

**WHAT ABOUT THE WOMEN? RAISING THE PROFILE OF FEMALE  
ENTREPRENEURS**

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## SUMMARY

The role of entrepreneurs has been raised within education circles (Davies, 2002), is covered in the media and is one of the focal points of the current government (Nicholson, 1998). Does this profile-raising of entrepreneurs cover all entrepreneurs or only a section?

This paper sets out to investigate female entrepreneurship. Could it be that only men are born with the entrepreneurial drive and Ms Roddick is a genetic exception; or could it be that entrepreneurs are made, but women do not fit the mould? According to the song, “behind every great man, there has to be a great woman” (Lennox, 1985), are then potential female entrepreneurs suppressing their drive in order to support their husbands’ careers? Or are the “sisters doin’ it for themselves” (Lennox, 1985) but just not being recognised for doing so?

This paper is not intended as a feminist diatribe, nor a veneration of ‘girl power’, but it does set out to investigate the potential for female entrepreneurship, together with its’ incidence in wider society. Reflecting upon current theoretical perspectives regarding entrepreneurial creation and/or development, the existence and opportunities for female entrepreneurs are investigated.

A disparity was identified between that of US and UK women entrepreneurs, citing clear differences between recognition and typology of male and female entrepreneurs (McManus, 2000), although a distinct lack of empirical evidence exists regarding female entrepreneurship. Gender differences alone did not explain the reasons for differing rates of entrepreneurship, nor did the existence of a ‘glass ceiling’ (Fryer, 1997) or other discriminatory factors (Brindley and Ritchie, 1999). In addition, differences between male and female entrepreneurs were highlighted (Deakins, 1999) which agreed with the work by Cromie and Hayes (1988).

As such, the recommendations of this paper are for a greater empirical analysis of female entrepreneurs incorporating all of Rees’ 1992 definitions due to the gender differences which exist. In addition, a strategy for the raising of the recognition of female entrepreneurs in wider society is proposed within the paper – identifying the need and potential routes for the amplified recognition of female entrepreneurs. This aims to ‘break’ some of the panes of both the glass ceiling and the ‘greenhouse’ which provides the pressure on recognised female entrepreneurs.

## INTRODUCTION

Within the Innovation and Design Management module on a BA Business Studies degree, students are each instructed to prepare a brief synopsis of an entrepreneur. The final list for each class contained the names of between 20 and 38 men as diverse as Genghis Khan and Chris Evans; and a single, token-female, Anita Roddick. Surely, where there is one, there must be more, or will Ms Roddick be remembered as the only female entrepreneur of the twentieth century? Apparently, by students, she will.

This paper sets out to investigate female entrepreneurship. Could it be that only men are born with the entrepreneurial drive and Ms Roddick is a genetic exception; or could it be that entrepreneurs are made, but women do not fit the mould? According to the song, “behind every great man, there has to be a great woman” (Lennox, 1985), are then potential female entrepreneurs suppressing their drive in order to support their husbands’ careers? Or are the “sisters doin’ it for themselves” (Lennox, 1985) but just not being recognised for doing so? This paper is not intended as a feminist diatribe, nor a veneration of ‘girl power’, but it does set out to investigate the existence of female entrepreneurs; examine if they are any different to their male counterparts and in a small way to redress any imbalance in recognition.

Defining what is meant by an ‘entrepreneur’ is not straightforward in itself. Carland (1984) suggested that an entrepreneur was an individual, characterised by innovative behaviour, who establishes and manages a business for the principal purpose of profit and growth. However, in 1982, Casson defined an entrepreneur as ‘someone who specialises in making judgemental decisions about the co-ordination of scarce resources’, yet precluded the possibility of the entrepreneur working in a team, committee or organisation. This exclusion is clearly unviable from a business viewpoint.

As for the entrepreneur’s principal purpose being profit and growth, research by Birley and Westhead (1993) resulted in the identification of seven principal purposes including the satisfaction of needs for approval, achievement, independence and personal development. In his study of the influence of culture on entrepreneurial start-up, Morrison (1998) suggested that in, for example North America, entrepreneurs emphasised the more ‘masculine’ values such as assertiveness and success, while in Kenya and Finland, the emphasis was on ‘feminine’ values and as such, the welfare of the community may take precedence over material gain (Carter, 2000). However, this does not necessarily indicate that entrepreneurs in North America are predominantly male and those in Kenya and Finland predominantly female, just that the motivating values can be assigned gender differences.

