
30
31 in a business growing out of mutual interests and skills. Their upbringing backgrounds and
32
33 life trajectories enabled them to combine a variety of resources at hand, such as skills and
34
35 knowledge, in ways that allowed them to embrace the contextual discontinuities (e.g.,
36
37 pregnancy, family upheaval) they encountered and thus extend the solutions available to them
38
39 in order to create and grow their firms and personally succeed. Here we see how the action of
40
41 women, whose lives are shaped by their caring roles was directed toward a shared ideological
42
43 concern (relational good) about sustaining the family that illustrates how they deliberated on
44
45 what had happened and then what needed to shift, initiating a business to secure the family's
46
47 future. Their relational reflexivity was aimed towards the partnerships and how this might be
48
49 changed to respond to household dynamics they faced. In this sense, the relational goods
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51 create solidarity in the household and the context for the new business start-up.
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58 **Relational Separation**

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3 Relational separation explains how tension is eased and affectivity is sustained as a
4 result of exit through separation or death of family members. In the above section the shared
5 concerns show the potential for entrepreneurial opportunities built around transformed
6 marital relationships. However, concerns are not confined to re-combinations of existing
7 cohabitants but can also follow transitions and events that are connected to social entropy or
8 the separation of family members that create what can be termed 'relational evils' (Donati
9 and Archer, 2015). Households not only encompass ties of solidarity and affection, they are
10 also points of tension (Alsos *et al*, 2014). The entrepreneurial responses of women in our
11 study – positioned as wives, mothers or carers - are thus borne out of familial histories to
12 sustain the relational goods associated with the affective roles the household plays (Folbre,
13 2001). Such relational goods follow breaks in the constitution of family's relational
14 composition that invites new dialogue about what matters to those members that remain.

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30 Linda illustrates how she set up a business in automotive services for women, as a
31 result of her daughter moving out of the home. There is an inherent relationality to this
32 mobility. Linda and her husband felt responsible for her adult daughter in spite of the
33 physical distance between them. Providing practical support at a distance through the
34 business for equivalent mobile females suggests parenting beyond the typical age of
35 dependency, which eases the emotional strain and indicates how she adapted to respond to
36 this familial change. Here we see changes in the family relational composition, associated
37 with a separation, propelling Linda, as wife and mother, to conceive of a new business that
38 lead to her founding, owning and becoming the managing director of an award-winning firm
39 that has attracted national attention for focusing on the needs of women motorists. In her
40 account she acknowledges the tension accompanying the exit of their daughter:
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55 A combination of factors then occurred, but the main one was that our
56 stepdaughter, Paul's daughter Emma, aged at that stage early 20s, who had
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3 been living with us, left home with her 3-year-old car to go and live in the
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5 north of England, and it dawned on us that, despite the fact that she had been
6
7 given a very basic maintenance instruction kit from her father, she was going to
8
9 be quite ill-equipped to sort out and look after her car herself. This caused her
10
11 father a great deal of stress. I then started to look at how it might be possible to
12
13 offer a package of motoring services specifically for women (*Linda, married*
14
15 *with children*).
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19 The shift from worries about her daughter to respond and start a new business confirm
20
21 that this move into a 'masculine' industry (Alvesson and Billing, 2009) was not a passive
22
23 process but illustrates how relational reflexivity has the potential to navigate seemingly
24
25 significant barriers to action. The household is significant, because breaking it apart in this
26
27 way set in play emotional responses among those physically co-located that confirmed how
28
29 their child's 'well-being' mattered to them, which created the energy to transpose her worries
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31 into creating a new business; that is, where Linda, as mother and relational subject, confirms
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33 what is important to her.
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37 In turn, some of our women decided to be entrepreneurial despite events that created
38
39 severe emotional trauma in the household calling into question the way of life they had
40
41 deemed worth living. On such occasions, separation seemingly provoked a move to negotiate
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43 household dynamics, which served as a 'buffer' allowing them to offset the ill-effects of a
44
45 tense period of life. Rhian, founder and managing director, explains the antecedents to her
46
47 decision to start her PR and Communication Company, which was the result of a miscarriage.
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51 I had a miscarriage and I was quite stressed out and I thought I think this is the
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53 time really to do something different... I don't think [my husband] was earning
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55 what he earns now and I was still really the primary breadwinner I supposed,
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57 but he was completely supportive. If it all went horribly wrong, I would just say
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3 I gave up work for a little while to get over the miscarriage to seem like a
4 starting school. Well that was 7 years ago. Things went really well. (*Rhian,*
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6
7 *married with children*)
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10 As with the case of Linda, being confronted with a major separation in the household
11 provoked responses that indicate her reflexivity and choices about the future of the
12 household, which was defined by a relational break. Entrepreneurship was a positive response
13 to the upset brought about by life changes that was a chance to ease emotional tensions. The
14 relational configuration of household dynamics is not fluid enough to just adjust to changing
15 transitions; it requires resilient selves, as some of our women entrepreneurs demonstrate.
16 They are a key feature of the ‘gendered choices’ (Risman, 1998), resulting from women’s
17 position within a social world where gendered roles shape experience and understanding.
18 How they are manifest in action is mediated by reflexivity as a feature of past actions and
19 present concerns and in this sense they are shared concerns with those significant others in
20 the household.
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37 **Relational Consolidation**

