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

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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.

Introduction
While scholars have recognized the household as a context built on familial relational ties that influence entrepreneurial experience and venture development (Alsos et al., 2014; Renzulli et al., 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 organizational settings (Calás et al., 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 repro- duction (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) situ- ate 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 deem appropriate to attaining their ends' (Archer, 2003: 9). Households that are constituted by relational ties exist as a feature of the relational reflexivity of women constituted by their gendered selves (as wives, mothers, and/or carers) in respect of the important others (partners, husbands, children, siblings) with whom they share their personal lives and concerns, throughout their life course (Donati and Archer, 2015; Marlow and McAdam, 2012). Thus, we argue that women's familial roles involve an embodied, intimate relationship between mother and child, spousal partners, and caring roles that can form the basis of a shared *modus vivendi* – the realization of a way of life they would find satisfying and sustainable – whereby conceptions of familial care motivate and

frame ventures that at one and the same time builds on and reframes the foundations of the household in their lives.

We contribute to research on gender, entrepreneurship and the household, by invoking relational reflexivity to explain the entrepreneurial responses of women whose lives are affected by changes in the household and negate categorizations imposed on them through ways that emphasize the 'motivations and agency of actors in society' (Wallace, 2002: 275). Rather than seek to understand the interconnectivity of household–business regarding resource acquisition and business growth, we follow the recommendation of Jennings and Brush (2013) by considering the significance of the relational dimension of the household as the focal point for entrepreneurial activities, through the conceptualization of the relational configuration of changing household dynamics (Elder, 1994; Emirbayer, 1977). Our empirical analysis reveals three agentic relational practices 'Recomposition', 'Separation', and 'Consolidation'. These are not mutually exclusive but rather stem from the con- figuration of household dynamics across the life course, and result in a new venture, as the active entrepreneurial response of women. The article is structured as follows. First, we begin by considering recent work to frame discussions of gender, entrepreneurship, and household. Second, we offer an elaborated explanation of the links between life course trajectories and relational reflexivity. Third, we provide details of our sample, methods, and data analysis. Fourth, we present our findings and analysis on agency and responses of women business owners to household dynamics. The last section concludes.

Gender, household dynamics, and entrepreneurship
The manner in which family and household influence business activities has been explored at length both by researchers studying family enterprises (Discua Cruz et al., 2012) and enterprising households (Alsos et al., 2014; Carter, 2011; Jayawarna et al., 2014; Wheelock and Oughton, 1996). The household is influential as expectations, hopes, or motives and more importantly as networks of family and friends who remain active in the lives of actors. Indeed, families evolve over time because new members are born, grown-up children may leave the family home, couples may separate and older generations pass away (Alsos et al., 2014). Much of this research has focused on the nature of resources and capabilities in terms of financial, emotional, or human capital that emanate from household dynamics and influence family–business interactions and decision-making. While this work offers important insights in explaining economic behaviour and growth, there is little emphasis on the gendered assumptions and institutional biases associated with changing household dynamics (e.g. birth, death, separation, family upheaval) that affect pro- cesses of social valorization and experiences of entrepreneurship, particularly as they relate to care and reproductive resources at certain points across the life course (Jayawarna et al., 2014). Feminist scholars have recognized gender as a fundamental component of social order with material and ideational effects which functions in society to create differential outcomes for men and women (Gunnarsson et al., 2016; Risman, 1998). The way we are embodied enables and constrains our practices, performing social roles and interacting with others (Archer, 2003; Shilling, 2003). Risman (1998) emphasizes the structured nature of social life in which 'women [and men] fill different positions in institutional settings, work organizations or families'; such positions are associated with various social roles and cultural expectations regarding the rights and duty of action which are critical in terms of resource distribution – whether resources are defined as access to opportunities or actual material goods – and experiences of work (p. 294). Studies have documented how gender and

entrepreneurship lie at the intersection between the private world of home and family and the public world of business and work (Bourne and Calás, 2013; Eddleston and Powell, 2012; Lewis, 2013). Women are involved in the bodywork of inti- mate care of others bringing the private world of reproduction (Ashcraft, 1999) into the public setting of organization. Women's 'embodied potential for maternity' (Gatrell, 2008: 2) may thus, render them unwelcome within professional settings where they are defined by their reproductive capacity, which evokes 'a sense of woman as saturated by her body and existing only in and through her body' (Witz, 2000: 11).

Gender roles instilled by gender socialization processes and enforced throughout the life span by the gendered nature of work, organizations, and institutions (Ahl, 2006) result in different household and labour market positions, creating a sexual division of labour (Bradley, 2007). Research suggests that men are prescribed greater responsibility for breadwinning and women greater responsibility for the household, family, and care giving, while institutions reward and sup- port their labour differently (Jennings and Brush, 2013). In this context, women's entrepreneurship has been associated in many cases with homeworking and the label of 'mumpreneur' (Ekinsmyth, 2011), as a way that enables women to determine the conditions of labour and secure, as a result, flexibility around the execution of business and domestic responsibilities. However, such argu- ments are not 'a cause for celebration' (McRobbie, 2009: 157) as there are detailed accounts of how domestic and care responsibilities are not something that women overcome on the way to entrepreneurial success (Lewis, 2014). Women entrepreneurs may commonly conduct business while caring for children/elderly persons simultaneously or invest non-standard hours in their busi- ness (Dy et al., 2017). Gender roles are built into the organization of life, with mostly women to retain the organizational role of the household (Acker, 2006), regardless of woman's income or career status (Thébaud, 2016).

