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Sex business in the toy store: A narrative analysis of a teaching case

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Abstract

This article is a narrative analysis of an entrepreneurship case performed from a post-structuralist feminist perspective. Acknowledging the social construction of reality, gender is conceptualized as performed rather than as an essential quality attached to male and female bodies. The analysis finds that the case reproduces discriminatory gender relations. While using such cases in entrepreneurship training may teach pragmatic lessons, they also teach women that there is no place for them in business. Suggestions for improvement include cases with female protagonists, gender-inclusive language, stories that challenge received entrepreneurship ideas, and the introduction of narrative analysis to enrich students' learning opportunities.

Keywords: Narrative analysis; Discourse analysis; Gender; Feminist theory; Teaching

1. Executive summary

The toy story is a business case used in entrepreneurship education. It describes how an entrepreneur named Terry Allen engages in a three-month business endeavor in the toy business. With almost no cash, hardly any prior knowledge of the toy industry and faced with various difficult obstacles and setbacks along the way, he manages to start his business, run it successfully and cash out as a wealthier man. It is a typical case in that it features a man of humble beginnings, challenges along the way, a happy end, and pragmatic how-to lessons for the students. It is also typical in that it celebrates the values of entrepreneurship; independence, perseverance in the face of difficulty and, above all, the importance of material success. It is atypical in that it features a protagonist who engages in less than ethical behavior, but still does not fall from grace. Usually the robber barons get their punishment at the end of such tales.

This means that this narrative deviates from the typical tales of this genre. Smith and Anderson (2004) show that entrepreneurship cases are set in a moral context, and contain moral lessons. Besides promoting entrepreneurship, they also promote ethical conduct, such as square dealing and remaining decent in spite of difficulties. An entrepreneur who acts ethically is rewarded by material success, while unethical conduct is punished by social exclusion and/or the loss of his wealth.

From a gender perspective, this is the interesting part of the story. The protagonist behaves unethically towards his wife, but he is not punished for it. He lies to her, blackmails her, withholds information from her and treats her like a child. Moreover, he belittles women and femininity in general, but is still rewarded with success. In this narrative, entrepreneurship, analysis, action, decisions, and daring is reserved for men. Women are portrayed as more or less helpless creatures, responsible solely for home, family and children, and present in the story only by their relationships with men. They do not even have names.

The story thus legitimizes discriminatory behavior and attitudes towards women, and it naturalizes discursive practices that support women's continued subordination in society, as the discourses of natural gender differences making men and women suited for different activities, and the discourse of a gendered division of a public and a private sphere with men responsible for the former, with its accompanying possibilities for influence, power and economic gain, while women are cast in a supportive role in the private sphere.

Besides the larger issue of such stories reproducing unequal gender arrangements in society, this story raises serious questions about the use of business cases in entrepreneurship education. The point of such cases is to provide pragmatic entrepreneurship lessons, but they also communicate other things that usually go unnoticed. In this narrative, for example, students learn that it is acceptable to lie to, withhold information from, and belittle women. They learn that women are incapable as decision makers and business managers. They learn that entrepreneurial action is for men only and they learn that a woman's place is in the home. A female business student has no one to identify with as a role model in this story. The women in the story are cast in roles that are completely contrary to the role of an entrepreneur, and they are portrayed in very unflattering ways. The lesson for the female student is very simple: business is not for me.

A male student, on the other hand, learns that business is indeed for him and his fellow men, and women are for marriage and bringing up one's children. They also learn that it is acceptable to discriminate against and belittle women. The toy store case is perhaps more explicit than most, but the typical case does feature a male heroic figure, and women are usually absent or cast in supportive roles. Stereotypical and discriminatory gender lessons are part and parcel of the business case.

Such lessons are probably neither intended nor desired. In order to continue to draw the benefits from using cases in entrepreneurship education while avoiding the reproduction of gender discrimination, I suggest three complementary strategies. The first is a simple hygiene measure. It is important that at least each other story features a female protagonist, so that female students are provided with role models, or at least have someone that it is possible to identify with. It is further important that the language used in cases and in business texts be gender inclusive. It should say "he or she" when talking about entrepreneurs or managers in general in textbooks. Some argue that this is clumsy and impractical, and that "he" is a generic pronoun in English, just as "man" for "humanity", but this is itself a gendered assumption. If it says "he", a woman is likely to think "not me". Using gender inclusive language is more important than is often assumed.

If implemented only to be politically correct, however, there is a risk that such a measure only does half the job. If nothing but gender is changed in the stories, the same discriminatory discourses may still be reproduced. The second strategy is therefore to critically assess the messages in the cases, and consciously use cases that challenge taken for granted, male gendered notions of entrepreneurship, and that communicate alternative messages. One might, for example, have a business case about a male entrepreneur who starts a business that enables him to take care of his small children at the same time, and who meets resistance in the form of lack of understanding (from the environment) of this way of arranging his life. This circumstance would in itself present entrepreneurial opportunities which could be taken advantage of. Another story could be about an entrepreneur who consciously avoids too much material success, but counts the blessings in life as having a small, manageable business that provides him or her a livelihood. Compared to the standard hagiography, this would be a realistic tale of entrepreneurship, supported by actual research results on how most men and women perceive their business. One might further have a case about a female entrepreneur who violates all the standards of femininity but still comes out on the right side, a case about a lesbian couple starting a marriage counseling business, or cases where people do all the right things but success still does not come.

Such cases would challenge taken for granted assumptions about gender, business and success, and make students reflect about conditions for men and women in business. There is still a risk, however, that students would find such stories contrived, since they do not reflect the repertoires of entrepreneurship narratives that they are accustomed to. They may also be unprepared when they encounter actual gender discrimination in the business world. The final suggestion is therefore to introduce narrative analysis to the curriculum. Provided some basic knowledge about structures of narratives in different genres, and provided insights in how narratives structure what we take for granted about reality, students would be well equipped to analyze stories such as the toy store. They would be able to draw many more lessons from them than the pragmatic how-to business lessons provided in the cases. This would enable them to ask questions of gender constructions as represented in entrepreneurship theory and practice, it would enable them to critically question the success ethos of entrepreneurship and it would allow them to discuss issues of morality in business. It would also enable them to question their own assumptions, and to highlight their own role in constructing knowledge from the cases provided. Given skills in narrative analysis on behalf of students and teachers, a case like the toy story may actually be very well used as a teaching tool, since it is rich in material for analysis, discussion and learning.