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40 In our sample, two of our women entrepreneurs used to be a single parent, and
41 another one a carer. Relational consolidation – ‘keeping in touch’ with their important others
42 in an attempt to pursue more satisfying living arrangements – offered affirmation about the
43 choices made such as leaving a lucrative job to start anew. Through the accounts of these
44 women, positioned as single parents/carers, we show how they managed to embrace the
45 household dynamics they faced and flexibly, using creative thinking, to enact opportunities to
46 start their own businesses.
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56 In her account Laura, founder of a successful HR company, explains that her career
57 had reached a peak in the UK. Working abroad was considered the best plan for her career at
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3 the time but not the right choice for her life “*I wanted to feel in control of my life rather than*
4 *work being in control of me and that was a really important part for me. I wanted to be in*
5 *control of where I lived*”. When Laura founded her business, keeping in close contact with
6
7 mother – her father was not around – was essential.
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12 An international role wasn’t the right time for me in my life. I wasn’t married
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14 at the time, so I haven’t got any children. I’ve got stepchildren now,
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16 grandchildren, but I haven’t got any of my own. But I felt that I needed to
17
18 spend more time with my mother and I also felt I wanted to focus on my career
19
20 in this country. So I decided to take redundancy and then set the business up in
21
22 2004. (*Laura, married*)
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27 Similarly, for Alex, the birth of her daughter, Reeva, and quick departure of the father
28
29 ensured she would need to be self-reliant, as “*suddenly I had no job, a baby, no house*”. As a
30
31 single mother, the creation of a kinship bond with Reeva shaped her appraisal of the career
32
33 options available to her because “*time with my baby whilst she was small was far more*
34
35 *important than money*”. However, she was not discouraged by this as she did a home study
36
37 course as a bookkeeper, although “*I was just terrified as to whether or not I’d make it work.*”
38
39 For Alex, her household required a different approach to her career and this was mediated by
40
41 her role as ‘bread-winner’ and ‘mother’.
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46 Yeah I studied while I was pregnant and shortly after I had Reeva I just set up,
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48 I just went door to door with some business cards and all the local businesses,
49
50 speaking to as many people as I could and leaving my business cards
51
52 everywhere. I’m a book keeper, I can do your books? So I was sort of doing the
53
54 studying and building the client base and just working every evening, so when
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56 baby went to bed I went into the spare bedroom and it’s just data entry really
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3 isn't it, book keeping. (*Alex, married with children*)
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6 Consolidating relationships helps to explain the motives and 'gendered choices' of
7
8 some of our women entrepreneurs with regard to what was deemed as both relationally
9
10 possible and best for the household, and reflects the agency of women in forming new
11
12 ventures. As with the other practices in this appraisal the make-up and position of relational
13
14 subjects in the household can take on many different forms and can generate different
15
16 dynamics related to concerns - family unity and family time – over the future constitution of
17
18 the household, in the context of gendered structures women operate. Consolidation is
19
20 important in giving 'ontological security', which is to carve out a sense of continuity and
21
22 cohesiveness in the shared lives of those in the household (Giddens, 1991). Ensuring this
23
24 'relational good' through consolidation can be seen as a way to respond to separation in the
25
26 relational structures of the household. Relational concerns co-exist in ways that create their
27
28 own dynamics that can enable women, as wives, mothers or carers, to negotiate the gender
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30 structures of household dynamics as an outcome of the interactions of the different household
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32 relational configurations.
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39 **Discussion**

