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The Diva Storyline: an alternative Social Construction of Female Entrepreneurship

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Biography

Robert Smith MA, PhD is a Lecturer in Leadership and Management at Aberdeen Business School. His PhD related to the social construction of entrepreneurship and entrepreneurial character. Rob has many eclectic research interests including entrepreneurship, small and rural businesses as well as gendered entrepreneurial identities such as the Diva; the Matriarch; and the 'Bad Boy' Entrepreneur.

Abstract

Purpose: Many 'Divas' despite possessing destructive character traits ironically become successful entrepreneurs thus illustrating an alternative 'storied' social construction of entrepreneurship. This influences how female entrepreneurs are perceived in the popular press and can be manipulated as an alternative entrepreneurial reality. This work builds upon research into entrepreneurial identity introducing the 'Diva' concept.

Methodology/approach: The qualitative methodological approach involves an analysis of biographies of famous Diva's to identify common themes; and an internet trawl to identify supplementary micro-biographies and newspaper articles on 'Divas'. This tripartite approach allows rich data to be collected permitting a comparative analysis.

Findings: This empirical study presents the socially constructed nature of entrepreneurial narrative and the 'Diva storyline' demonstrating the influence of journalistic licence upon how successful women are portrayed. The study adds incremental credence to power of male dominated journalistic practices to vilify enterprising behaviour to sell newspapers.

Research limitations/implications: An obvious limitation to the work is that the sample of articles and biographies selected were chosen via search parameters which mention the word 'Diva'. Nevertheless, there is scope for further 'more detailed' research into the phenomenon to flesh out the model built in this preliminary paper.

Practical implications: An important implication for scholars and journalists is the need to reconsider how we tell and decode entrepreneur stories. As researchers we need to recognise that there are other avenues for women to become entrepreneurs than to become businesswomen and that it is alright for women to reject the 'entrepreneur' label.

Originality/value: This paper informs our understanding of the socially constructed nature of how we tell, understand and appreciate entrepreneur stories. It thus makes a unique contribution by illustrating that the storylines which constitute the 'Diva Cycle' are constructed from the same storylines that we associate with entrepreneur stories but narrated in a different order. It provides another heuristic device for understanding the social construction of gendered entrepreneurial identities making it of interest to feminist scholars of entrepreneurship and to social constructionists alike.

Key words: Female Entrepreneurship, Social Constructionism, Narrative Analysis, The 'Diva Cycle', Divapreneur.

The Diva Storyline: an alternative Social Construction of Female Entrepreneurship

“Now there was a time when they used to say - That behind every - great man there had to be a great woman. But in these times of change you know that it's no longer true. So we're comin' out of the kitchen cause there's somethin' we forgot to say to you. Sisters are doin' it for themselves. Standin' on their own two feet and ringin' on their own bell. Sisters are doin' it for themselves”.

The Eurythmics and Aretha Franklin.

1. In search of Diva Attitude

It is appropriate to begin with words from the feminist anthem because this is very much a paper about “*Sisters doing it for themselves*”. In analysing (and celebrating) the ‘Diva’ stereotype we encounter an alternative social construction adopted by women everywhere; this paper tells an alternative tale about how female entrepreneurs are increasingly adopting the ‘Diva Identity’ as their own. The Diva label challenges accepted gendered social constructions of the entrepreneur aligned to masculinity. Nevertheless, it is incumbent upon us to highlight that Diva identity is socially constructed in the tabloid press and media and therefore, carries with it a judgemental stigma. The term which derives from the Italian word 'diva' meaning “*Goddess*” or “*fine lady*” was originally used to describe a woman of rare, outstanding talent. Although in its purest form the term is generally regarded as a celebrated female Opera singer (particularly sopranos), in modern everyday usage it has expanded to include all outstanding female singers, celebrity film stars and now talented businesswomen. Indeed, it has now become an accepted synonym for feminine success and talent.

The genesis of this paper began several years ago by chance, when the author caught part of a documentary on the SKY TV ‘History Channel’ about the phenomenon.