2. Introduction

A narrative analysis may be fashioned in many different ways, but common to them all is the insight that life is lived, breathed and traded through narratives. Through narratives one makes sense of one's own and others' past, present and future actions, and through narratives one fashions one's own and others' identities. Analyzing narratives thus means analyzing life itself, and the result of such analyses can only be communicated through yet another

narrative. Even the standard scientific article, allegedly following the logicoscientific mode of producing knowledge, must make use of narrative knowledge to communicate (Czarniawska, 1997; McCloskey, 1994, 1998). The common structural elements of any narrative are also present in the narrative genre of research articles. If using the structural framework of Burke's (1968) pentad in which a narrative is said to consist of the five elements of scene, actor, agency, act and purpose, the introduction section of the article sets the scene by relating the background and introducing the purpose (Swales, 1990). The research objects are cast as actors, or rather actants, if they are inanimate (Greimas and Courtés, 1982). The main actor is of course the researcher, even if the somewhat peculiar rules of this genre recommend that she remains invisible. The act proceeds through literature review, method section and result section, and the agency, in the sense of plot (O'Connor, 2007-this issue) is the means by which these different acts interconnect. As any good narrative, a research article also has a moral point, as told in the implications section.

This particular research article analyzes constructions of gender in a teaching case called the Toy Store, and reasons around the possible implications of the results of the analysis. Meanwhile, I also demonstrate how such an analysis may be carried out, which may aid methodological discussions. For the analysis to make any sense, however, one must first realize that together with narrative approaches to science come certain ways of understanding concepts such as reality, subjectivity, gender, agency, language and power. The next section therefore outlines some of the theoretical points of departure for a narrative analysis. This is followed by an analysis of the case in question, a discussion of the results in terms of certain constructions of gender relations, and the implications of this for the practice of using cases in entrepreneurship education.

3. Theoretical points of departure

3.1. Constructionist views on reality, language, subjectivity and agency

Narrative analyses regard reality as socially constructed. Berger and Luckmann (1966) explained that reality is constructed in interaction between people in a process of externalization (of “knowledge”, “facts”), objectification (where knowledge and facts are made objective), and internalization (where one learns from others' objectified knowledge). When knowledge becomes taken for granted it becomes institutionalized, i.e. people habitually do certain things and they have a normative explanation for them. Taken for granted knowledge can, of course, be questioned, renegotiated and reconstructed. Since reality was socially constructed in the first place it is, in principle, always in flux, even if it may seem, at times, amazingly stable.

That reality is socially constructed should not be interpreted as that it does not exist, only that the meaning given to reality is negotiable. It implies, however, that one cannot study reality “as it is”. It is impossible to develop knowledge based on any “pure” sense-data observation. “Were we to describe our experience in terms of sensory description... we would be confronted with not only uninterpreted, but an uninterpretable world”, writes Czarniawska

(1997:12). It is only possible to understand the world if one has access to a language, to a pre-understanding of some sort that orders categories in a comprehensible way, as well as an understanding of the particular context in which action takes place. All of these will mold one's understanding in certain directions.

This points to a comprehension of language that differs from the ordinary understanding of language as a transparent mirror reflection of an objective reality. Narrative analyses regard language as constitutive rather than representational. There is no immediate connection between a word and that which it is thought to represent (Saussure, 1970). In fact, that which the word is thought to represent can be said to be accessible for human experience and comprehension only as far as there is a suitable expression for it. Even when such an expression is at hand, the meaning invested in it is likely to vary between different people, contexts and times as it was human-made in the first place. In this manner language circumscribes (and makes possible) what one can think and feel and imagine doing. It “typifies our experiences” as Berger and Luckmann (1966) expressed it.

This includes our understanding of the self. The self is also, counter-intuitively as it may seem, socially constructed. Psychologist Kenneth Gergen (1991) writing of feelings as socially constructed, says that if there is no word for a feeling, we cannot have it. He exemplifies this with cultures different from our own who have words for emotions that we lack, and concludes that it is the language of the self which constitutes the self, not the other way around, and this language of the self in turn constitutes many of our social institutions. “Without certain shared definitions of human selves, the institutions of justice, education, and democracy could scarcely be sustained. Without the language of the self – our internal states, processes, and characteristics – social life would be virtually unrecognizable” (Gergen, 1991).

This understanding of subjectivity troubles the every-day understanding of a distinction between subject and object, individual and environment. If the self is socially constituted, there cannot be a clear-cut division between self and non-self. The Cartesian, dualistic subject/object (mind/body, nature/culture) understanding of reality becomes erased. But what does this do to agency? If one cannot theorize an independent self, is it then possible to theorize agency, or are we all helpless puppets caught in the yarns of various social constructions of reality? The answer is no. In fact, the question is being asked from within a dualistic either–or framework. It is not either–or, it is both–and. Reality is socially constructed in a reciprocal mode. Subjects are constituted socially, but they in turn construct social reality. Or, to put it another way: social reality requires a great deal of maintenance work.

3.2. Discourse, power and change

But again, if reality is constructed in such a reciprocal, or circular mode, is change possible? Or is just the same thing re-constructed again and again? To answer this, it helps to introduce the term discourse. Gregory (2000:180) has a useful and inclusive definition: “A specific series of representations, practices and performances through which meanings are produced, connected into networks and legitimized”. This definition makes it clear that the concept of discourse refers not only to what is said. It is not only a language phenomenon, but it includes

also the many practices by which that which is said is made legitimate. This definition is congruent with Foucault (1969/1972:49) who defined discourse as “practices which form the object of which they speak”. Discourses thus have consequences for the object of which they speak. Foucault called these “power implications”, meaning that power is inherent in discourse, or in knowledge, as he also expressed it.