Both Schumpeter (1942) and Carland (1984) explored the link between the entrepreneur and innovation and Needle (1995) tells us that through innovation, the entrepreneur is the driving force behind business growth and development. In addition, Drucker (1999) identifies that the entrepreneur uses innovation as a tool to exploit change.

Innovation has been defined in many ways by many authors and the definitions appear to have evolved over time and through research. For Schumpeter (1934) innovation was the introduction of a new good or service, the introduction of a new process, the opening of a new market, the identification of new sources of supply or the creation of a new type of industrial organisation. Schmookler (1996) took this further, defining innovation as a technical change made by an enterprise through the production of a new good or service, or when using a new method or input (Deakins, 1999). Lynch viewed innovation as both the “generation and exploration of new ideas’ and the process that moved organisational inputs, processes or outputs ‘beyond their current boundaries and capabilities” (Lynch, 1997: 807). In 1998, Trott suggested that innovation was process management involving all the activities from conception of the idea through to the development and marketing of the new product, service or process.

It could then be said that the entrepreneur is the embodiment of strategy having the vision to move the organisation forward in a significant way beyond the current environment’ (Lynch, 1997). As such, the entrepreneur must possess the desire to create business and the ability to take risks (Burns & Dewhurst, 1996).

There has been much debate as to whether this entrepreneurial ‘flair’ is an inherent quality; is a product of the entrepreneur’s life; or is a business skill that can be taught like any other. Schumpeter (1942) identified that entrepreneurs have an ‘innovative drive’, and Rotter (1966) that they possess a need for a ‘locus of control’; both authors suggest these are inherent. An innovative drive is possibly easier to identify as being inherent than is a need for a locus of control. For example at the age of six, Howard Hughes had his own little workshop and by the age of 11 had built the town’s first broadcasting radio (Encarta, 2000). In the same way Elizabeth Downing, co-founder and CEO of 3D Technology Labs., would, as a child would ‘sneak away’ to play with boy’s toys such as Lego because they encouraged her creativity (Lash, 1997). This would suggest both male and female entrepreneurs might well be born with an innovative drive.

However, McLelland (1961) demonstrated that, to some extent, entrepreneurship could be taught, thus entrepreneurs need not be born that way, but could be ‘made’ (Burns & Dewhurst 1996). This is the premise of the new Enterprise Centre that was recently opened by Sir Alan Sugar in Bristol. Although Sir Alan does not believe that one can be taught to be an entrepreneur, students will get the chance to take courses in entrepreneurship with the aim of encouraging new talent and creating a more vibrant business culture in the City (BBC Online, 2000).

In 1981, Cooper took the ‘making’ of an entrepreneur further and theorised that antecedent influences such as the skills, knowledge and background of the entrepreneur; incubator organisations for which the entrepreneur had previously worked; and environmental factors such as the economic climate; all influence the entrepreneurial decision (Burns & Dewhurst ,1996). An entrepreneur is then, the innovative and risk-taking, driving force behind an

enterprise, who seeks profit and growth as well as personal satisfaction. The entrepreneurial flair is apparently, partly inherent, partly the product of the entrepreneur's background and partly learned; but apparently not gender specific.

In addition there is statistical evidence of female entrepreneurialism. Labour market trends suggest that 7 percent of women in employment are self-employed or run their own businesses (Moralee, 1998) and are thus potentially, entrepreneurs. While this compares with 17 percent for men (Moralee, 1998), the involvement of women is increasing at a faster rate than that of men (Deakins, 1999). Vanessa Freytag researched female entrepreneurialism and found that, at least in the USA, women launch enterprises at twice the rate of men and further that 65 percent of women-owned businesses were over 5 years old (McManus, 2000). When it is considered that over half of all new businesses in the UK deregister within the first 5 years (Burns & Dewhurst, 1996), this suggests that 65 percent of women-owned businesses in the USA have a good chance of future success. More recently, Daft (2000) identified that women now own 34 percent of all US businesses.

Female entrepreneurs do then exist, but are they any different to male entrepreneurs? Until the mid-1980s, the majority of research into entrepreneurialism was centred upon male-owned enterprises, indeed in 1986 Rees and Shah's analysis of UK self-employment excluded females on the basis that "self-employment is predominantly a male preserve" (Carter, 2000). However, the concepts of the entrepreneur were promoted as being gender neutral under the assumption that the female entrepreneur conformed to the same patterns of behaviour as the male (Carter, 2000). Consequently, gender-related differences were not considered significant within the entrepreneurial role (Brindley & Ritchie, 1999). This could suggest that at a certain creativity level, entrepreneurs become more alike to each other irrespective of gender, than they are to non-entrepreneurs of their own gender. However, it would still not preclude differences between male and female entrepreneurs.