It has been demonstrated these social biases and gendered expectations of domesticity are detrimental for women in terms of creating or growing new ventures (Bourne and Calás, 2013; Bruni et al., 2004). Hence, those who do not conform to the normative entrepreneur – an unencumbered male professional – find their legitimacy constrained by their subject position (Jayawarna et al., 2014). Not surprisingly, wives, mothers, or carers are, as a result, 'already culturally devalued identities' (Bourne and Calás, 2013: 435) opposing the view of what an entrepreneur should be (Ogbor, 2000). Household dynamics (birth, death, family upheaval) associated with the 'skill in mothering and its metaphorical extensions' (Haraway, 1990: 36), such as care and familial responsibilities for others, precipitate inequalities that position women in the household as 'Othered'. Our aim is to contribute to this research by exploring how women positioned as wives, mothers, or carers in the micro-environment of the household make sense and navigate changing household dynamics that require them to find new ways in which to adapt and develop their house- hold relations that can also create economic outcomes. To develop such arguments, we introduce relational reflexivity (Donati and Archer, 2015), which enables us to consider women's actions within the social contexts they find themselves.

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, while women entrepreneurs may share a common basis for their experiences by virtue of

their social position within social hierarchies, including the household (Bradley, 2007; Gunnarsson, 2011), 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 colour 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 et al., 2015). Put simply, the life course of individuals is embedded in and shaped by socio-historical influences expressed through shared relationships over an 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. Contrary to theories of reflexivity in late modernity (Beck et al., 1994) that associate reflexive capacities with increased individual expressivity and the decline in the significance of social structures (such as gender, race, class) in shaping life experience, Archer (2012: 6) highlights the intensified role of structural and cultural contexts considering reflexivity 'as the process mediating the effects of our circumstances upon our actions'. Through their reflexive deliberations, actors assess social demands and choose to act in ways that allow them fallibly to satisfy personal concerns they subjectively value. More recent work by Donati and Archer (2015) has extended ideas on reflexivity to offer an assessment of the relational subject. This they define as someone who is 'constituted by the relations he/she cares for, that is the subject's concerns' (p. 55). Lives are lived interdependently (Elder, 1994) and the relational organization of close relationships affects all household members and their inter- actions (Rouse and Kitching, 2006). Donati and Archer (2015: 153) argue that 'relational reflexivity consists in orientating the subjects to the reality emergent from their interactions by their taking into consideration how this reality is able to feedback onto the subjects'.

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

Methodology

Research context and the profile of participants
Our orientating research question commenced by asking the following: '*how might we conceive of entrepreneurship in the context of women positioned as wives, mothers or carers, confronted with household dynamics, such as birth, separation, death or family upheaval?*' This necessitates an understanding of the relational configuration of the household and an examination of the women's relational practices that enable us to explain how their actions mitigate the gendered structures of changing household dynamics. Our qualitative, interpretative study was designed to capture the meanings that women attach to their choices (Archer, 2012) and provides insights into substantive events and experiences forming the basis for considering in detail the interplay between contexts and actions (Suddaby et al., 2015). We aim to explore women's gendered selves, and enable their experiences to be studied without comparison to an 'unmarked male template' (Jackson, 2012: 1001) which negatively affects how their actions are perceived (Ahl, 2006; De Bruin et al., 2007). We recognize that women business owners are a heterogeneous population (Hughes et al., 2012), their household resources do vary (Dy et al., 2017), and the character of women's entrepreneurial activity itself, including the size and location of their ventures, is often contingent on their family situation (Aldrich and Cliff, 2003; Losocco and Bird, 2012). Our goal is not to disentangle these social factors that certainly affect their business performance and growth, but to explicate their active entrepreneurial responses under conditions of life transitions they all experience in their life course.
In this sense, we see considerable value in exploring entrepreneurship as a reflexive process of engagement revealing the deliberative capacities of individuals in different circumstances as opposed to a largely economic endeavour (Suddaby et al., 2015). To explain this process, data were collected by means of in-depth biographical interviews, through a life history methodology (Chamberlayne et al., 2002). Biographical research has the merit of aiding the task of understand- ing major social shifts by taking into account how novel experiences are interpreted by persons within groups and institutions (Denzin and Lincoln, 1994). From a feminist framing, biographical interviews offer the potential to recognize the diversity and plurality of women's lived experiences and enhance their visibility (Lather, 1991). In turn, they encourage a reflexive understanding of the relationship between individual action and social structure (Archer, 2003), recognizing the part gendered selves play in constructing structures as well as being mediating by them (Stanley, 1993). To approach our participants, we contacted the networks of women entrepreneurs in the South of England through university's knowledge exchange networks and business partnerships. Additionally, the 'snowballing' method was used to contact acquaintances of already participating women owner-managers. The 15 interviews reported here are part of a project focusing on the lives, interests, and experiences of women business owners as a basis for knowledge construction. In the sample, participants were all drawn from the United Kingdom and ranged in age from 28 to 53 years.

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

PR: Public Relations.

They are all White native born (Byrne, 2006). In total, 13 interviewees were married and two divorced at the time of the interview. Of those interviewed, nine had one child or more. The firms of the participants represent various sectors including landscape design, marine engineering, marketing, automotive services, construction, biotechnology, consultancy, events management, public relations, and communication. Table 1 below details the background of the participants. Pseudonyms are used to protect the identity and privacy of participants.