Vivien Burr (1995:48–49) illustrates this with the example of two radically different discourses about foxhunting. There is “foxhunting as pest control”, which represents foxhunting as a natural way to keep the fox population down to manageable numbers. There is nothing immoral in this. Burr says that consistent with this statement would be a letter to a national newspaper extolling the virtues of foxhunting, or an invitation to the annual hunt ball. But parallel to this is a discourse of “foxhunting as the contravention of basic morality”. Animal rights groups might use this discourse to sabotage foxhunts, or it could be used to support appeals for laws prohibiting foxhunting. The differences in “power implications” for the fox of these two discourses are crucial. In the first, the fox suffers a premature death, and in the second it is allowed to live. Power effects of discourses could be more subtle than this, however, but are no less serious. Think of a discourse called “a woman's natural place is in the home”, which might deny her education, advancement opportunities, and in some contexts even bodily freedom. Or consider how differently “entrepreneurship as the pillar of the economy” versus “entrepreneurship as the ultimate expression of self-interest and greed” positions the entrepreneur.

A discourse could of course take the form of a narrative, but the concept is wider than this. As noted above, it refers not only to what is said, but also to the practices which make certain statements possible and legitimate. In detailing such practices, Foucault (1972) said that perhaps the most important of them are assumptions that are taken for granted. This practice also includes what it excludes, namely assumed understandings of what does not belong to a certain discourse; what you cannot say. Related is the ‘will to truth’ which is the historically contingent manner in which false is demarcated from true. Other practices concern who is allowed to speak (with authority) on what topic, and the role of institutional support. My research on the discourse on women's entrepreneurship in research journals, showed, for example, that the institutional support (sources of research funding, profile of research centers) in combination with a scholar's training and established pathways from earlier research contributed to positioning women's entrepreneurship as important mainly as an instrument for economic growth. This implied a focus on growth and performance issues, and a neglect of power and equality aspects. Other established research practices such as preferred methods (looking for statistically significant differences between groups), male gendered research instruments, the individualist focus of entrepreneurship research, and the assumption of the existence of essential gender differences, meant that researchers typically looked for shortcomings in women entrepreneurs. They were consistently portrayed as something less than men, or, at best, a complement (Ahl, 2004b, 2006).

Returning to the question about how change can be theorized in a social constructionist framework, the answer is that since in most instances, several different discourses compete, reconstruction does not mean that the exact same thing is reconstructed. One can draw on

different discourses, and discourses can be combined in new, creative ways. Maybe this is what Schumpeterian entrepreneurship is all about? Not everyone has the same freedom to reconstruct social reality, however. The power to shape discourses is unevenly distributed in society. Attempts at reconstruction are also difficult and meet resistance. Giddens (1991) writes that taking most things for granted gives people a sense of ontological security. It brackets out threats and anxiety and it maintains social stability. It also provides a stable frame of reference for the creation of one's identity. There might also be resistance since discourse orders people and objects, determines what is right and true and what one might act upon, as well as the opposite, thereby affecting the social order. Those who benefit from the current social order will most likely oppose change.

3.3. Gender and feminist theories

If reality, self and subjectivity are socially constructed, this also applies, of course, to gender. Denying an essential, independent self means denying the essential man or woman. It does not mean that men and women, as bodily phenomena, do not exist, but the meaning which one attributes to male and female (what is normally referred to as masculinity and femininity) is socially constructed and varies in time and place, a point easily made if comparing ideas of what a “real man” (or woman) is supposed to be like, and behave like, in different contexts. Vanity, for example, is today attributed to women, but the reverse was true at the court of Louis the XIV. It is considered manly to work today, but such lowly undertakings were not fitting for gentlemen in Britain in the 19th century. Crying is today something attributed to girls and women, but historian Claes Ekenstam (1998) reveals that this has only been so since the event of industrialism. Particularly in the literature predating industrialism, men showed their feelings in abundance and were not rendered any less manly because of this.

The term gender was originally introduced to discriminate between biological sex and socially constructed sex. Gender is a relational concept. One cannot imagine femininity without simultaneously picturing masculinity. The one is what the other is not, and constructing the one in a certain way also means constructing the relationship to the other (Gherardi, 1995). Using the term gender instead of sex also means that the object of study expands beyond bodies. Gendered professions, work practices, spaces, professional and social norms etc. become research objects.

The concept, however, has since then encountered at least two problems. The first is that it has been co-opted and is today used in the same way as the word sex, thus reinforcing what it was meant to question. Whereas forms used to ask you to indicate your sex, they are today, in English-speaking countries, just as likely to ask you to state your gender. The other problem is that the sex/gender dichotomy resembles the nature/culture dichotomy so questioned by constructionist thought. Butler (1990) says that there cannot be a prediscursive body on which gender is inscribed. The body is itself culturally constituted, and it is impossible to draw the line between what should be regarded as “nature” and what regarded as “culture”. Think of all the amendments that people make to their bodies with clothing, make-up, training and cosmetic surgery to identify themselves as real men or women, making

the body seem more malleable than solid. Or consider that when identifying sex by hormone levels or chromosome patterns, there are at least seventeen versions available (Kaplan and Rogers, 1990). Talking about men and women as two unitary concepts seems in this light like a simplification. The sex/gender distinction itself is the result of a social construction. Gender is “the very apparatus of production whereby the sexes themselves are established” says Butler (1990:7).

Viewing gender as socially constructed is, within feminist thought, most commonly referred to as post-structuralist feminist theory. Post-structuralist feminist scholarship is concerned with how masculinity and femininity is constructed, and what effect this has in regard to gender/power relations. Gender is not seen as an essential attribute, but as something that is performed. Any seeming stability depends on the repetitive performance of gender. One is not free to perform gender in any way one chooses, however, but one is restrained by predominant discourses on proper gender behavior (Butler, 1990). Poststructuralist feminist work investigates and challenges such discourses.