The program was based around 'Divas' in the music industry. In the spellbinding story which unfolded we heard an incredible tale of women such as Dolly Parton, born in humble beginnings who nurtured their talent and, by virtue of hard work, were 'found' by an impresario who made them stars. In those days, it was, of course, the villainous Impresario who profited financially from what was essentially an uneven partnership because that was the way of the world. Granted, the singers were given centre stage and were able to establish themselves as products in demand whilst developing a reputation and fan base. This frequently entailed a grueling schedule of concert appearances which in turn fostered a disjointed hotel life style. The narrator told of a rapid rise from poverty and obscurity most often accompanied by personal problems. These may have been related to destructive relationships, or an onset of alcohol and or drug abuse. These are social issues which in a man would be accepted as being plain old fashioned 'hell-raising'. However, in women this was not the case, and such issues were portrayed as outrageous attention seeking antics. Inevitably, we heard of a rapid fall from grace, humiliation in the tabloid press and ultimately rejection by a horrified public. Only those who weathered the storm of public disapproval and climbed back onto the stage and, by virtue of talent and sheer perseverance, won back the hearts and minds of their public went on to achieve diva status. It is akin to a process of hazing whereby one emerges from the fire harder and sharper than before.

Indeed the fall from grace and the repentance of past sins and misdeeds are integral to donning the mantle of 'Divadom'. It was apparent that the Divas featured learned from the experience and took control of their lives and, in the process, became astute at business. In the male dominated music industry it was an accepted (and often

the only) way of establishing ones self. Such talented artistes are mocked as ‘Divas’ and their entrepreneurial status often remained hidden. This is even more surprising as, in this short paragraph, we have spanned the entrepreneurial storylines of humble-beginnings, prodigy status, hard work tales, and a fall from grace. This is, as we know, the basic outline of an entrepreneur’s story - the difference being that Divas are expected to fail whereas masculine entrepreneurs are not.

In this paper we go in search of an explanation of why this ‘Diva Cycle’ is so. The narrative angle to the study is important because, in seeking to position women in business in a men’s world, authors of women’s self-help manuals often deliberately make a play upon entrepreneurial mythology – thus, Hollander (2003) playfully entitled her book “*bags to riches*” an obvious play on the familiar ‘rags to riches’ storyline. Nevertheless, Hollander, herself a successful entrepreneur and business consultant, proffers sound advice for women with a diva attitude who wish to enter the world of business.

This paper is structured as follows: this introduction has set the scene and section two commences with a brief review of the existing literature on the Diva-entrepreneur phenomenon. More importantly it highlights the dearth of academic research into this feminine archetype. Section three discusses the methodology and, in particular, how to research non traditional academic constructs using internet websites as a database. Using material gleaned from a trawl of internet sites, section four develops the concept of the divapreneur. Section five synthesises the material in relation to entrepreneurial narrative and identity, melding it into our understanding of entrepreneurship theory. In the process

it answers the research questions of 1) whether women relate to the socially constructed 'Diva' narrative as an entrepreneurial identity; and 2) if so, what are the implications for women in business?

2. What the literature tells us

It is widely accepted in academic circles that traditional entrepreneur stories, with their masculine bias, simply do not resonate with all women thus engendering a misfit between gender and narrative. This paper does not aim to present a comprehensive review of female entrepreneurship or of women's business ownership, which has been done elsewhere by Ahl (2002); Carter, Anderson and Shaw (2003), among others. Rather, this section should, perhaps, have been entitled – "*what the literature does not tells us*" because, not surprisingly, there are no published journal articles on the diva as entrepreneur albeit there are a few academic studies and scholarly articles on divas *per se*. The classic study entitled "*The Diva's Mouth: Body, Voice, Prima Donna Politics*" by Leonardi & Pope (1998) concentrate on linking the diva voice to the concepts of seduction, ecstasy, divinity and passion – asserting that the diva voice challenges the strict binarisms of heterosexist codes associated with masculinity. Although this article was ostensibly about 'Prima Donna' politics, this concentration on the triage of mouth, body and voice is vital to understanding the power of the diva as a metaphor for change because it centres upon communication and the projection of feminine image and imagery. In an earlier study, Leonardi & Pope (1994) used the diva label as a voice metaphor to signify the power of feminine collaboration and empowerment [1]. There is also a large biographical literature relating to the life stories of many successful Divas

which cast light on the emerging phenomenon - for example, books by Nathan (1999); Bates, Thompson and Vaile (2003); Burns & LaFrance (2001); Hammond (2007); and Bomani (2007) provide a valuable insight into the phenomenon. Thus, to gain an insight into divadom and better understand the diva phenomenon it is necessary to turn to the popular book market. In this regard, there are a number of books of interest namely:-