The first author collected the biographical accounts in the workplace of participants 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 example, 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 endeavour. The interviews lasted 90–150minutes each, were tape recorded, transcribed, and returned to participants for possible corrections (Oliver et al., 2005).

Data analysis

We analysed our data using an iterative process (Edwards et al., 2014), moving back and forth between the data and the existing literature to capture the gendered structures under which women entrepreneurs found themselves and better understand their actions. We stress that the first author initiated the interview as a university-affiliated female who asked questions of self-employed females. The similarity of being both professionals and females eased the discussion of gender issues. The second author, who was not involved in the interaction with participants, was engaged in the analysis and interpretation of these accounts. This allowed us to trace the ramifications of the actions of participants in wider contexts and contribute to critical scrutiny and theorizing of transcripts. Data analysis was undertaken in three stages.

First, a coding framework was constructed by the researchers using conceptual categories as thematic codes identified in the literature relating to gendered structures, household dynamics, household/family relations, and life/career decisions. Following this, we coded the transcripts and extended it to include any new themes founded in the specific interview (Holton, 2007). At the end of this first step, we had a number of primary codes that summarized the conditions that influenced the situation of women entrepreneurs, the household dynamics, and the relational configuration of the household. This enabled us to interrogate the literature and primary data to isolate text extracts from across the range of participants.

In the second step, we sought a deeper structure in this array (Gioia et al., 2013). We asked how the identified primary codes could help us understand the projects and actions of women entrepreneurs, including options not taken, and the justification of the actions they took. We consequently compared our primary codes across interviews and revisited the data using tables to facilitate this comparison. For example, we developed individual overviews to better understand women's main concerns and decisions in relation to household dynamics. At the end of this stage, we had generated second order themes that summarized recurrent patterns of relational concerns associated with women's roles as wives, mothers, or carers.

In the third and final step, we analysed how the above characteristics were related to the entrepreneurial ways women employed to respond to household dynamics. We distilled from the data the ways the above subthemes associated with women's roles were combined, including variations within groups. We went back and forth using different definitions of practices to group cases according to the ways that women in our sample navigated relational concerns, such as entry or exit, in their households. This process helped us review each biography and led to the identification of three relational practices 'Recomposition', 'Separation', and 'Consolidation'. We use Figure 1 to feature our data structure for emergent relational practices.

Our analysis is not irreducible merely to giving information about a succession of events but relates to the way women interpret, understand, and make sense of their lives and thereby initiate action. Unpacking these practices emphasizes the autonomy of agents showing how relational reflexivity is constituted *in* practice. The data presented below are not put forward as an illustration of findings or conclusions (Gioia et al., 2013); rather, they are offered as a means of stimulating a discussion around the issues of gender, entrepreneurship and household to explain how women entrepreneurs, positioned as mothers, wives, or carers, confound boundaries that mark them as 'the other'.
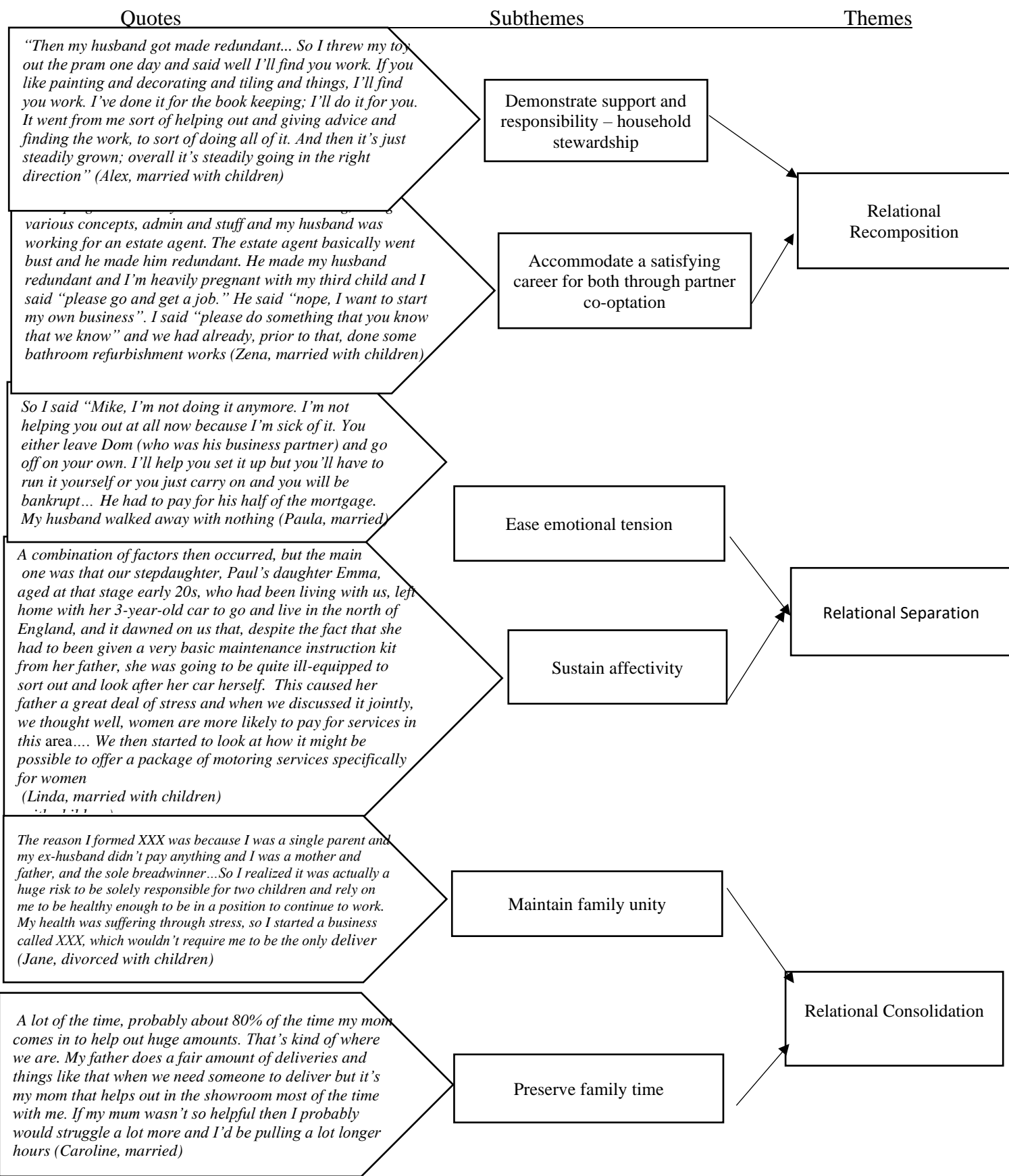
Quotes	Subthemes	Themes