As female entrepreneurship grew in the 1980s, so did academic interest (Carter, 2000). Early studies such as the research by Goffee and Scase (1987) concentrated mainly on the reasons for female entrepreneurial start-up (Carter, 2000). This suggested two major influences, the first being the level of attachment to 'entrepreneurial ideals' such as high motivation for self-advancement and a strong 'work ethic'. The second major influence is the extent to which conventional gender roles were accepted. The different combinations of these two influences provide four categories of female entrepreneur as in Figure 1 below.

Figure 1: Types of female entrepreneur

<u>Types of Female Entrepreneur</u>	
Entrepreneurial	Conventional Gender Roles

Ideals	High	Low
High	<b><i>Conventional</i></b>	<b><i>Innovative</i></b>
Low	<b><i>Domestic</i></b>	<b><i>Radical</i></b>

Source: Deakins, 1999

The conventional female entrepreneur was predominantly working class and highly committed to conventional gender roles. The motivation for start-up was financial need and although highly committed to entrepreneurial ideals the domestic role was retained. The domestic entrepreneur was strongly attached to the traditional gender role and only moderately committed to the entrepreneurial ideals, fitting a small enterprise around the domestic role. Neither of these categories appear to fit with the traditional definitions of an entrepreneur; consequently it could be argued that these categories would more accurately represent the small business manager rather than entrepreneur.

The radical female entrepreneur is identified as having little commitment to either the conventional gender roles or entrepreneurial ideals. Instead, this entrepreneurial type was identified as being feminists engaged in collective political and economic ventures to promote women's issues (Rees, 1992). Only the innovative category seems to fit with the traditional definitions as the female is highly committed to entrepreneurial ideals and to success and has rejected the traditional gender roles. Business start-up for these entrepreneurs was a creative reaction to career restrictions.

A similar study by Cromie and Hayes (1988) identified three main female entrepreneurial types. The first category mirrored that of Goffee and Scase's innovative entrepreneur (Rees, 1992) and the second category, the dualists, reflected the conventional entrepreneur. However, with the third and final category, Cromie and Hayes moved away from Goffee and Scase's findings and identified returners who tended to be older and having had a career break, were facing restricted employment prospects. Once again, this research centred on the reasons for entrepreneurial start-up. It can be seen from the research that the particular circumstances leading to start-up may be different for females than it is for males due to their traditional roles in society. However, as these roles become more flexible, it would seem likely that the specific male and female reasons for start-up may become more congruent.

Research by Watkins and Watkins (1984) looked further than start-up and suggested that there were some basic differences between male and female entrepreneurs; particularly, that women had little prior experience to facilitate their entry into non-traditional areas (Deakins, 1999). There are obvious exceptions to this for example; Shelley Day, who co-founded Humongous Entertainment producing children's software; the organisation's market share

now surpasses that of Living Books, Microsoft and Edmark (Fryer, 1997). Day had a wealth of experience in her field, having previously worked as a producer of CD Rom titles for two software development companies Electronic Arts and Accolade, and having also worked for LucasFilm.

However, in 1986 Hisrich and Brush also identified a lack of previous executive management experience amongst female entrepreneurs (Carter, 2000). It was suggested that this negatively affected female credibility when it came to raising finance. Over half of all women surveyed reported they had been stereotyped as being not as serious as men and thus were less able to secure finance for their enterprises (Carter, 2000). Burdette (1996) also found that the female entrepreneur faced increased difficulty when approaching external agencies, especially for the purpose of raising finance.

Indeed Anita Roddick's bank was not interested in accepting the risk of lending to a woman with a "crazy" business idea (Brown, 1996). But then, she did not present the bank with a business plan (Brown, 1996). There must be few men in this world, even with a proven track record, that could approach an unknown bank for a business loan and expect to be successful in the application without having, at the very least, a basic business plan. Enough authors have cited discrimination against women when it comes to finance for there to be little argument that it does occur. However, in at least some cases the discrimination might be against the level of naivety or relevant education of the applicant and would undoubtedly conform to the findings of Hisrich and Brush regarding lack of experience.