- “*I am Diva: Every Woman’s Guide to Outrageous Living*” (Bates, Thompson and Vaile, 2003);
- “*Disruptive Divas: Feminism, Identity, and Popular Music*”, (Burns & LaFrance, 2001).
- “*The Diva Principle: Secrets to divine inspiration fore victorious attitude*” (Hammond, 2007).
- “*The Dynamic Diva Dollars - For Women Who Aren’t Afraid to Become Millionaires*” (Bomani, 2007).

These books provided a sound starting point for clothing the diva construct. The book ‘The Diva Principle’ (Hammond, 2007) is the bible of divadom and the genre of books discussed above tends to concentrate on the spectacular and, in particular, the spectacle of divadom - for example, upon outrageous and disruptive behaviour and on finding inner passion and the zest for life. In such works, successful woman in business are increasingly held up as positive role models with a diva attitude as opposed to the negative aspects of the construct.

How does this brief review of the diva complex relate to women in business, and thus, entrepreneurship in its widest sense? The study of Schlattman (1991) set in the music industry appreciated the rise of a group of woman singers known as the ‘Disco Divas’ from being singers to “*Material Girls*” who choreographed their own careers thereby increasing their earning power. The Diva construct has now been extended to

cover women in business – for example Carlassare (2001), Harrington (2001) and Forson & Ozbiglin (2002) all make reference to Dot.Com Divas. Indeed, Carlassare and Seybold (2001) profiled twenty of the most successful women in the internet business but, unlike the other Divas featured in this paper, are not household names.

3. Methodologies for researching emerging constructs

The methodological approaches used in this paper are broadly qualitative in nature and include firstly, an analysis of the biographies of famous Diva's to identify common themes. Secondly, there is an internet trawl to identify supplementary material in the form of micro-biographies; and finally, analysis of newspaper articles discussing the 'Diva' storyline. This tripartite approach allows rich data to be collected from practical sources permitting a comparative approach to be adopted. As this phenomenon has not been subject to academic scrutiny it is an appropriate and practical method. This tripartite approach allows rich data to be collected from practical sources permitting a comparative approach to be adopted. As this phenomenon has not been subject to academic scrutiny it is an appropriate and practical method.

As the title of this section suggests in relation to entrepreneurship the diva phenomena is an emerging construct. Emerging constructs require different methodologies than accepted fields of research. As a consequence, the author has been forced to adopt a journalistic approach and style in which reporting and the use of "*thick description*" (Geertz, 1973) take precedence over scientific rigour. This is necessary to raise awareness of the emerging concept and introduce it into the rhetoric and discourse

of enterprise culture. The author accepts that this style of presentation will inevitably engender criticism from scholars for whom rigorous methodology is sacrosanct [2].

4. Constructing and developing the diva construct

The 'Diva' construct is a storied and predominantly gendered construct which starts in adolescence because it is in the stages of early maturity that talent often becomes self-evident. However, in order to develop the construct it was necessary to conduct internet research to locate examples of Divas worthy of study. This was used to identify key behavioural traits and qualities associated with diva status and, in particular, the semiotic aspects of diva identity. We then examine the emergence of the supermodel and her metamorphosis to entrepreneurial status utilising micro-biography. Finally, we link the diva concept to entrepreneurship *per se* by examining three more micro case studies of female entrepreneurs who have adopted and embraced diva status.