"Then my husband got made redundant... So I threw my toy out the pram one day and said well I'll find you work. If you like painting and decorating and tiling and things, I'll find you work. I've done it for the book keeping; I'll do it for you. It went from me sort of helping out and giving advice and finding the work, to sort of doing all of it. And then it's just steadily grown; overall it's steadily going in the right direction" (Alex, married with children)

Demonstrate support and responsibility – household stewardship

various concepts, admin and stuff and my husband was working for an estate agent. The estate agent basically went bust and he made him redundant. He made my husband redundant and I'm heavily pregnant with my third child and I said "please go and get a job." He said "nope, I want to start my own business". I said "please do something that you know that we know" and we had already, prior to that, done some bathroom refurbishment works (Zena, married with children)

Accommodate a satisfying career for both through partner co-optation

Relational Recomposition

So I said "Mike, I'm not doing it anymore. I'm not helping you out at all now because I'm sick of it. You either leave Dom (who was his business partner) and go off on your own. I'll help you set it up but you'll have to run it yourself or you just carry on and you will be bankrupt... He had to pay for his half of the mortgage. My husband walked away with nothing (Paula, married)

Ease emotional tension

A combination of factors then occurred, but the main one was that our stepdaughter, Paul's daughter Emma, aged at that stage early 20s, who had been living with us, left home with her 3-year-old car to go and live in the north of England, and it dawned on us that, despite the fact that she had to been given a very basic maintenance instruction kit from her father, she was going to be quite ill-equipped to sort out and look after her car herself. This caused her father a great deal of stress and when we discussed it jointly, we thought well, women are more likely to pay for services in this area.... We then started to look at how it might be possible to offer a package of motoring services specifically for women
(Linda, married with children)

Sustain affectivity

Relational Separation

The reason I formed XXX was because I was a single parent and my ex-husband didn't pay anything and I was a mother and father, and the sole breadwinner...So I realized it was actually a huge risk to be solely responsible for two children and rely on me to be healthy enough to be in a position to continue to work. My health was suffering through stress, so I started a business called XXX, which wouldn't require me to be the only deliver (Jane, divorced with children)

Maintain family unity

A lot of the time, probably about 80% of the time my mom comes in to help out huge amounts. That's kind of where we are. My father does a fair amount of deliveries and things like that when we need someone to deliver but it's my mom that helps out in the showroom most of the time with me. If my mum wasn't so helpful then I probably would struggle a lot more and I'd be pulling a lot longer hours (Caroline, married)

Preserve family time

Relational Consolidation

Figure 1. Themes and subthemes of household relational practices.

Emergent relational practices: women entrepreneurs negotiating household dynamics

The biographical narratives of many of our participants offered insight (albeit partially) into the transitions surrounding their personal lives as they struggled to build and sustain family life as a feature of the household. Confronted by household changes associated with care and reproductive resources, including separation, child birth, unemployment, financial instability and crisis, these women help illustrate relational feedbacks in respect of these shifts in circumstance that highlight the transformative effect of the household as a context for entrepreneurship (Calás et al., 2009).

The transformative consequences of the feedback loop into the relational dynamics of the household confirm the role of each of the women in subjectively choosing to respond to these changes and in the nature of the family relational composition because such actions are a feature of the subjects and the social ties, as mothers, wives, or carers, that bind them together. But, this is not a pneumatic process:

The social relation is intrinsically reflexive, in the sense that it 'is always bent back' on to the subjects that are in the relation. However, reflexivity can be minimal, impeded, distorted, or fractured and in that case so, too, will be the relationality between the agents/actors. (Donati and Archer, 2015: 29)

Here, we argue the reflexive mode of the women in relation to significant others entailed a positive feedback because they actively considered interactions on the basis of prior life course experiences and because they deliberated the impact of new ways of doing things for what might follow.