The common denominator of post-structuralist and other feminist theories is feminism, which is defined as the recognition of women's subordination, and the desire to do something about it. The main difference is how one regards gender. Whereas post-structuralist feminism sees gender as socially constructed, as described above, other theories see gender as an essential concept. To simplify, there are two versions: either both men and women are seen as essentially similar, or they are seen as essentially different. In liberal feminist theory men and women are seen as essentially similar. It is inspired by liberal political theory where what makes a human a human is her ability to think rationally. Men and women are seen as equally endowed with this ability, and any subordination of women must depend on structural barriers, as for example unequal access to education. These are barriers which may be amended. Whereas liberal feminist thought has had an all-important impact on furthering women's equal rights, there are also problems, most notably that it has an unstated male norm (Calás and Smircich, 1996). It does not question taken for granted constructions of bureaucracy, leadership and so on. Women are advised to adapt to the existing order.

The other version (found in social feminist theory, psychoanalytical feminist theory or radical feminist theory) holds men and women to be essentially different (even if the assumed reasons for this vary between the theories) and would rather value women's specific ways of behaving more highly (Chodorow, 1988; Gilligan, 1982), maybe tearing down the corporate ladder altogether, and building flat organizations with shared leadership and consensus decision making (Iannello, 1992). A problem with this view is that it does not question the male norm, it only provides an alternative, or a complement. Constructing men and women as different means that one understands “man” and “woman” to be essential, unitary (and different) concepts, which gives both sexes a limited repertoire. As studies on gender differences show over and over again, the differences between individuals within each sex are actually much larger than the mean differences between the sexes (Doyle and Paludi, 1998).

This article takes a post-structuralist point of view on gender. The connection to discourse theory is the power/knowledge relation. Gender relations are inherent in discourses about gender. Such discourses have power implications for men and women, and are therefore

interesting and valid study objects for post-structuralist feminist analyses. The connection to narrative analyses is that narratives demonstrate how people draw on different discourses in their reality constructions. One is, in principle, free to concoct any story one likes, but there are at least two restraints to this freedom: Firstly, one is limited by the discourses that are around, and by the language that is available, a language which already structures reality. Secondly, one is not the sole author of one's narrative — to be accepted by an audience, the narrative must draw on discourses that, by the audience, are perceived as legitimate (Czarniawska, 2004:5). This brings me to the concluding point of this theoretical discussion: Through an analysis of a narrative one is able to describe – and discuss – discourses, institutions and power regimes of the society in which a certain narrative is produced. By analyzing Terry Allen's tale of how he started the toy store, one can say something about the discourses of men, women, entrepreneurship, family, private and public, business, ethics and so on that the narrator draws upon and that are legitimate in his context, and one can also say something about the gender/power relations, or gender regimes, that these discourses produce. Within a constructionist approach, narratives are regarded as social and not individual constructions (Hosking and Hjorth, 2004:265). Analyzing a narrative therefore means analyzing social arrangements.

4. Analysis of the “Toy store” narrative

The tale of Terry Allen's toy store venture in 1965 comes in two versions. The first is a transcribed tape recording from 1984. It was a repeat of a lecture that Terry Allen gave to an audience of college students in 1982, seventeen years after the business endeavor took place. The second version is a chapter in a book entitled “No cash, no fear” published by Wiley in 2001¹. The book consists of a number of business cases, all written by Terry Allen, who is a serial entrepreneur and currently the owner of New Business Resources, LLC, which offers a variety of services to newly formed businesses. On Wiley's web page¹ the book is marketed as a how-to guide for starting a successful business with little or no cash, with the following words:

“Allen, who has started more than 20 businesses in his long and illustrious career, reveals exactly how he did it with none or very little of his own money—and how you can, too! He gives you his foolproof strategies for obtaining cash from a variety of surprisingly accessible sources. You'll discover ways to sell your product before it even exists and how to get someone to give you \$1 million to invest (and a Rolls Royce to boot)!”

The two versions are very similar, except for a few details. The written version also contains some additional information, the text is a little more polished, but the tone and contents are mainly the same. I will use the lecture version, but complement it with some details only

¹ <http://www.wiley.com/WileyCDA/>.

available in the written version. I view the text as a teaching case, since that was its original use.

Above, I wrote about the role of the audience in the acceptance or rejection of a narrative. The original audience was a class of students and their professor. The book's audience is much wider, and the written version is more thoroughly prepared, with for example a clearer structure indicated with subheadings in the form of smart business advice, such as “figure out what the homework assignment is before you do it”. It is clear that the author has a large audience in mind. If he wants his text to be accepted (as I take it for granted that he does, and as Wiley in fact did), it can therefore be assumed that he draws upon discourses that enjoy wide legitimacy. It is not a freak story that I analyze, but a story of achievement told by a successful entrepreneur who positions himself as a role model for others.

What then happens in this narrative? It is a story of a three-month business endeavor in the toy business, where the owners, against all odds, are able to cash out quite well. The story belongs to the comedy genre, in which the different characters form “parts of a higher unity which, despite setbacks and (funny) complications, work to resolve everything into harmony — the characteristic happy ending” (Czarniawska, 2004:21). Czarniawska explains that a comedy always moves between a deficient state, and a desirable one. The transition between the two states does not go smoothly—there are complications, setbacks etc. that fuel the story, and these are often caused by “obstructing characters” who are the comics of the comedy. The comedy also features characters, helpers, who support the happy ending. Entrepreneurship tales need not necessarily be comedies — even tragedies are possible, but in such cases there is a clear moral lesson for the audience. Smith's (2003:2) analysis of storybook tales of entrepreneurship found that beginnings typically emphasized disadvantage and portrayed the hero as being of humble origins. The middle ground was reserved for action, heroism and adventure, and the endings were either of the happy ever after variety, or “imbued with the tragic pathos of the hubristic payback”.

The story begins with Terry Allen and his friend John Simons and their wives drinking martinis and conjuring up the idea of selling toys on consignment in the last three months before Christmas, and then cashing out. After persuading his wife, Allen took their joint savings of 500 dollars, added them to John's \$500, and spent them on the rent of a facility in a good downtown location. Out of money, they found that toys could not be had on consignment — and there were expenses for gas, light and heat. Enter the banker, who is tricked into lending them 7000 dollars, provided their wives co-sign the loan. Terry's wife is resistant, but what can she do? The alternative is losing their savings altogether.