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41 James (2012) argues that research on women entrepreneurs needs to extend into new
42
43 directions to focus on the successes rather than the problems experienced. Within this article
44
45 we aim to contribute to this endeavor through the exploration of how and why women,
46
47 positioned as wives, mothers or carers, negotiate and respond to household dynamics. Figure
48
49 2 illustrates a summary of our framework and the three relational practices we identified. We
50
51 present a number of contributions to this debate, outline suggestions for future research and
52
53 note the limitations of our arguments.
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58 'Insert Figure 2 Here'
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3 Our analysis of the literature revealed how gendered expectations of domesticity
4 create a sexual division of labour in care (Bradley, 2007) which reproduces gendered
5 structures that devalue practices and activities associated with the private and the feminine
6 (Calás *et al*, 2009; Gatrel, 2013, O'Hagan, 2014). As Acker notes (1992: 255) 'these
7 [gendering] practices and relations, encoded in arrangements and rules, are supported by
8 assumptions that work is separate from the rest of life and that it has first claim on the
9 worker. Many people, particularly women, have difficulty making their daily lives fit these
10 expectations and assumptions'. This view of women entrepreneurs contrasts them with the
11 archetypical male entrepreneur (Ogbor, 2000). As a consequence, women entrepreneurs exist
12 at the periphery of recognized entrepreneurial activity, construed as survivalist and non-
13 economic agents while their new ventures are deemed as less legitimate and less likely to
14 succeed (Marlow and McAdam, 2015).
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29 In our study, we explored the gendered paths of wives, mothers and carers and found
30 that such structures do not undermine wholesale the role of women entrepreneurs. Research
31 on the household positioning of women entrepreneurs has been limited. Using Archer's
32 (2003, 2012) work on reflexivity in the context of changing household dynamics (Alsos *et al*,
33 2014) sensitized our analysis to advance this literature by illustrating why and how those
34 women entrepreneurs can respond successfully to significant life transitions and perhaps
35 'overcome the taken-for-grantedness of their socially constructed environment' (Suddaby *et al*,
36 2016: 3). In doing so, we cast our gaze on not just the individual, as a reflexive individual,
37 but also the relationships that inform and constitute the context within which new futures are
38 imagined and actualized (Ramoglou and Tsang, 2016).
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51 First, our findings suggest relational reflexivity (Donati and Archer, 2015) is crucial
52 in explaining women's entrepreneurial responses, positioned as relational subjects in the
53 household, offering an alternative understanding to studies focusing on the uniqueness of the
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3 entrepreneur, which marginalize non-hegemonic actors. The context of entrepreneurship
4
5 shows that there is more inequality and exclusion in relation to individual's position within
6
7 social hierarchies, which affects resource accrual (Jayawarna *et al*, 2014, Dy *et al*, 2017). In
8
9 this article, we argue that it is essential to maintain the analytical distinction of structure and
10
11 agency (Archer, 2003), which allows us to explore the capacities needed to navigate
12
13 household gendered structures. Thus, our study advances women entrepreneurship theory
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15 regarding the role of family and household (e.g. DeMartino and Brabato, 2003) by exploring
16
17 the entrepreneurial actions of women as conditioned action (not determined), which plays out
18
19 in relation to their reflexivity. This is important because reflexive abilities collide with the
20
21 multiple household gendered structures that constitute the social context in which women
22
23 find themselves as the past meets the present. For our participants, structures were 'what they
24
25 confront – and have to grapple with' (Archer, 1982: 463). Analogous to studies that observe
26
27 how women negotiate their social context (Al Dajani and Marlow, 2013; Essers *et al*, 2010;
28
29 Dy *et al*, 2017) our study shows how through the development of relational reflexivity the
30
31 actions of women entrepreneurs highlight their agency as they have the power to implement
32
33 practices they deem appropriate for their lives.