We specify three relational practices characterising how some women, positioned as wives, mothers, or carers, responded to changing household dynamics. These reveal the reorganization of relations to sustain the 'relational goods' that created normative conformity in the midst of household dynamics. In this context, we see relational subjects – women positioned as wives, mothers, or carers – operating on a personal relational register that inculcate gendered selves (Risman, 1998) in ways that are subversive and have positive entrepreneurial outcomes (Calás et al., 2009).

Relational recomposition

Relational recomposition explains how some of our participants interjected to establish a new enterprise with their marital partners when confronted with household instability. We are interested in the concerns emerging from changing household dynamics and how these transitions can shape women's entrepreneurial responses. As shown in many of the women's accounts, their actions were deliberate because instability to the family (usually in terms of lost income) required new ways to overcome the resulting household dissonance. For Risman (2004), 'constraints are, of course, an important function of structure, but to focus only on structure as constraint minimizes its importance' (p. 431). Under these circumstances, some of our women interjected showing how their experiences, dispositions and hunches were reflexively deployed to avoid a family crisis. The responses of our relational subjects confirm the importance of relational reflexivity that enable them to monitor their circumstances and explain those times when embedded gendered structures are challenged (Al-Dajani and Marlow, 2013).

One of our women, Alex, explains how she 're-composed' her marital relationship to help her husband when he could no longer maintain a regular wage. Alex had, by this time (and

before their marriage), built up a client base from her bookkeeping business within her local community appreciating what it meant to start from the bottom-up and juggle family and work life, having also previously been a single parent. We agree with Donati and Archer (2015): 'relations both are the "mediation" of prior structural and cultural conditioning and have emergent powers, of causal consequence in their own right and of their own kind' (p. 142). Alex had an intimate understanding of what it meant to sustain the family in hard times, which her husband lacked (prior conditioning) while the establishment of a joint enterprise with him revealed a 'relational good' that could help stabilise their future (intended causal consequence). The development of this business with her husband while she had continued to organize the household around the needs of her children albeit with considerable difficulty, had allowed her to develop a role where she used her expertise and love of materials (Alex has a degree in Yacht Manufacture and surveying) to secure the households future, contra adversity. Generating shared relational goods through a business venture allowed them to dedicate time to a shared concern – the security of the household:

Then my husband got made redundant. It was just really unreliable and feeling, you sent me a slip saying we're going to get paid £400 and you've put £80 in my bank account. Like how am I meant to run a household on this? So I threw my toy out the pram one day and said well I'll find you work. If you like painting and decorating and tiling and things, I'll find you work. I've done it for the book keeping; I'll do it for you. It went from me sort of helping out and giving advice and finding the work, to sort of doing all of it. (Alex, married with children)

Like Alex, other participants also adapted to household dynamics related to family upheaval as they experienced it with their partner's job. Paula 'recomposed' her relationship helping her part- ner with his business to save it from bankruptcy: '*They were very, very dodgy ground for a long time*'. This was essential for their life together, as they had recently acquired a mortgage. Paula had grown up in a council house and was the first in her family to go to university and acquire a degree in Business Management. Having been self-employed – sales contractor and advertising magazine owner – she became her husband's much needed bookkeeper as well as assisting with marketing and sales. This collaboration subsequently led them to start a business, which confirmed the business acumen of Paula, who became a shareholder and managing director:

He ran it by himself for a good two years and it was difficult because obviously we had to fund from our own money, it wasn't going anywhere. We had a big discussion because we're both concerned that by both working for the same company, if something happened, we'd lose the house and everything. After deciding, I said 'make me a director then because I'm not closing my company down and having nothing'. He made me a director, 50% shareholder, all of that and then I took over in the business basically. (Paula, married)

In both cases, the threat to the household provided the impetus to monitor what can be termed 'the family's *modus vivendi*' (Donati and Archer, 2015: 144, *italics in original*). It is also illustrative of the wife as business partner asserting control precisely because they have an innate appreciation of the household–business nexus (Carter, 2011). Transforming the modus vivendi is necessary when events call into question the basis of the relational configuration in the household. Put another way, **'**to establish a modus vivendi is initially and deliberatively to design a way of life that the subject reflexively deems worth living and, all being well, subsequently finds can be lived' (Donati and Archer, 2015: 134). The relational goods that emerged from the relational configuration of household dynamics indicate the agency of these women as reflexive individuals able to be entrepreneurial.

To understand the scope of entrepreneurship (Calás et al., 2009), it is necessary to realize that the responses of our participants are not simply a question of rational choice or use of familial networks to start a business (Renzulli et al., 2000) but, as argued, involves relational subjects – wives, mothers, carers – making active responses to satisfy their concerns in their attempt to con- found the gendered structures of household dynamics. We can call this 'dovetailing' of concerns among relational subjects (Archer, 2003) when partners imagined *and* actualized their version of the future (Ramoglou and Tsang, 2016). Take Suzie, a designer, in her account, she notes how her husband, Graham, who is an architect, recomposed their relationship to support her first project as a freelancer during her pregnancy. Here, we see pregnancy as the motivation to change the relational basis of their family that, contrary to claims otherwise, created the opportunity to recompose their lives based on the complementarity of skills, dedication, and co-commitment, which led to this business and then a second:

Graham is an architect and me, doing kind of design and space layout and this kind of thing. It's good for meeting our two skills. So in the seven years, he has been my employee really in terms of what we've done. (Suzie, married with children)