Conducting internet research to locate the construct

From a trawl of internet search engines it was possible to locate hundreds of examples of famous Divas from different creative genres including Opera; Outstanding non-operatic singers; Iconic actresses; and Supermodels. Mayer (2007) incisively argues that as a genre the actress was the first photographic icon. This is significant because aesthetics and, especially the socially constructed nature of beauty, play a significant part in the construction of success in the careers of individual divas. See Table 1 below for a cross section of such examples.

Table 1 – Examples of famous Diva's (source : see appendix 1 for details of individual websites perused)	
Diva Category	Named individuals – Role Models
Opera Singers	Maria Callas, Jenny Lind, Joan Sutherland, Birgit and Nilsson.
Outstanding Non Operatic Singers	Gladys Knight, Madonna, Britney Spears, Alanis Morissette, Christina Aguilera, Aretha Franklin, Diana Ross, Alicia Keys, Björk, Mariah Carey, Whitney Houston, Celine Dion, Patti Labelle, Barbra Streisand, Gloria Estefan, Cher, Tina Turner, Whitney Houston, Celine Dion, Mariah Carey, Beyoncé, Aretha Franklin, Shania Twain, Donna Summer, Shakira, Lisa Marie Presley, LeAnn Rimes, Brandy, Ashanti, Cyndi Lauper, Anastacia, Stevie Nicks, Courtney Love, Fiona Apple, Gwen Stefani, Holly McNarland, and Natalie Imbruglia.
Iconic Actresses	Audrey Hepburn, Ava Gardner, Bette Davis, Elizabeth Taylor, Gloria Swanson, Grace Kelly, Greta Garbo, Jean Harlow, Joan Crawford, Judy Garland, Julia Roberts, Julie Andrews, Katharine Hepburn, Lana Turner, Lauren Bacall, Lucille Ball, Marlene Dietrich, Rita Hayworth, Sophia Loren, and Vivien Leigh.
Supermodels	Twiggy, Cheryl Tiegs, Jean Shrimpton, Carol Alt, Lynn Sutherland, Janice Dickinson; Beverly Johnson, Margaux Hemingway, Jerry Hall, Patti Hansen, Anna Bayle, Tyra Banks, Lisa Snowdon, Heidi Klum, Gisele Bündchen, Claudia Schiffer, Christie Brinkley; Christie Turlington, Elle Macpherson (the body), Cindy Crawford, Niomi Campbell and Kate Moss.

This search enabled the identification of divas as role models for other girls to follow. It is also significant that the list in Table 1 crosses cultures and continents as well as including examples identifiable to different generations. This enables an overarching 'Diva Identity' to be constructed from the behaviours of the divas themselves. This entails delving into key behavioural traits and qualities associated with diva status.

Identifying key behavioural traits and qualities associated with diva status

Being a 'Diva' is also associated with 'attitude'. Therefore, it is hardly surprising that the term has developed negative connotations with an implication (or even expectation) that a star so labeled will be arrogant, difficult to work with, manipulative, fussy, highly strung, privileged and demanding. The term diva is often associated with being synonymous with the female stereotype of the gold digger who does not believe the law and accepted rules of courtesy apply to them. Professional actors often use this term to describe

someone who desires the stage spotlight over others. The term 'High Maintenance' is also often bandied about in the press. Divas are regarded as being greedy, needy, grasping and expensive both in terms of money and time. Other adjectives associated with the term are brittle, finicky and temperamental. From this litany of descriptors we can see that it is not a eulogy in the traditional sense which is emerging. Nevertheless, it is a fascinating story.

Moreover, Diva status and thus 'Divadom' is based around a combination of skill and beauty and only a small cliché of women accrue the (siren like) status of being a true diva who possesses endurance, a glamorous persona, an air of mystery coupled with a tragic countenance. Above all, a diva has presence and, because the entire basis of diva status is to impress and to show off, it is, in many respects, an identity that one performs. Indeed, it is significant that Costantino (2000) identified this performative nature of the diva personality. Another facet the diva shares with the entrepreneur is that, as a general rule, they are loved by their public and often subject to popular acclaim. However, not all successful women identify with or approve of the Diva label, as demonstrated by the list of stars that declined to participate in the popular VH1 Divas concert series such as Barbara Streisand, Christina Aguilera, Britney Spears, Jennifer Lopez and Kylie Minogue. The singer Gladys Knight openly disapproves of the diva label. Thus, like the label entrepreneur the term 'Diva' is a controversial one. In attempting to conduct a rudimentary analysis of the material presented in this section it is self-evident that there is a semiotic aspect to diva identity.