The next character in the story is the wholesaler, who tells them about the fantastic Marvel Mustang® — the toy every kid is going to want for Christmas this year. He tells them to make it their loss leader, i.e. to sell it for a few dollars less than the suggested retail price— they would still make money on it. So they spent three of the seven thousand on the Marvel Mustang®. But the toys did not fill up the store. They needed more. The banker lent them another \$10,000, and this time they did not even ask their wives for signatures—that was apparently taken care of in the small print in the first contract. The next complication arises

when their competitor, Grants, advertises the Marvel Mustang® for just seven cents above wholesale price. Terry and John decide to corner the market. They use all the proceeds from the sale of their other toys to buy up Grants Marvel Mustangs stock.

There is then a period of intense suspense before Christmas, when the obstacles pile up. The banker changes from being helpful to a potentially obstructive (and comic) character as he calls repeatedly, supposedly to get some of his money back, while John and Terry use all kinds of inventive moves to avoid him. They do not sell any Marvel Mustangs, and the wholesaler delivers the final blow when he tells them that Grants has ordered another box car load for delivery before Christmas. The turning point of the story is when they find out that Grants has sold Marvel Mustangs on a lay-away basis, but not physically laid them away, so that when the car load did not arrive in time, Terry's and John's luck was made. They cashed out, paid the banker, and made some good money.

The entrepreneurial lessons, or the moral of the story, as spelled out by Terry Allen in the Wiley version are the following: The first is that sometimes luck is more important than being smart, and the only way to be lucky is to give it a try, so go for it. The second concerns not just doing your homework right—but doing the right homework. The third is to not borrow money from banks — borrow from bankers. Personal relationships with bankers are important. The last lesson is that in some industries the suggested retail price is meaningless.

As a tale of entrepreneurship this is both typical and atypical. Smith and Anderson (2004) write that such narratives, which they call e-tales, typically operate as instrumental examples, with how-to lessons, but they are also set in a moral context. The authors analyzed e-tales in a wide variety of genres – personal, fictional, autobiographic, journalistic and even research narratives – and found that they all had a common moral theme, with two elements. The first was the social promotion of entrepreneurship, with overtones of independence, perseverance and the importance of success. The second was the promotion of particular values for entrepreneurship, emphasizing how it should be ethical. This is communicated in the narratives by the falling from grace of those who do not uphold the entrepreneurial values of hard work, independence, thrift, remaining decent in the face of adversity, square dealing and most importantly, achieving material success. For those who follow these codes, however, there is the additional reward of legitimacy. Entrepreneurial narratives thus provide a legitimizing context, both personal and social, for entrepreneurship write Smith and Anderson (2004:142), who found that the narratives contained the following basic formula: “Hard work+morality=success=legitimacy”. This formula may even be seen in the way that the field of entrepreneurship research is conceived if one follows the arguments of Rehn and Taalas (2004). They hold that the field itself is a product of specific moralizations, in that it excludes from study entrepreneurial endeavors outside the law, or in communist states where entrepreneurship itself is outlawed.

Terry Allen tells a standard “from rags to riches” story, but the story does not follow the formula. Allen does not uphold the moral values (particularly not the square dealing), but neither does he fall from grace. In fact, his story reveals all kinds of deceitful actions. Perhaps the story would have turned out in a more predictable manner had somebody else told it, as for example the IRS agent invented by Ted Baker (2007-this issue) who positioned Allen as

susceptible of tax evasion rather than seeing him as an entrepreneurial role model — this narrative had indeed the predictable fall from grace.

But Allen did not fall. And he did brag about his deceitful actions. And the audience accepted it. It is this double issue of (a) morality being legitimized through this narrative, and of the audience confirming its legitimacy, which interests me. Or, putting it in plain language: *How is it possible for Terry Allen (1) to tell, and (2) to get away with telling, a story like this?*

There are many issues pertaining to morality and values in the toy store narrative. There are incidents of lies, of the withholding of information, of manipulation and deceit, but as I find that almost all of them have a bearing on gender constructions, I have chosen to focus my analysis on how the narrative constructs gender relations. Such constructions are present already in the first line:

“Two couples – myself and wife – and a fellow named John Simons and his wife, were sitting around drinking martinis at my house after dinner one night. John was personnel manager at General Electric in Rutland, Vermont.”

A few pages later Terry Allen tells the audience that he had a master's degree in Business Administration, and even later in the story he informs the audience that shortly after the toy store event, he became the head of the Business Education department at his college. The men have names and are defined as persons. John Simons is further defined by his title and company affiliation, and Terry Allen by his education and position. John's wife appears in the story only as “wife”, and Terry's wife is introduced in the following way:

“I had a two-year old son and a nonworking wife. Avery conservative wife, whose father was the local obstetrician.”

The two women in the story are anonymous wives, and exist only as characters in this story by virtue of their marriage to their husbands, or as in Mrs. Allen's case, by virtue of her relationship to her husband and her father. One may also read it the other way around—the wives add to the presentation and status of the men as family men. The protagonists are thus in possession of names, titles, positions, and wives, while the women remain nameless extras, present only by virtue of their affiliation to men. The idea of the toy store comes up in a discussion (involving alcohol) between Allen and Simons. “I'll drink to that” said Allen, and raised his glass. The wives are not present in the discussion. Allen and Simons have them in mind, however, as they consider appropriating the labor of their wives:

“Our only risk would be rent. We figured our wives could be unpaid clerks, even though they were both at home with our young children (Wiley edition).”

Allen's next problem is persuading his wife to use their total savings of \$500 to invest in rent for a facility. He tricks her (and himself?) into this by presenting it as a fool-proof deal:

“I said, look, we're going to make money. We're not taking any risk whatsoever... We get these toys on consignment and if we don't sell them, we ship them right back. The only risk is in the rent of the building, because we'll run the store ourselves.”

In the next sentence he says that “the wives decide to run it during the day and the two men after work at night”. It seems here as if his wife has clearly agreed to become a business partner. She has agreed to invest their joint savings, and she has also agreed to run the shop during the day.