Suzie's example illustrates how some women in the household, by leveraging relationships and using the synergy between the household and career projects, help extend their horizons to respond to the gendered structures of household dynamics, as in pregnancy. In each case, these women actively confounded the changes to the household; that is, they were not confounded by events, but they co-created relational compositions that resulted in a business growing out of mutual interests and skills. Origins and life trajectories enabled them to combine a variety of resources at hand, such as skills and knowledge, in ways that allowed them to embrace the contextual discontinuities (e.g. pregnancy, family upheaval) they encountered and thus, extend the solutions available to them to create and grow their firms and personally succeed. Here, we see how the action of women, whose lives are shaped by their caring roles was directed toward a shared ideological concern (relational good) about sustaining the family that illustrates how they deliberated on what had hap- pened and then what needed to shift, initiating a business to secure the family's future. The relational reflexivity was aimed toward the partnerships and how this might be changed to respond to the household dynamics they encountered. In this sense, the relational goods create solidarity in the household and the context for the new business start-up.

Relational separation

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

Linda illustrates how she set up a business in automotive services for women, as a result of her daughter moving out of the home. There is an inherent relationality to this mobility. Linda and her husband felt responsible for her adult daughter in spite of the physical distance between them. Providing practical support at a distance through the business for equivalent mobile females suggests parenting beyond the typical age of dependency, which eases the emotional strain and indicates how she adapted to respond to this familial change. Here, we see changes in the family relational composition, associated with a separation, propelling Linda, as wife and mother, to conceive of a new business that lead to her founding, owning, and becoming the managing director of an award-winning firm that has attracted national attention for focusing on the needs of women motorists. In her account, she acknowledges the tension accompanying the exit of their daughter:

A combination of factors then occurred, but the main one was that our stepdaughter, Paul's daughter Emma, aged at that stage early 20s, who had been living with us, left home with her three year old car to go and live in the north of England and it dawned on us that, despite the fact that she had been given a very basic maintenance instruction kit from her father, she was going to be quite ill-equipped to sort out and look after her car herself. This caused her father a great deal of stress. I then started to look at how it might be possible to offer a package of motoring services specifically for women. (Linda, married with children)

The shift from worries about her daughter to respond and start a new business confirms that this move into a 'masculine' industry (Alvesson and Billing, 2009) was not a passive process but illustrates how relational reflexivity has the potential to navigate seemingly significant barriers to action. The household is significant because breaking it apart in this way set in play emotional responses among those physically co-located that confirmed how their child's 'well-being' mattered to them, which created the energy to transpose her worries into creating a new business, that is, where Linda, as mother and relational subject, confirms what is important to her.

In turn, some of our women decided to be entrepreneurial despite events that created severe emotional trauma in the household calling into question the way of life they had deemed worth living. On such occasions, separation seemingly provoked a move to negotiate household dynamics, which served as a 'buffer' allowing them to offset the ill-effects of a tense period of life. Rhian, founder and managing director, explains the antecedents to her decision to start her Public Relations (PR) and Communication Company, which was the result of a miscarriage:

I had a miscarriage and I was quite stressed out and I thought I think this is the time really to do something different ... I don't think [my husband] was earning what he earns now and I was still really the primary breadwinner I supposed, but he was completely supportive. If it all went horribly wrong, I would just say I gave up work for a little while to get over the miscarriage to seem like a starting school. Well that was seven years ago. Things went really well. (Rhian, married with children)

As with the case of Linda, being confronted with a major separation in the household, it pro-voked responses that indicate her reflexivity and choices about the future of the household, which was defined by a relational break. Entrepreneurship was a positive response to the upset brought about by life changes that was a chance to ease emotional tensions. The relational configuration of household dynamics is not fluid enough to just adjust to changing transitions; it requires resilient selves, as some of our women entrepreneurs demonstrate.

They are a key feature of the 'gendered choices' (Risman, 1998), resulting from women's position within a social world where gendered roles shape experience and understanding. How they are manifest in action is mediated by reflexivity as a feature of the past actions and the present concerns, and in this sense, they are shared concerns with those significant others in the household.

Relational consolidation
In our sample, two of our women entrepreneurs used to be a single parent and another one a carer. Relational consolidation – 'keeping in touch' with their important others in an attempt to pursue more satisfying living arrangements – offered affirmation about the choices made such as leaving a lucrative job to start anew. Through the accounts of these women, positioned as single parents/ carer, we show how they managed to embrace the household dynamics they faced and flexibly, using creative thinking, to enact opportunities to start their own businesses.
In her account Laura, founder of a successful HR company, explains that her career had reached a peak in the United Kingdom. Working abroad was considered the best plan for her career at the time but not the right choice for her life: '*I wanted to feel in control of my life rather than work being in control of me and that was a really important part for me. I wanted to be in control of where I lived*'. When Laura founded her business, keeping in close contact with mother – her father was not around – was essential:
An international role wasn't the right time for me in my life. I wasn't married at the time, so I haven't got any children. I've got stepchildren now, grandchildren, but I haven't got any of my own. But I felt that I needed to spend more time with my mother and I also felt I wanted to focus on my career in this country. So I decided to take redundancy and then set the business up in 2004. (Laura, married)
Similarly, for Alex, the birth of her daughter, Reeva, and quick departure of the father ensured she would need to be self-reliant, as '*suddenly I had no job, a baby, no house*'. As a single mother, the creation of a kinship bond with Reeva shaped her appraisal of the career options available to her because '*time with my baby whilst she was small was far more important than money*'. However, she was not discouraged by this as she did a home study course as a bookkeeper, although '*I was just terrified as to whether or not I'd make it work*'. For Alex, her household required a different approach to her career and this was mediated by her role as 'breadwinner' and 'mother':
Yeah I studied while I was pregnant and shortly after I had Reeva I just set up, I just went door to door with some business cards and all the local businesses, speaking to as many people as I could and leaving my business cards everywhere. I'm a book keeper, I can do your books? So I was sort of doing the studying and building the client base and just working every evening, so when baby went to bed I went into the spare bedroom and it's just data entry really isn't it, book keeping. (Alex, married with children)
Consolidating relationships helps explain the motives and 'gendered choices' of some of our women entrepreneurs with regard to what was deemed as both relationally possible and best for the household, and reflects the agency of women in forming new ventures. As with the other practices in this appraisal, the make-up and position of relational subjects in the household can take on many different forms and can generate different dynamics related to concerns – family unity and family time – over the future constitution of the household, in the context of gendered structures women operate. Consolidation is important in giving 'ontological security', which is to carve out a sense of continuity and cohesiveness in the