Appreciating the semiotic aspect of diva identity

There is also a semiotic aspect to the diva personality. Essentially, divas are ‘bad girls’; they are to femininity what ‘bad boys’ are to masculinity. Divas court tragedy in the form of the tragic love affair, the sex scandal or rocky abusive marriage. The diva phenomenon appears to be based upon the aesthetics of feminine sexuality and fragility. Indeed, the focus is on the face (or faces) of the women. Hammond (2007) discusses how to get and keep a victorious attitude that will set a woman apart with her own unique style by unleashing the beauty and power of her inner self. It is about getting ones act together—emotionally, spiritually, mentally, and physically. Divas are iconic special people with the ability to communicate their personal brand to diverse audiences to make people take notice of them (Brooks & Valentine, 2006). Such icons are role models for others. They practice what Pavda (2006; and Rowe, 1995) refer to as “*unruly womanliness*”.

According to Pavda (2006) the business of divas is to show (or put on a show). For Pavda (2006: 28), divas such as Barbara Streisand, Kylie Minogue, Cher and Jennifer Lopez are characterized by highly carnivalesque, “*ultra-feminine*” outfits, accessories and gestures. Clothes are important in dressing like a diva. These ladies of legendary status positively drip diamonds and furs and are surrounded by a coterie of acolytes presenting a feminine form of bling. This epitomises the female equivalent of masculine flamboyance. One is reminded here of divas such as Dolly Parton and Tina Turner. According to Pavda these “*celebrities have sophisticatedly produced and reproduced their womanhood on their skin, hair, fingernails, gestures, their gait, moves, tone of speech, glamorous outfits, and sassy accessories*”. Divas consciously play the part of the

“*ultimate*” femmes, the admired superwomen, and thus, exude a theatricality that is part of their personality.

Moreover, Pavda (2006: 27) stresses that divas are subject to ‘Diva Worship’ because of their over emphasised glitzy femininity. Divas are characterised by exuberance despite being vulnerable. Pavada, echoing Norton & Reid (1999) discusses the semiotic construction of Diva identity and provides examples such as

- The British pop star Dusty Springfield, with her towering steel-blond beehive, panda-eyed makeup, and slightly grannyish gowns;
- The black, supermodel, Disco diva, B-movie goddess Grace Jones with her theatrical costumes, red gloves, dark lipstick, and prominent alto voice.
- The Tennessee country singer Dolly Parton, with her massive blond wigs and buxom physique.
- The TV soap opera of the 1980s, *Dynasty*’s star Joan Collins, who played the powerful antagonist Alexis with her magnificent evening dresses, red lipstick, and sophisticated manipulations, a fabulously nasty character.

The diva, thus, has to position herself as “*an entrepreneur of oneself*” (Yurchak, 2003: 73). Yurchak argues that in order to succeed, the new entrepreneurial classes in Russia have to fashion themselves as entrepreneurial subjects, and so it is with the diva.

However, in the new Russia one has to present oneself as an entrepreneur or ‘*true careerist*’ albeit only men are accepted as true careerists. In a throwback to Victorian attitudes the role of a woman is to compliment her entrepreneur. Yurchak (2003: 82-83) describes a new kind of diva in Russia, namely the women who sets out to marry a rich businessman. Yurchak asks “*What do schoolgirls, retired women, salesgirls and pop divas, married women and old spinsters dream of?*” In Yurchak’s Russia marriage to a businessman is the highest career achievement women can aim for. Consequentially, Russian lifestyle magazines now urge a new generation of women to dress up (like a diva?) for her man. In Russia this ‘old wordly’ chauvinistic attitude is excused by the

fact that business is regarded as a masculine province. Indeed, Yurchak (2003: 84) presents the perceived ideology that women in business have problems building long term relationships in their personal lives [3]. This provides evidence of the socially constructed nature of everyday constructs which may vary across cultures and continents. One such new social construct worthy of further consideration is the supermodel.