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40 Second, from the data collected three relational practices have emerged that enabled
41
42 the women to negotiate the changing household dynamics (i) Relational recomposition that
43
44 lead to a unity of life together, (ii) Relational separation that precipitated enterprising efforts
45
46 to ease emotional strain, and (iii) Relational consolidation with regard to possible loss of
47
48 family cohesiveness and an attempt to sustain key relationships to avoid conflicting
49
50 situations. These practices emerged from our conceptualization of the relational configuration
51
52 of household dynamics (Elder, 1994) as revealed through the personal biographies of our
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54 participants. The examination of the household as a unit of analysis and its impact on
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56 resource accrual and business growth through household-business interactions (e.g. Alsos *et*
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3 al, 2014, Carter, 2011, Jayawarna et al, 2014) is well documented in the literature, but what is
4
5 not documented is the focus on ‘ends’ – not ‘means’ – as the prime concern of persons who
6
7 engage in and reflexively monitor their personal projects. As such the relational practices
8
9 explain women’s personal concerns and their attempts to sustain the ‘relational goods’
10
11 generated in the household amidst family transitions. These practices are not only consistent
12
13 with the family embeddedness idea of entrepreneurship (e.g. Aldrich and Cliff, 2003); they
14
15 also advance research by identifying the important tract of the relational dimension of the
16
17 household-business interaction, accounting for the importance of understanding people, their
18
19 diagnoses and their actions, which are as influential as the structures and institutions that they
20
21 necessarily engage. This is not an either/or situation; rather, an individual can adopt all three
22
23 practices depending on the situation in the life course. We have seen, as a result, our
24
25 participants create and use possibilities to satisfy their personal concerns and thereby in
26
27 different ways become successful business-women, amidst household gendered structures.
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32 Third, more broadly, our findings suggest how entrepreneurship represents a
33
34 transformational activity “taking place” in the everydayness of our life, in social interactions
35
36 and in everyday practices’ (Stayaert and Katz, 2004:190). The emphasis is on the link
37
38 between the actor, their relations, the household and society. Our relational framework avoids
39
40 looking at the household as separate from normative work spaces and the activities of women
41
42 as ‘economic’ or ‘non- economic’, looking instead at how activities ‘connect to each other
43
44 and would not work without each other’ (Glucksmann, 1995: 68). Our study on women as
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46 wives, mothers and carers in the context of household dynamics makes evident how
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48 entrepreneurship as inculcated in the generation of ideological, emotional and family
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50 cohesiveness particularly in times of family disruption that extends ideas of ‘what else
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52 entrepreneurship is and does’ (Calás et al, 2009: 553).
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3 We see broader implications for our work as it calls for a better understanding of the
4 relational subject, which is open to non-deterministic appraisals of action (Donati and Archer,
5 2015, Kitching and Rouse, 2016). This move coincides with efforts in neo-institutional theory
6 to address the paradox of embedded agency (DiMaggio and Powell, 1991; Friedland and
7 Alford, 1991; Seo and Creed, 2002). What appeared as barriers to business development were
8 overcome precisely because each of these women were enabled due to their gendered
9 biography and social position to imagine and enact a different future. This is not to argue that
10 there is a universal and generalizable female experience, but it is to show how actors
11 confronted by situational discontinuities see scope for agency, as opposed to barriers (Mutch,
12 2007). In this respect, our work extends recent work on reflexivity in neo-institutional theory
13 (see Delbridge and Edwards, 2013; Edwards and Meliou, 2015; Suddaby et al, 2016) not just
14 because of the move to reinvigorate micro-analyses as opposed to macro-studies but because
15 our work draws attention to gender, which has been profoundly ignored in neo-
16 institutionalism.