John and Terry then found an empty facility downtown, just vacated by Penney's. They buy the alcoholic owner several martinis and as the alcohol does its job, they persuade him to let them rent the place, for \$1000, for three months. The wives are not present, and do not seem to be informed. Next comes the surprise of the unforeseen running expenses, and the resulting need for more working capital. John and Terry identify a banker who they thought would be sympathetic towards the idea of having a toy store in town that supplies toys all year round, and not only at Christmas. The banker has indeed experienced problems finding birthday presents for his kids, since he has eight children. “We used to say that his wife was part Irish, part Xerox” says Allen. They did not say that the banker was part Xerox...the joke is entirely on the wife. They get the banker to lend them \$7000 (on false premises), but the banker requires the wives to co-sign the loan. At this point in the story Terry Allen says:

“So I had already told her about the \$500 savings account. But if we don't do this, I said, we're gonna lose it all.”

The audience here is left with contradictory information. Earlier, the wife agreed that they should use their savings. Now she is told about it. How much say did the wife actually have in this decision? Regardless of how it really happened, at this point she has to sign for the loan, or lose their savings altogether. Allen practically blackmails his wife. He tells her about the Marvel Mustang®, and how much money they will be making on it:

“So that's what I said to my wife to get her to sign the \$7000 note ‘we've got at least \$1800 bucks IN THE BANK!’ After she stopped crying she agreed to sign the note or we were gonna be in deep trouble.”

The magnitude of the deceit keeps growing, as they need to borrow another \$10,000, and do not even bother telling their wives about it. The wives' signatures from the first note are apparently valid also for the second. The opening comes, they advertise the Marvel Mustang® for \$15.17, only to find out that the competitor had a huge ad on the next page with the price \$9.97.

“On my way home that night I tore out the middle of the paper so my wife wouldn't see the ad. No way I was gonna let that happen, right?”

This is a somewhat strange move. Obviously, from what happens later, and since his wife works in the store, she would certainly have found out anyway. It cannot have remained a secret for long. How come he revels in how he tried to keep his wife in ignorance when he narrates this story? The tale continues:

“So what are we gonna do? Well, John and I went out and had many drinks and sat up late into the night.”

The men have a session in a restaurant, where they scribble their calculations all over the tablecloth and decide to corner the market. Again, the wives are kept completely out of business strategies and tactics, even if they are doing most of the physical work in the store.

“So at this point, we had another woman and our two wives working at the store and I told them...”

“We” equals the men. The women are not included. The women are something that the men “have”, and that they “tell” things. “Having” a woman also has a sexual subtext of domination and subordination. The rest of the story continues with much suspense, many obstacles and many clever actions by the hero and his partner to set things straight, and the whole thing ends happily:

“So —we both made about \$3000 from this little escapade... I crumpled up five, ten, twenty dollar bills and stuffed a big stocking full for my wife at Christmas. She said it was the best Christmas she ever had. That was the end of our toy story.”

“We both” means Terry and John. Terry treats his wife like an unknowing little child when stuffing the stocking with crumpled up bills—and in his version of the narrative it seems as if she is pleased with it.

There is a small footnote of what happened after they closed down after that Christmas. A man from Mattel approached them, offering to sell them toys on consignment. Terry did not accept the offer, but attracted by the idea, he bought some Mattel stock, which was initially a very good investment...

“But then – have you heard the Mattel story? It went from \$26 a share down to \$3 a share in two weeks – they had been misstating what their profits were and the president of the company had resigned. Of course, the president sold her stock at \$18 before they made a public announcement about their troubles. But she eventually got sued and had to pay it all back.”

It is remarkable that an element of a more traditional tale in the toy story, where unethical behavior is followed by a fall from grace, happens to be about a woman. The Wiley addition

contains another little side story, however. They had arranged a lottery, and were going to draw the winner:

“The second fond memory was giving away the 12-foot stocking full of presents. The first person whose name we selected was a well-to-do single woman with no children. We quickly put her name back in the bowl. We didn't know the second selection, but the address was in the best part of town, and we put that one back too. The third choice was a real winner—a single mother from the poorer section of town with a 10-year old boy and an 8-year old girl. I still remember their happy faces as all three carried the stocking from the store.”

It is a somewhat odd way of selecting a winner, although the audience might agree that the end justified the means and could forgive him. What strikes me, however, is the presence of this part of the story. As Smith and Anderson (2004) pointed out, the typical e-tale is a rags-to-riches story of a hero-entrepreneur, who either becomes successful and whose ethical conduct is legitimized by his bestowing some of his wealth on the less wellto- do, or is de-legitimized by his fall from grace. In my eyes, Terry Allen's conduct is less than ethical, but in adding the story of the lottery he positions himself as a benefactor of the poor and helpless (who happen to be women and children...). This is a way of bestowing legitimacy on his story according to the script. There is one final element of the story which also carries some not-so-subtle gender connotations, namely the Marvel Mustang® itself. Below is a picture of it.²



² Retrieved from http://www.epinions.com/kifm-Toys-AllMarx_Toys_Marvel_The_Mustang, Sept 17 2004.

5. Discussion

If narratives, as Smith and Anderson (2004) contend, provide a legitimizing context, both personal and social, for entrepreneurship, what kind of entrepreneurship is it that this story legitimizes? What kinds of actions are rendered acceptable, and what sort of social order does the story promote? The picture above illustrates how the toy store tale, and most other narratives of entrepreneurship, constructs the entrepreneur as an all-male concept. Smith and Anderson (2004:137) contend that “the accepted notion of morality in entrepreneurial narratives is patently a ‘masculine’ gendered form”. Quoting Biddulph (1998), they name five central precepts of manhood: the notion of the self-made man, action, competitiveness, the quest for approval (legitimacy), and hard work. These elements, write Smith and Anderson (2004), echo the precepts of e-tales and reinforce the masculinity of entrepreneurial narratives. I came to the same conclusion by analyzing classical and contemporary research texts on entrepreneurship—the entrepreneur was consistently described in exactly the same words as those used to describe manhood. Moreover, words used to describe femininity were completely absent from any discussions of entrepreneurship (Ahl, 2004b, 2006; see also Bruni et al., 2004). The result of the construction of entrepreneurship as male, is that women as entrepreneurs are rendered invisible (Pettersson, 2004; Sundin, 1988).