From supermodels to entrepreneurs

In the fashion world the diva goes by another label namely that of the 'Supermodel', a highly-paid elite with a worldwide reputation and often a background in haute couture and commercial modeling. The term became popular in the media during the 1980s and 1990s. It is significant in relation to this paper that supermodels share similar traits with divas, namely:-

- A reputation within their industry;
- They work for top fashion designers and labels.
- They have multi-million dollar contracts, endorsements and campaigns.
- They are household names – first name recognition is coveted;
- They have in effect branded themselves, and their name is their currency.
- They are photogenic (and thus representative of the socially constructed nature of femininity, beauty and sexuality).

Supermodels have a diva attitude – for example supermodel Linda Evangelista famously uttered the words "*We don't wake up for less than \$10,000 a day*". Supermodels have joined movie stars as iconic symbols of luxury and wealth, and many have spanned the void between image and personality, landing roles in movies and / or achieving celebrity status in gossip columns, talk shows, and night clubs. Many inspire the creation of franchised merchandise. Through exposure to fame many supermodels took charge of their destiny and careers and importantly began to market themselves to command higher

fees, although it led to a situation where the super model label was associated with high prices and a poor attitude or, in other words, a reputation for being a bit of a diva. Since the late 1990s there has been a cross over, with actresses and singers replacing supermodels on fashion magazine covers and advertisements.

The stories of supermodels frequently come to us in the form of micro-biographies. The potted biographies of supermodels as hosted on the website www.supermodels-online.com are commoditised and linked to the products they endorse. Nevertheless, the life stories of many supermodels mirror those of divas worldwide and, as a result, the two gendered stereotypes can be merged for the sake of this paper. One such micro biography worthy of study is that of German supermodel Heidi Klum; her story epitomises the emergence of the supermodel as an entrepreneurial typology and therefore, is a role model for other girls to follow. (See Micro Case Study 1 below).

Micro Case Study 1: Heidi Klum's years of Learning

To date, the life story of supermodel Heidi Klum reads very much like a traditional fairy tale. We are told that as a child she grew up with parents in the fashion industry. Her father worked in the cosmetic industry and her mother was a hair stylist. We are asked to believe that the young Heidi had no plans on a career in the fashion industry yet (as if by miracle), she became one of most famous supermodels of the past decade. By chance, when perusing a magazine in 1991, she stumbled across an advertisement for a modelling competition. Encouraged by her friends, she sent of a few photographs. Eighteen year old Heidi won the competition and was soon engaging in modelling assignments in Paris, Milan and then the States. She signed with the Elite Modelling Agency in New York, eventually becoming famous as the face of Victoria's Secret. Other prime contracts followed as she adorned the front pages of fashion magazines. Television appearances and a part in the hit movies 'The Devil Wears Prada', 'Ella Enchanted' and 'Perfect Strangers' followed. This platform of legitimacy allowed her to launch her own successful fashion project 'Project Runway' which is a television programme. We are told of a busy Heidi launching her own jewellery and shoe collections. In the process, the model became successful in business and has turned to designing. The philanthropic married mother of three has turned to charity work with fundraisers for organisations such as the 'For All Kids Foundation', the 'American Red Cross' and the 'Pediatric AIDS Foundation'.

This typical fairytale rendition of the rise from supermodel to super-businesswomen is somewhat disingenuous in that it ignores important issues such as her upbringing, her trading upon social capital and the 'entrepreneurial learning trajectory', that is the

mastering of one's trade and using this as a launch pad to move on to other related career paths. It is a far cry from the children's novel 'Heidi's Years of Wondering and Learning' by the Swiss author Johanna Spyri [4]. Nor is the latter day Heidi's tale unusual. Other supermodels turned moguls include Janice Dickinson (opened a Modeling Agency) and Tyra Banks (producer of America's Next Top Model). We begin to see obvious links between diva identity and entrepreneurship *per se*. (See also the book by Maillet (2007) for an insight into the world of the diva).