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34 Finally we believe that this debate has much wider implications for entrepreneurship
35 research. Whilst we deployed relational reflexivity to explain that entrepreneurial actions of
36 women embedded in the household, our arguments have theoretical and analytical relevance
37 within different entrepreneurial contexts such as teams or communities allowing for a more
38 nuanced understanding of entrepreneurial actions resulting from shared projects and concerns
39 (e.g. Shalley and Perry-Smith, 2008). Our findings also contribute significantly to the
40 literature on entrepreneurial motivation, as they add nuance to the over simplistic push/pull
41 model (Shapiro and Sokol, 1982).

42 43 44 45 46 47 48 49 50 51 52 53 54 **Limitations and future research**

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3 This study, as with most, has some limitations but through identifying them we can
4 also identify interesting avenues for future research. Limitations to the empirical study are
5 acknowledged; there are small numbers in each sub-category (wives, mothers, carers) of
6 women interviewed and thus future research needs to replicate and extend this study.
7 Furthermore, whilst our focus on women's entrepreneurial responses to household dynamics
8 that all of them experience points out their reflexivity, we acknowledge that individuals are
9 reflexive to different degrees (Archer, 2012), which affects their gendered paths and
10 decisions. Attention to different forms of reflexivity presents an opportunity for
11 entrepreneurship scholars to further explore differences between and within the actions of
12 women entrepreneurs and contribute to a more nuanced understanding of the heterogeneity of
13 women entrepreneurs (Hughes et al, 2012). Understanding more about the experiences of
14 women entrepreneurs in the context of the household presents an intriguing direction for
15 future research recognizing the causal significance of relational subjects that are operating
16 through but not determined by social structures.
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33 34 35 36 **Conclusion**

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38 In sum, while entrepreneurship research has suggested the significance of household
39 and family in entrepreneurial experience is paramount, contemporary analyses indicate a
40 gender bias that calls into question how women embedded in the household, as wives,
41 mothers and/or carers, overcome inequalities to be entrepreneurial. In this article we explored
42 this paradox and showed how these women, as relational subjects, through self-monitoring
43 and evaluation of their gendered concerns engage in relational reflexivity to overcome the
44 changing household dynamics to sustain relational goods for the household and become
45 successful entrepreneurs. The emergence of three relational practices should stimulate a
46 renewed interest in understanding the entrepreneurial actions of women as conditioned
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3 action, which takes place in everydayness when individuals see - contra adversity - a chance
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5 to actualize a new world.
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16

17 18 19 20 21 **Biographies** 22

23
24 Elina Meliou, PhD is a Lecturer in Organizational Behaviour and HRM at Newcastle
25 University London, UK. Her research focuses on the dynamics of leadership, gender and
26 entrepreneurship with particular emphasis on how the actions of actors are negotiated within
27 organizational and institutional contexts. Her work has appeared in journals such as *Human*
28 *Relations* and *Equality, Diversity and Inclusion*, and has been presented in international
29 conferences. She is also the lead researcher for a project on career trajectories of women
30 entrepreneurs funded by the British Academy.
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36 Tim Edwards (Ph.D., Aston University) is Professor of Organisation and Innovation Analysis
37 at Cardiff Business School. His research interests include critical studies of women
38 entrepreneurs, institutional change, innovation and organisational theory. Tim has published
39 in a number of world-leading journals including, *Journal of Business Venturing*,
40 *Organisation studies*, *Human Relations*, *Organisation*, *Journal of Management Inquiry*,
41 *International Journal of Management Reviews*, *Management Learning and Urban Studies*.
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46 He has also won a number of best paper awards from the Academy of Management (USA).
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Table 1
Characteristics of Respondents

