

Abstract submitted to the IECER Conference, 2005, Amsterdam

Proposed track: Entrepreneurial Economy: Entrepreneurship, Innovation, and
Economic Development

**“The attractive blond lady in a pink business suit” –
Analyzing the discourse on female entrepreneurship in German
newspapers between 1997 and 2003**

Leona Achtenhagen

Jönköping International Business School
PO Box 1026
SE-551 11 Jönköping
Phone: ++46-36-156147
Leona.Achtenhagen@ihh.hj.se

Friederike Welter

RWI Essen
& Jönköping International Business School
Hohenzollernstrasse 1-3
D- 45128 Essen
Phone: ++49-201-8149268
welter@rwi-essen.de

Fostering female entrepreneurship has become an area of concern in many countries. One prerequisite for developing entrepreneurship as an alternative career option is the representation of female entrepreneurship in positive terms by public media. In this paper, we analyze the discourse on female entrepreneurship in the major German national newspapers for the years 1997-2003. We shed light on the changes in public discourse that have taken place and link these to the changes in institutional context (such as changes in the support infrastructure and overall economic development). This will allow us to discuss possible links between discourse, institutional contexts and overall economic development, thus bringing in an innovative, namely discourse-based perspective on entrepreneurship and economic development.

Key words: Discourse analysis, female entrepreneurship

**“The attractive blond lady in a pink business suit” –
Analyzing the discourse on female entrepreneurship in German newspapers
between 1997 and 2003**

Even though the German federal and state governments put much effort into fostering entrepreneurship in recent years, cultural and societal issues continue to be presented as reasons for low levels of entrepreneurial interest. In the discussion of potential business founders, female entrepreneurs are often classified as an untapped resource. Consequently, the focus on fostering female entrepreneurship has recently increased in attention in an attempt to enhance the overall level of entrepreneurship.

Newspapers are an important medium to transmit cultural values and ideas, as well as socio-political ideologies (Soothill/Grover, 1997). Stevenson (1995) argues that newspaper analysis is crucial to understanding mass communication and culture. Thus, discourse analysis of newspaper texts seems a fruitful research methodology to investigate how female entrepreneurship is reflected in newspapers, thus potentially influencing the level of female entrepreneurship in Germany. As discourses structure our sense of reality, the discourse on female entrepreneurship plays an important role in structuring the impression of potential women business founders of entrepreneurial reality (cf. Mills, 1997: 15).

We therefore analyzed the use of key female entrepreneurship terms in major national newspapers in Germany over the period of 1997 to 2003. The searched terms were: female business founder (‘Gründerin’) and female entrepreneur (‘Unternehmerin’). The study presented in this paper is an extension of a previous study conducted by the authors (Achtenhagen/Welter, 2003) in terms of coverage and research questions. The newspapers covered are ‘Bild’, ‘Welt’, ‘FAZ’, ‘Berliner Zeitung’, ‘Frankfurter Rundschau’, and ‘Süddeutsche Zeitung’. These newspapers are not only the most important national newspapers in Germany, they also represent a wide spectrum of political orientations and readership groups. We have collected more than 1000 articles from this search. For discussing the development of the discourse on female entrepreneurship as a cultural and societal phenomenon, we employ a longitudinal perspective to capture these changes. Therefore, we investigate a period of seven years (1997-2003), focusing the analysis on changes in discourse patterns and discourse contents.

However, in this paper we go a step beyond deconstructing the discourse of female entrepreneurship in German newspapers (cf. Nodoushani/Nodoushani, 1999). Rather, we link the development of the use of the female entrepreneurship-related terms to the analysis of the

potential and institutional environment for female entrepreneurs (Welter/Lageman, 2003). Since the late 1990s, both governments and public-private initiatives have shifted their focus on supporting women entrepreneurs, who are seen as contributing not only to employment, but to overall economic growth and well-being. In this context, we will analyse the possible influence of the current policy focus on media discourse and vice versa.

With this paper, we believe to make a number of different important contributions:

Firstly, we will further establish the method of discourse analysis in entrepreneurship research (cf. Achtenhagen/Welter, 2005). Secondly, we make an empirical contribution to the study of female entrepreneurship in its own right, by analysing the discourse around it in Germany. Thirdly, our findings have important implications for policy makers and actors involved in supporting female entrepreneurship.

The authors thankfully acknowledge the financial support of the Media Management and Transformation Centre at Jönköping International Business School.

Bibliography:

- Achtenhagen, L./Welter, F. (2003): 'Female Entrepreneurship as Reflected in German Media in the Years 1995-2001', in: Butler, John (ed.) (2003) *New Perspectives on Women Entrepreneurs*, Volume 3 in Research on Entrepreneurship and Management, Information Age Publishing, 71-100.
- Achtenhagen, L./Welter, F. (2005/forthcoming): 'Entrepreneurship Discourse in the Media', in: Neergaard, H./Ulhoi, J.P. (eds.): *Handbook of Qualitative Research Methods in Entrepreneurship*, Edgar Elsevier
- Mills, S. (1997): *Discourse*. London/New York: Routledge.
- Nodoushani, O./Nodoushani, P.A. (1999): A Deconstructionist Theory of Entrepreneurship: A Note, in: *American Business Review*, January, 45-49.
- Soothill, K./Grover, C. (1997): A Note on Computer Searches of Newspapers, in: *Sociology*, 31, 3, 591.
- Stevenson, N. (1995): *Understanding Media Cultures: Social Theory and Mass Communication*, London/Thousand Oaks: Sage.
- Welter, F./Lageman, B. (2003): *Gründerinnen in Deutschland – Potenziale und das institutionelle Umfeld*, Essen: Rheinisch-Westfälisches Institut für Wirtschaftsforschung, 111pp. [Female business founders in Germany – Potentials and the institutional environment]