Linking diva identity to entrepreneurship per se

This section continues to develop the link between the diva phenomena and the practice of entrepreneurship by demonstrating that an increasing number of women entrepreneurs are choosing to adopt a diva identity. It is significant that it was an internet search which enabled the material presented below to be readily available to the author as a researcher. In the following section, the author presents three prime examples of online communities of like-minded female entrepreneurs. Ironically, such developments have only been made possible by the introduction of the internet and, in particular, chat rooms for on-line communities. The first relates to an online community Divapreneur™. (See Micro Case Study 2).

Micro Case Study 2: Divapreneur™ An Online Community for Diva-Entrepreneurs

This new online peer community for female entrepreneurs at www.divapreneur.org has been billed as a premiere network for modern female entrepreneurs looking for information, advice, support and empowerment from other women business owners. The divapreneur website stresses that "*Today's female entrepreneur brings more style, flare and femininity into the boardroom than her predecessors... and ... wears chic, form-fitting fashions, is up on the latest beauty trends, and even with a packed agenda and Blackberry glued to her hand, she's never afraid to let her hair down. The type of woman who has it all together, some might call her a 'Diva'*". Membership is by invitation only. The network was founded in December, 2007 by International designer and illustrator Elaine Biss of Lancaster, Pennsylvania, with the vision of being the leading online community for modern female entrepreneurs. Biss made the term

Divapreneur a trademark. It has gained 800 members. On its website it boasts of adding “sass and sophistication”. It creates a sense of community and uses ‘Teach Night’ Podcasts allowing members to share their expertise. Members get 360-degree access to other members. This enhances their networking capabilities and develops their confidence in being themselves.

Another networking organisation worthy of note is www.wellhealeddivas.com, as discussed in Micro Case Study 3.

Micro Case Study 3: www.wellhealeddivas.com

The aim of the dedicated network is to inspire and empower women globally to step up to the next level. It was set up by two (in their own words) sassy, positive and successful entrepreneurs Jane Keynon and Yvonne Halling who argue that there has never been a better and more exciting time to be a woman with the choices, opportunities and the projections for personal wealth and entrepreneurship being on the ascendancy. They aim to bridge the gap between the increasing academic achievement of British girls and the fact that British girls have the lowest self-esteem in Europe. It is about setting the tone and leading by example. According to serial entrepreneurs Kenyon and Halling, the British suffer from guilt trips; play the superwomen game; act and behave like men; are too competitive as opposed to creative; accept mediocrity; under value themselves; put everyone’ else’s needs before their own; and perpetuate the lie that money does not matter. Kenyon and Halling urge women to “*to get back into our female, diva energy and be true to ourselves*” instead of competing against each other. The talk is of sisterhood and of regaining lost identity. Kenyon and Halling are embarking upon a Divas 2008 Preview Tour to narrate their stories and philosophies as well as to recruit likeminded women to their network and market their workshops on networking, relationships, wealth creation, money, property, entrepreneurship and speaking. They aim to do this via Mastermind Groups and Coaching Services. The rhetoric is of stepping up and getting connected and the events are billed as a journey of self-discovery to release the inner diva.

The need for networking and being networked with likeminded individuals can occur after the entrepreneurial event, as is the case with the Young Black and Rich Network – www.youngblackrich.net (YBR ©). (See Micro Case Study 4).

Micro Case Study 4: www.youngblackrich.net

YBR © is billed as the successful lifestyle network for today’s young black and rich woman with a winning mindset. According to the publicity spiel on the website the network was created as a haven for today’s Diva Entrepreneurs. The emphasis is upon expressing oneself whilst encouraging talent and creativity. The goal is to uplift, inspire, and transform the lives of women by providing information on topics relating to living a successful lifestyle. This is achieved by using the website as a virtual bulletin board containing helpful tips, articles, and success stories, the point of which is to motivate and encourage entrepreneurial behaviour amongst its already rich (and not so rich) members. The YBR philosophy is that the keys to true happiness and freedom lie within. Members allegedly include Oprah Winfrey, Beyonce Knowles, Tyra Banks and Karen Washington.