Name	Main Sector/Service	Marital status at the time of the interview	Education
Paula	Landscape design	Married	BSc Health and Fitness Management
Alex	Property Services	Married with children	BSc Naval engineering
Laura	HR consultancy	Married	BSc Business Management
Rhian	PR -Communications	Married with children	BSc Theatrical/ Drama Studies
Suzie	Design and Illustrations	Married with children	BA Hons Multi-media Textile Design MA Illustration
Kate	Technology	Married	MSc Business Management
Caroline	Events Management	Married	BSc Business Management

Zena	Construction/Building	Married with children	BSc Law
Penny	Social Enterprise	Married with children	MSc arts
Linda	Automotive	Married with children	MBA
Amanda	Consultancy- Professional Development	Married with children	BSc Modern languages
Erin	Biotechnology	Divorced with children	Medical Studies
Gina	Marine Engineering	Married with children	BSc, MA Engineering
Jane	HR -Consultancy	Divorced with children	MSc social work
Heather	Consultancy – Social enterprise	Married with children	BA Geography, MSc Economic Development

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For Peer Review

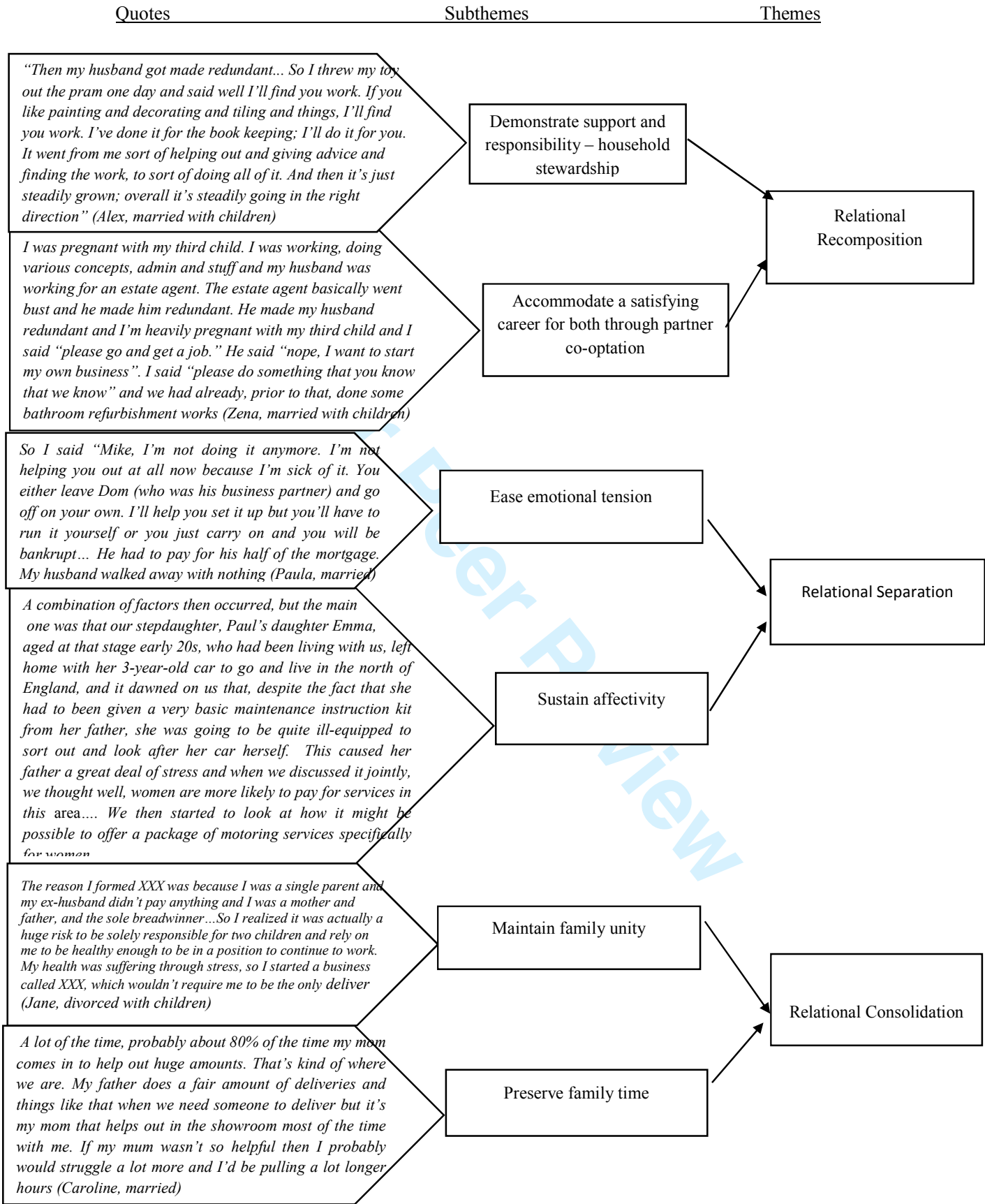


Figure 1. Themes and subthemes of household relational practices

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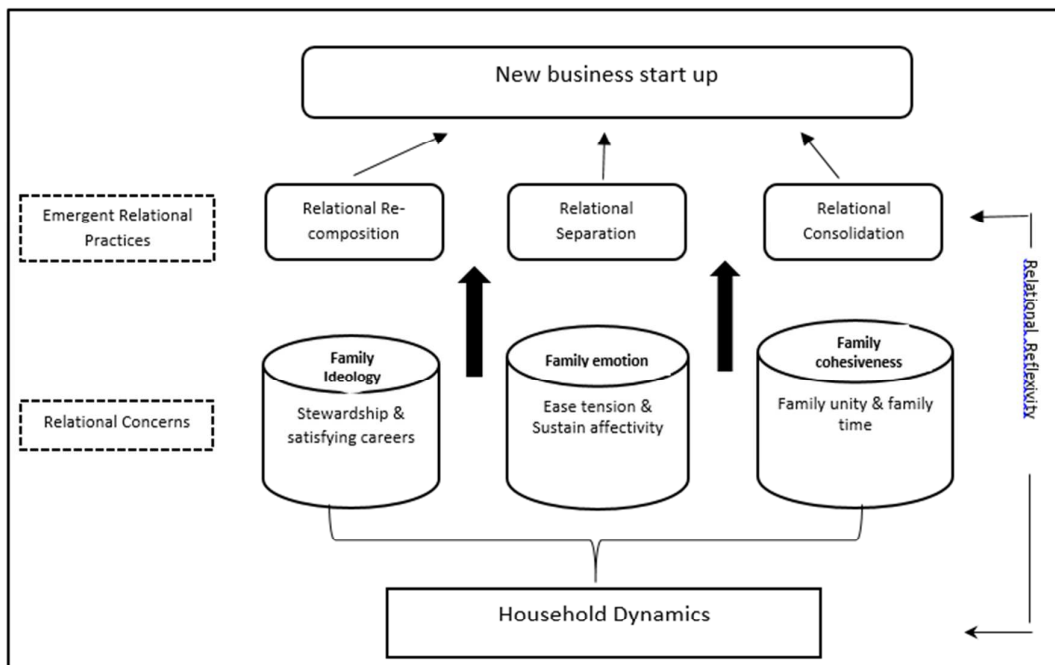


Figure 2. Women entrepreneurs' responses to changing household dynamics