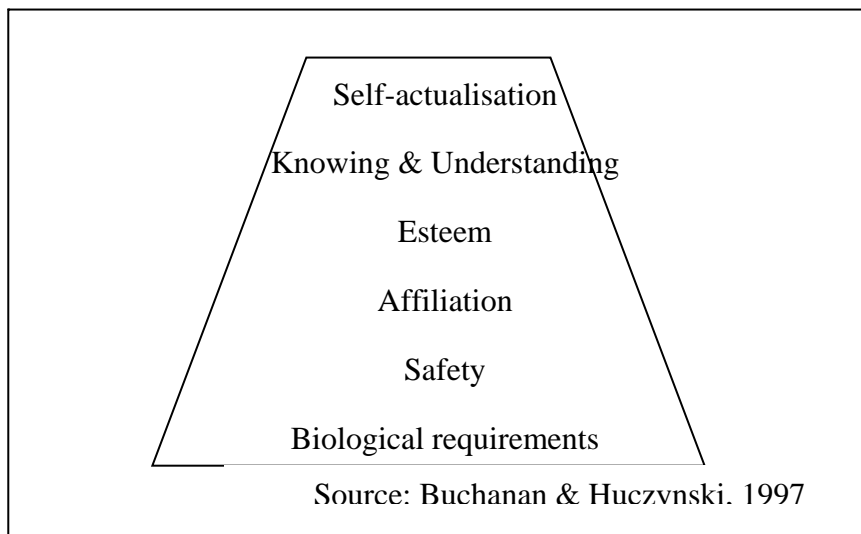
Discrimination is not confined to finance; Burdette (1996) concluded that one of the key reasons why the women became entrepreneurs in the first place was to escape discrimination. However, once running their own business, relationships within the organisation and supply chain did not seem to be affected by discrimination. More specifically, Morrison (1987) identified that a major motivating factor for female entrepreneurial start-up, was the 'glass ceiling' (Rees, 1992). This is perceived as an invisible barrier preventing women from rising above the level of middle management.

There is little argument that the glass ceiling exists and in 1990, the Hansard Society Commission on Women at the Top concluded there were few women on the boards of British industry (Rees, 1992). However, in recent years, things have been changing, and in this year's rankings of Britain's 50 most powerful women, so wide was the available field, that Ann Gloag, co-founder of Stagecoach and ranked Britain's third wealthiest woman, did not even appear in the power ranking (Ashworth, 2000). Consequently, not all women would cite discrimination as a major force for start-up; for example, Shelley Day refutes even the presence of a 'glass ceiling' in the high technology children's market (Fryer, 1997).

That glass ceilings encountered pre-start-up should be cited as a major difference between male and female entrepreneurs is somewhat doubtful considering that Rees (1992) goes on to identify that some men also start-up following career frustration. This is nothing new; the

concepts of the entrepreneur's need for achievement and control are a common theme in the texts. It follows that many start-ups may not have occurred if the entrepreneur could have satisfied such needs within a host organisation, therefore, for men too, career frustration must play a major role. Maslow (1943) argued that individuals have innate needs that can be arranged in a hierarchy as in Figure 2 below (Buchanan & Huczinski, 1997).

Figure 2: Maslow's Hierachy of Needs



As each need is met, the individual moves up the hierarchy to focus upon the next need. As such, when potential entrepreneurs meet career frustration, for whatever reason, their need for self-actualisation is frustrated. Maslow identified this need as 'a musician must play ... a poet must write' (Buchanan & Huczinski, 1997). The reason for the frustration then seems far less relevant than the frustration itself, which can be felt equally by male or female.

Female entrepreneurs may encounter discrimination in other forms and Brindley and Ritchie (1999) cite the 1996 research by Talley, which suggests that a number of internal and external factors may impose gender-related barriers and constraints to the effectiveness of entrepreneurial decision-making. In this research, females ranked the five major barriers to advancement as: the old boys' network, home/career conflict, power differences, lack/absence of mentoring, and the his/her career strain.

In response to these barriers and the aforementioned lack of executive experience, women tend to seek more input into decision-making (McManus, 2000) with 42 percent of all female entrepreneurs regularly sharing experiences with other entrepreneurs, 30 percent seeking input from financial advisers and 24 percent regularly consulting with legal advisers. Men on the



other hand tend to be less open in their business relationships and less likely to ask advice, especially from other entrepreneurs (McManus 2000).