shared lives of those in the household (Giddens, 1991). Ensuring this 'relational good' through consolidation can be seen as a way to respond to separation in the relational structures of the household. Relational concerns co-exist in ways that create their own dynamics that can enable women, as wives, mothers, or carers, to negotiate the gender structures of household dynamics as an outcome of the interactions of the different household relational configurations.

Discussion

James (2012) argues that research on women entrepreneurs needs to extend into new directions to focus on the successes rather than the problems experienced. Within this article, we aim to contribute to this endeavour through the exploration of how and why women, positioned as wives, mothers, or carers, negotiate and respond to household dynamics. Figure 2 illustrates a summary of our framework and the three relational practices we identified. We present a number of contributions to this debate, outline suggestions for the future research and note the limitations of our arguments.

Our analysis of the literature revealed how gendered expectations of domesticity create a sexual division of labour in care (Bradley, 2007) which reproduces gendered structures that devalue practices and activities associated with the private and the feminine (Calás et al., 2009; Gatrell, 2013). As Acker (1992) notes,
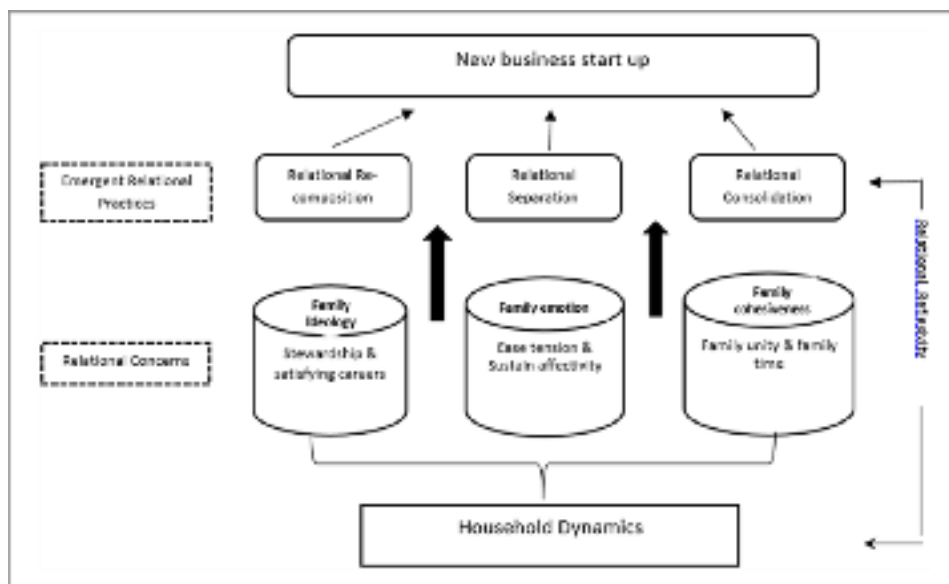

Figure 2. Responses of women entrepreneurs to changing household dynamics.

These [gendering] practices and relations, encoded in arrangements and rules, are supported by assumptions that work is separate from the rest of life and that it has first claim on the worker. Many people, particularly women, have difficulty making their daily lives fit these expectations and assumptions. (p. 255)

This view of women entrepreneurs contrasts them with the archetypical male entrepreneur (Ogbor, 2000). As a consequence, women entrepreneurs exist at the periphery of recognized entrepreneurial activity, construed as survivalist and non-economic agents while their new ventures are deemed as less legitimate and less likely to succeed (Marlow and McAdam, 2015).

In our study, we explored the gendered paths of wives, mothers, and carers and found that such structures do not undermine wholesale the role of women entrepreneurs. Research on

the house- hold positioning of women entrepreneurs has been limited. Using Archer's (2003, 2012) work on reflexivity in the context of changing household dynamics (Alsos et al., 2014) sensitized our analysis to advance this literature by illustrating why and how those women entrepreneurs can respond successfully to significant life transitions and perhaps 'overcome the taken-for-grantedness of their socially constructed environment' (Suddaby et al., 2016: 3). In doing so, we cast our gaze on not just the individual, as a reflexive individual, but also the relationships that inform and constitute the context within which new futures are imagined and actualized (Ramoglou and Tsang, 2016).