But Terry Allen's story does more than so. It constructs entrepreneurship as male, thereby marginalizing women and femininity in the context of entrepreneurship, and makes women's work invisible, but this particular narrative also blatantly, and openly, denigrates women and femininity.

The men have names, titles, positions (and wives), but the women are nameless nobodies. The men take all the action and make all the decisions. The women are either not informed, or they are “told” things, but only when necessary, as when Allen's wife is conned into investing money, or blackmailed into signing for further loans.

Moreover, Allen takes active measures to keep his wife uninformed, as when he does not tell her about the second loan, or when he tears out the competitor's ad so she will not see it. Femininity is made fun of or denigrated, as the joke about part Irish, part Xerox, or when Allen says that his wife signed the note after she had stopped crying. Stuffing a Christmas stocking with crumpled up bills has a similar effect. The other two women in the story are similarly positioned. The first is the company president who behaves badly and falls from grace, and the second is the single, poor mother with two children who is positioned as the object of Allen's benevolence.

Obviously, Allen's wife cannot have been the helpless, unknowing, and gullible creature as he portrays her. She and John's wife actually ran the store during daytime and took care of their children at the same time. She is indeed both co-owner and business partner. How is it then possible that Allen can tell a story which positions women in this way? And how can the audience accept it? On the other hand, considering the role of the audience in constructing any story, and my role in constructing this analysis, why do I react to Allen's story in this way?

My difficulty in the acceptance of this story tells me that there is a discursive struggle existing here, between discourses that can not easily co-exist. In my own constructions of femininity and masculinity I draw on discourses of equality, of equal rights, and of men and

women as equally competent to run any business. Keeping secrets from your husband or wife strikes me as being very unethical. Even if one had such secrets, one would at least not admit it publicly. Allen's story violates every one of these discourses, and in so doing makes these discourses visible.

Allen draws on discourses where masculinity and femininity are constructed as each other's opposites, and where femininity is consistently devalued, confirming the notion of the gender system. Swedish professor of women's history Yvonne Hirdman (1992, 2001) coined this concept, which has been much used in Scandinavian feminist research. It says that the gender system operates on two principles. The first is segregation, in which anything feminine is separated from anything masculine. The second is hierarchical ordering, where the two genders are ordered with the male as the norm and the female as the exception.

Allen also draws on discourses that equate entrepreneurship with masculinity. He presents himself as a man of action, a decision and risk-taker, and the advice at the end points towards action orientation and analysis. These words are consistent with American psychologist Sandra Bem's much used masculinity scale (Bem, 1981). The way he describes women – sensitive, emotional, passive, childlike and gullible – are on the other hand consistent with Bem's femininity scale. His story derides femininity and the gender system is patently present in these descriptions. In Allen's narrative, “femininity” and “entrepreneur” cannot co-exist within the same person. There is no space for a woman to be an entrepreneur in this rendering.

Allen further draws on discourses of the separation between public and private, between work and family, where the public is a male gendered sphere and the private a female gendered sphere. Without hesitation he tells a story where he and John make all the decisions, take all the action and keep their wives in ignorance. In his story, the wives are solely responsible for childcare. Moreover, the men do not seem to think twice about appropriating the unpaid labor of their wives in the toy store. The fact that the story is presented and accepted as a legitimate entrepreneurial narrative means that the discourses Allen draws upon are also accepted and unquestioned, as is the social order produced by these discourses.

When I first read this story I reacted with the usual defense mechanisms. Not Valid Here and Not Valid Now. I thought to myself that there could be no point in doing a gender analysis of this story. The tale is from 1965, and so much has changed since then, in terms of women's participation in the work force and women's representation in higher education, and the housewife nearly becoming an endangered species today. This story is told by an old man who just has not kept up with the changing times, and such a story can now only be laughed at. But the editor of this volume tells me that, no, it could very well have been told by any entrepreneur today, and in fact it was told today, as the book version came out in 2001. Still doubtful, I suggested a geographical objection instead — this must be an American phenomenon (Czarniawska and Calás, 1998). It could never have happened in my country, Sweden, where men and women have participated equally in the work force for decades, where more women than men get college degrees, and where parents have access to publicly subsidized child care from the age of one and paid parental leave, making it possible for both

sexes to work and care for children on equal terms. But I then realized that these objections were against my better judgment.

Even if they would not take the same expressions, the discourses that Allen draws upon are as present today as they were in 1965, and they are probably just as present in Sweden as in the USA. As an example, the discourse of the private sphere as women's responsibility is present in how Swedish parental leave is shared. Even if legislator intended parental leave to be shared equally between the parents, it turns out that mothers take more than eighty per cent of it (Statistics Sweden, 2000). Since they stay out of the job market for more than a year, their salaries lag behind men's, and employers see the hiring of women in fertile ages as risky — they prefer to hire men. The resulting salary and employment opportunity discrimination affects all women, not just mothers. The situation for women entrepreneurs in Sweden is no better. Women business owners are consistently rendered invisible (Pettersson, 2004; Sundin, 1988), and women co-owners in businesses owned by a couple are seldom presented as “entrepreneurs”. The husband is regarded as the entrepreneur, while the wife, at best, is mentioned as a helper (Javefors Grauers, 1999). Even in public policy, women's businesses are constructed as particularly fitting for the low-paid care sector—women are encouraged to start pre-schools, nursing homes and health care centers (Ahl, 2004a; Sundin, 1997).

The discourses that Allen draws upon are largely responsible for the reproduction of women's subordination in society. Discourses of gender differences, of men as suited for action, daring and decision and women as suited for tenderness and care, legitimize unequal social arrangements and explain the continued discrimination of women in society. Discourses of a gendered division of a public and a private sphere legitimize men's favored position in business life and on the job market, as well as the continued appropriation of women's labor.

Following Foucault (1972), the discursive practices constituting these discourses are mostly taken for granted assumptions about the order of things, which in turn reflect social structures and institutional arrangements. Allen's story reproduces certain social arrangements, which should be questioned. One might also question the role of entrepreneurship teaching institutions in co-reproducing these social arrangements by employing such cases as teaching material. Using cases following storybook structures as a proxy for reality, and privileging the entrepreneur's point of view may be regarded as yet another discursive practice.