One apparently successful way of overcoming a lack of experience, for male or female entrepreneurs, is to take advantage of the various entrepreneurial mentoring programmes that are available, through for example, Hertfordshire University, the Entrepreneurship Programme of East Kilbride, The Glasshouse in London, or via the newly opened Business Enterprise Centre in Bristol. However, these are few and far between and one particular group in Vancouver, Canada, questions the methods involved (Withers, 1999). The traditional mentoring relationship is one of an 'older, wiser, teacher' with a 'younger, less experienced pupil' (Murray & Owen, 1991). This would seem at odds with the traditional profile of an entrepreneur, which includes a need for a locus of control (Rotter, 1966), a desire for independence (Meredith, 1982) and a probable difficulty in coping with alternating dominant and submissive roles (Trott, 1996). In addition, Kets de Vries (1985) argued that the desire for control often leads to the desire to let no one else have any authority; this can lead to a degree of distrust of such a mentor (Trott, 1996).

The Vancouver peer-mentoring programme, launched in 1997 as a joint project by the Simon Fraser University and the Scotiabank Resource Centre for Women Entrepreneurs, has taken a different approach (Withers, 1999). The programme offers each woman 10 hours of training in the peer mentoring technique, and the women then meet in groups of eight to ten for three hours each month. These are groups of like-minded individuals from unrelated fields who then exchange ideas and perspectives to gain new insight and clarity into the business and personal issues and the opportunities that they face (Withers, 1999). A pre-screening process ensures that each group contains sufficient diversity of age, experience and industry and the result is a non-competitive, non-judgemental environment. When a member of the group has a problem or wants feedback on an idea, she can present the situation to the group; rather than giving advice, the group then relates back to when they have been in similar situations and each member tells her story including the outcome, good or bad.

According to facilitator Joan Mara, there has been a shift away from direct problem solving in order to access the most important issues the women face whether they be business or personal issues (Withers, 1999). This, she suggests, highlights one difference between male and female entrepreneurs, in that men are better adapted to action situations and direct problem solving, while women are often more comfortable in dialogue-based settings (Withers, 1999).

Wendi Copeland, founder of Stamp of Approval suggests another major difference is that men don't tend to discuss life as a whole, but clearly separate business and personal life (Withers, 1999). However, it is unclear as to whether men are more able to keep the two apart or simply less willing to accept or admit that they impinge upon each other. Many of the women cited in the article, including Kate Ross LeBlanc, president of Sage a \$3-million chain of aromatherapy stores, believe the group's success hinges on its direct honesty. Which

highlights a further gender difference in that women tend to be more open in all relationships than do men (McManus, 2000).

One factor that influences both male and female entrepreneurial start-up is the national culture and economic environment (Cooper, 1981; Morrison, 1998). When it is considered that in the UK the Sex Discrimination Act was only passed in 1975 (Keenan & Riches, 1996), it is perhaps understandable that there are fewer female entrepreneurs than male. Anecdotal evidence suggests that the role of women in business is still evolving and with female-owned enterprises starting up at a faster rate than that of male-owned enterprises (McManus, 2000), the role of the female entrepreneur must also be evolving.

Advancements in the field of information technology have encouraged this evolution, creating new Internet opportunities for entrepreneurs or Netpreneur's as they have been termed (Business Wire, 1999). According to the Association of Technology Staffing Companies, the number of women in IT jobs in the UK has halved since the 1960s (Nicolle, 2000). However, it would seem that women are turning away from IT jobs and using information technology to start-up their own businesses (Turner, 2000). This scenario is exemplified by multi-millionaire, Martha Lane Fox of lastminute.com.

Opportunity exists for the female netpreneur partly because the start-up of a 'dot.com' company need not be capital intensive and thus circumnavigates the problems it has been shown that women encounter when raising finance. For example, Mary Pietrowski found that an actual bookstore would not be economically feasible but has opened the largest women's bookstore on the web with over 400,000 titles (Cowles, 1997). The Internet also offers access to a global market that would otherwise not be available. For example Jane Karwoski, the founder of all-hotels.com has a deal, to take bookings on the web, with 58,000 of the world's 60,000 bookable hotels (Turne, 2000).

In the dynamic society of today it would be unrealistic to expect the role of the female entrepreneur to remain static. Research suggests that differences do exist between male and female entrepreneurs, as can be seen in Table 1 below, which was taken from Hisrich and Peters (1998) and summarises the principal gender differences.

Table 1: Differences between male and female entrepreneurs

<b>Characteristic</b>	<b>Male Entrepreneurs</b>	<b>Female Entrepreneurs</b>
Motivation	Achievement – strive to make things happen. Personal independence – self-image as it relates to status through their role in the corporation is unimportant. Job satisfaction arising from the desire to be in control.	Achievement – accomplishment of a goal. Independence – to do it alone.