First, our findings suggest relational reflexivity (Donati and Archer, 2015) is crucial in explaining women's entrepreneurial responses, positioned as relational subjects in the household, offering an alternative understanding to studies focusing on the uniqueness of the entrepreneur, which marginalize non-hegemonic actors. The context of entrepreneurship shows that there is more inequality and exclusion in relation to individual's position within social hierarchies, which affects resource accrual (Dy et al., 2017; Jayawarna et al., 2014). In this article, we argue that it is essential to maintain the analytical distinction of structure and agency (Archer, 2003), which allows us to explore the capacities needed to navigate household gendered structures. Thus, our study advances women entrepreneurship theory regarding the role of family and household (DeMartino and Brabato, 2003) by exploring the entrepreneurial actions of women as conditioned action (not deter- mined), which plays out in relation to their reflexivity. This is important because reflexive abilities collide with the multiple household gendered structures that constitute the social context in which women find themselves as the past meets the present. For our participants, structures were 'what they confront – and have to grapple with' (Archer, 1982: 463). Analogous to studies that observe how women negotiate their social context (Al-Dajani and Marlow, 2013; Dy et al., 2017; Essers et al., 2010), our study shows how through the development of relational reflexivity, the actions of women entrepreneurs highlight their agency as they have the power to implement practices they deem appropriate for their lives.

Second, from the data collected, three relational practices have emerged that enabled the women to negotiate the changing household dynamics: first; relational recomposition that leads to a unity of life together; second, relational separation that precipitated enterprising efforts to ease emotional strain, and third, relational consolidation with regard to possible loss of family cohesiveness and an attempt to sustain key relationships to avoid conflicting situations. These practices emerged from our conceptualization of the relational configuration of household dynamics (Elder, 1994) as revealed through the personal biographies of our participants. The examination of the household as a unit of analysis and its impact on resource accrual and business growth though household–business interactions (Alsos et al., 2014; Carter, 2011; Jayawarna et al., 2014) is well documented in the literature, but what is not documented is the focus on 'ends' – not 'means' – as the prime concern of persons who engage in and reflexively monitor their personal projects. As such the relational practices explain women's personal concerns and their attempts to sustain the 'relational goods' generated in the household amidst family transitions. These practices are not only consistent with the family embeddedness idea of entrepreneurship (Aldrich and Cliff, 2003); they also advance research by identifying the important tract of the relational dimension of the household– business interaction, accounting for the importance of understanding people, their diagnoses and their actions, which are as influential as the structures and institutions that they necessarily engage. This is not an either/or situation;

rather, an individual can adopt all three practices depending on the situation in the life course. We have seen, as a result, our participants create and use possibilities to satisfy their personal concerns and thereby in different ways become successful business- women, amidst household gendered structures.

Third, more broadly, our findings suggest how entrepreneurship represents a transformational activity 'taking place' in the everydayness of our life, in social interactions, and in everyday practices (Steyaert and Katz, 2004: 190). The emphasis is on the link among the actor, their relations, the household, and society. Our relational framework avoids looking at the household as separate from normative work spaces and the activities of women as 'economic' or 'non- economic', looking instead at how activities 'connect to each other and would not work without each other' (Glucksmann, 1995: 68). Our study on women as wives, mothers, and carers in the context of household dynamics makes evident how entrepreneurship as inculcated in the generation of ideo- logical, emotional, and family cohesiveness particularly in times of family disruption that extends ideas of 'what else entrepreneurship is and does' (Calás et al., 2009: 553).

We see broader implications for our work as it calls for a better understanding of the relational subject, which is open to non-deterministic appraisals of action (Donati and Archer, 2015; Kitching and Rouse, 2017). This move coincides with efforts in neo-institutional theory to address the para- dox of embedded agency (DiMaggio and Powell, 1991; Friedland and Alford, 1991; Seo and Creed, 2002). What appeared as barriers to business development were overcome precisely because each of these women was enabled due to their gendered biography and social position to imagine and enact a different future. This is not to argue that there is a universal and generalizable female experience, but it is to show how actors confronted by situational discontinuities see scope for agency, as opposed to barriers (Mutch, 2007). In this respect, our work extends recent work on reflexivity in neo-institutional theory (see for example, Delbridge and Edwards, 2013; Edwards and Meliou, 2015; Suddaby et al., 2016), not just because of the move to reinvigorate micro-anal- yses as opposed to macro-studies, but because our work draws attention to gender, which has been profoundly ignored in neo-institutionalism.

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

Limitations and the future research

This study, as with most, has some limitations but through identifying them we can also identify interesting avenues for the future research. Limitations to the empirical study are acknowledged; there are small numbers in each sub-category (wives, mothers, carers) of women interviewed; and thus, the future research needs to replicate and extend this study. Furthermore, while our focus on women's entrepreneurial responses to household dynamics that all of them experience points out their reflexivity, we acknowledge that individuals are reflexive to different degrees (Archer, 2012), which affects their gendered paths and decisions. Attention to different forms of reflexivity pre- sents an opportunity for

entrepreneurship scholars to further explore differences between and within the actions of women entrepreneurs and contribute to a more nuanced understanding of the heterogeneity of women entrepreneurs (Hughes et al., 2012). Understanding more about the experiences of women entrepreneurs in the context of the household presents an intriguing direction for the future research recognizing the causal significance of relational subjects that are operating through but not determined by social structures.

Conclusion

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

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