6. Implications

The genre of research narratives requires a moral to the story, in terms of implications for research, policy and practice. Elsewhere, I conclude that the discourses drawn upon in the toy story are equally present in academic entrepreneurship research, and they have the same effect in reproducing women's secondary position in society. Research on gender and entrepreneurship typically assume that certain traits go with certain bodies, and that these traits have an explanatory power for business performance and growth. Not only is such an approach unproductive, just as the trait approach generally in entrepreneurship research

(Gartner, 1988, 1990), it also neglects structural and institutional arrangements (everything is assumed to depend on the individual entrepreneur) and thereby conceals gendered power relations. I suggest ways of improving such research, namely by avoiding the essentialist and individualist assumptions so prevalent in research on gender and entrepreneurship and instead study how gender is constructed and what power effects this has (Ahl, 2004b).

Implications for policy makers are beyond the scope of this paper, although a central point would be the recognition that discourses produce policy, but policy which challenges dominant discourses may also be able to bring about change in discourses. In a democratic society, however, it takes a certain critical mass of people who challenge a discourse in order for a policy change to take place. This phenomenon is most clearly studied in connection with present debating issues, for example the current debate on legislation allowing homosexual marriages in the USA. This is an issue, which seems to divide the population and expose conflicting social constructions of reality. Another example is the issue of parental leave in Sweden. There is today a debate about making it compulsory for parents to divide the parental leave equally between them, but the suggestion, while encouraged by feminists, so far meets massive resistance from men and women who prefer a more traditional arrangement. The suggested legislation has triggered a debate in which many different representations of gender and gendered work come to the fore and clash against each other.

I would, however, like to focus this discussion on the practical implications, and it is a certain kind of application I have in mind, namely the use of cases in entrepreneurship education. This is the context in which this story was first used, and it is a situation where case studies such as this one are regularly used as teaching tools. The cases are supposed to give students the closest real life experience of entrepreneurship as possible, and they are meant to learn from them. But what is it that they actually learn from such narratives? Is it only the tricks of the trade, or is it something more? As reported earlier, the toy store case spells out the lessons towards the end of the text and these lessons are of a very pragmatic nature — be action oriented, do the right homework, establish personal relationships with bankers and do not trust any suggested retail price. Meanwhile, however, students learn that it is acceptable to lie to, withhold information from, and belittle women. They learn that women are not capable of acting as decision makers or business managers. They learn that entrepreneurial action is only for men and they learn that a woman's place is in the home.

How is a female student supposed to react to this? She is a would-be entrepreneur, but the entrepreneur role model in the case is a man whom she may not spontaneously identify with. The women in the story are definitely not any sort of role model for an entrepreneur, but they are the only ones the female student can identify with as a woman. But which female student of this day and age could identify with Allen's wife? The description of her and her position betrays every good opinion of herself that any woman can have. The result is that there is no one that the female student can identify with. Confronted with an endless row of men in the literature and in the cases, she may react as I did myself during my undergraduate and MBA studies, but formulated years later: Business is not for me. I have no place in the business world. Male students, on the other hand, learn that business is almost exclusively for

men. Women are for marriage and procreation. And thus the treatment and consideration of women in derogatory ways is the name of the business game.

Is this what we want to teach our business students? Probably not. To improve the situation, I suggest three, complementary strategies. The first is a simple hygiene measure. See to it that women are shown as entrepreneurs and heroines in at least 50% of the case stories, so that female students have someone to identify with. Make sure that the language used to describe entrepreneurs is gender inclusive—it should say “he or she” when talking about entrepreneurs or managers in business texts. This is much more important for the reader than is usually assumed.

Such a measure is, however, not really enough. There is a risk that it only goes half-way, and is implemented merely to be politically correct. If changing the genders, but nothing else, the same old discourses may be reproduced anyway (Cameron, 1995). The next measure would therefore be to tell different stories, that challenge the taken for granted discourses. How about a story of a male entrepreneur who starts a business which enables him to take care of his small children at the same time? Some of the obstacles in this story could consist of the lack of understanding from the environment of this way of arranging one's life. Or how about a story about a female entrepreneur who displays all the stereotypical male traits? Or a lesbian couple starting a marriage counseling business? Or stories where people do all the right things but success does not come? Or an entrepreneur who consciously avoids too much material success, but counts the blessings in life as having a small, manageable business that provides him or her with a livelihood? This would actually be the most realistic of all entrepreneurial tales (Aldrich, 1999; Davidsson, 1995; Wiklund, 1998).

Such stories would challenge taken for granted assumptions about gender, business and success, and perhaps make students reflect about conditions for men and women in business. There is still a risk, however, that students would find such stories contrived, since they do not reflect the repertoire of legitimate entrepreneurial narratives that they grew up with and have accepted. They may also be unprepared when they encounter the Terry Allens of this world after graduation. My final suggestion is therefore to introduce the students to narrative analysis. As O'Connor points out (2007-this issue), narratives as teaching tools have long been legitimized in business schools, but the analysis of narratives has not, since it is indeed a skill that requires training. Provided with some basic knowledge about structures of narratives in different genres, for example such knowledge as Smith and Anderson (2004) offer about entrepreneurial narratives, and provided insights into discourse theory, feminist theory and theories of the social construction of reality, students would then be better equipped to analyze stories such as the toy store, and they would be able to draw many more lessons from them than the four pragmatic lessons provided by Terry Allen. This would enable them to ask questions of gender constructions as represented in entrepreneurship theory and practice, it would enable them to critically question the success ethos of entrepreneurship and it would allow them to discuss issues of morality in business. It would also enable them to question their own assumptions, and to highlight their own role in constructing knowledge from the cases provided. As Smith (2003) pointed out, we are socially programmed to look for storybook structures in narratives, as well as to look for the moral of a story. The somewhat

ironical moral of this particular story is thus the following: Provided skills in narrative analysis on behalf of students and teachers, the toy story case is, actually, a brilliant teaching tool, rich in material for analysis, discussion and learning.

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