Departure point	Dissatisfaction with present job. Sideline in college, sideline to present job, or outgrowth of present job. Discharge or layoff. Opportunity for acquisition.	Job frustration. Interest in and recognition of opportunity in the area. Change in personal circumstances.
Sources of funds	Personal assets and savings. Bank financing. Investors. Loans from friends and family.	Personal assets and savings. Personal loans.
Occupational background	Experience in line of work. Recognized specialist or one who has gained a high level of achievement in the field. Competent in a variety of business functions.	Experience in area of business. Middle management or administrative level experience in the field. Service related occupational background.
Personality Characteristics	Opinionated and persuasive. Goal oriented. Innovative and idealistic. High level of self-confidence. Enthusiastic and energetic. Must be own boss.	Flexible and tolerant. Goal oriented. Creative and realistic. Medium level of self-confidence. Enthusiastic and energetic. Ability to deal with the social and economic environment.
Background	Age when starting venture 25 – 35. Father was self-employed. College educated – degree in business or technical area (usually engineering). First-born child.	Age when starting venture 35-45. Father was self-employed. College educated – degree in liberal arts. First-born child.
Support groups	Friends, professional acquaintances (lawyers, accountants). Business associates. Spouse.	Close friends. Spouse. Family. Women’s professional groups. Trade associations.
Type of business started	Manufacturing or construction.	Service-related – educational services, consulting, or public relations.

Source: Hisrich & Peters, 1998

In some cases the differences appear subtle and in others, they appear to be no more than an exercise in semantics. At the same time, the table identifies many similarities such as goal orientation, energetic enthusiasm and educational backgrounds.

However, Brindley and Ritchie (1999) identify that there is a distinct lack of available research on female entrepreneurs, a view backed up by Deakins (1999) who suggests that related data is hard to come by. This paper has avoided investigation into gender differences regarding male versus female attitudes to risk for just that reason. The majority of sources used for this paper have originated in the USA, as that is where the majority of the research into the subject is taking place. Where possible European and specifically UK data has been included; but not enough information was available to enable confirmation that the same 'boom' in female entrepreneurship is occurring in the UK as appears to be the case in the US.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

Clearly there is a distinct lack of empirical evidence regarding female entrepreneurship. Whilst their existence can be identified, the level of start-ups is unknown and a disparity exists between businesses formed simply to provide a basic income and those designed for growth more akin to male entrepreneurs. Without a credible definition of female entrepreneurs, a clear investigation cannot occur. However, as identified by Hisrich and Peters (1998), female entrepreneurs are different from male entrepreneurs and, as such, require different categorisation.

A recommendation is made for the incorporation of Rees' 1992 definitions of conventional, domestic and radical entrepreneurs being included in the classification in addition to the natural-fit of the innovative entrepreneur. Clearly a gender difference exists and, as such, a re-working of the traditional masculine entrepreneurial boundaries are required.

## **Strategic Approach**

The DTi conference on Rural Female Enterprise in February 2002 raised the profile of female enterprise with businesses but not with those in secondary education. Without female role models, little will occur to alter the perspectives of those soon to enter the business world.

Strategically, a co-ordinated approach is required between government agencies, the DTi and enterprise education bodies. In order to raise the profile of female entrepreneurs, more time and effort is required from the DTi in terms of the recognition of female entrepreneurship as a career. This time should be spent supporting enterprise education within schools – leading from the Davies report of February 2002. Without this awareness raising, little will occur in terms of actual tangible change.

The profile raising should incorporate female entrepreneurs where possible – current DTi initiatives have tended to use a majority of male entrepreneurs, as with the Design Council's Big Zipper Challenge. Building on from the Industrial Society's recommendation in October 2001 for a National Centre for Women's Enterprise, this should incorporate the British Association for Women Entrepreneurs – bringing role models into the classroom. It is unfeasible to raise the profile of female entrepreneurs when only male role models are presented.

## **CONCLUSION**

In conclusion, the purpose of this paper has been satisfied. It has been shown that not only do female entrepreneurs exist, but also that they are increasing in proportion to male entrepreneurs. It has been possible to highlight gender differences and similarities and identify where differences such as the effect of the 'glass ceiling' are becoming less prominent. A co-ordination strategy has been proposed to raise the profile and recognition of female entrepreneurs. And finally, a handful of female entrepreneurs have been identified to help balance the list.

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