From the above Micro Case Studies it can be demonstrated that the diva construct can be applied to the context of entrepreneurship *per-se*. These internet colonies share a mentoring role in fostering a new generation of women entrepreneurs with a positive diva attitude. Evidence of the entrepreneurial content of the diva storyline can be found in the biographies of famous divas as socially constructed in the media.

5. The Diva Storyline as socially constructed in biography

For Pavda (2006) autobiography can be a process of transformation and alteration in which one constantly re-invents and re-produces themselves in a never-ending story, multi-layered, multi-faceted, and multi-versioned, inseparable from art and performativity. From readings of several biographies relating to divas some observable patterns and themes emerge from which it is possible to construct a socially constructed model of different stages in a diva's career. The biographies selected included those of Dolly Parton (e.g. Parton, 1995; Mahoney, 1998; Nash, 2002; and Parton, 2002) and Tina Turner (e.g. Turner & Loder, 1987; Turner, 2005) and Hampton, 1998). Although it is recognised that the biographies of two divas do not constitute a representative sample it nevertheless, represents a viable starting point in what is part of a wider study. This was confirmed by dip sampling other biographies of famous divas.

A socially constructed template for telling diva stories

These identified themes roughly correspond to the notion of "*Rites of passage*" (Van Gennep, 1961). There are six identifiable stages in the ontology of becoming diva:-

- **The Finding**: In this stage we see the diva being found in true fairytale fashion by a dashing impresario. It is usual for the poor girl or findling to have tales of

- poverty and marginality to tell. It is essential that the poor girl has talent and looks in abundance. In the early stages of her career the diva has to concentrate on playing the poor-girl to good effect.
- **The Flaunting:** In this stage, the findling is flaunted as a product by the impresario. In these hungry years she must continue to play the poor-girl and accrue storylines such as the hard work tale and prodigy storyline. In this phase our girl develops her talent.
 - **Achieving Celebrity Status:** This stage sees the girl making it as a celebrity in recognition of her hard work in building self and career. The findling becomes other in the process of building a reputation upon which she will later trade. In these stages, she is very much the property of the impresario or his/her company.
 - **Divadom:** In this stage we see the findling flower into womanhood and achieve a personal legitimacy as a star by right. It is a process of arriving during which she develops a diva personality. However, in the process she is smitten by the sin of hubris as she inevitably oversteps the mark.
 - **The Fall from Grace:** This pivotal stage sees our girl crash and burn like the proverbial Icarus of legend. This can result from the hectic lifestyle on the road, a chaotic lifestyle, the strain of touring, over exposure to alcohol and drugs and/or the failure of personal relationships. This element sees the introduction of tragedy and pathos into the stories of individual divas. A classic example is that of the singer Karen Carpenter whose tragic and largely self-induced early death entitles her to a place in divadom. Brooks (2008) identifies the theme of the doomed Diva character. Furthermore, Brooks articulates that Beyoncé emerged victorious from the fall from grace as a co-producer and entrepreneur. Similarly Bradshaw (2008) suggests that we have a drive to push us to pursue, consume, and destroy the diva and this in particular highlights our cultural attachment to narratives of the diva's abjection and shame. For Bradshaw, the Diva personifies feminist rebelliousness and through the diva narrative, we see the formulaic destruction of the ambitious woman necessary to achieve a return to the status quo. It is a punishment for daring to be ambitious.
 - **The Comeback:** This stage sees the now humbled girl taking stock of her life in a process of rebuilding self and sanity. She must re establish a sense of self worth and take charge of her destiny. Quite often this involves taking charge of her career and developing a business sense. In many cases this will involve her becoming a self-directed entrepreneur. In the process she passes through a necessary transformation from artiste to artisan. For Costantino (2000), the Israeli diva Astrid Hadad is a prime example of an artiste and entrepreneur. This re-birthing process allows the findling to start again, but this time on her own terms. She must begin a process of building her own contacts and network instead of being a part of the network of others. It is a steep learning curve. It is significant that both Dolly Parton and Tina Turner became successful businesswomen and entrepreneurs.

An analysis of what this model tells us

From an analysis of the above model, it is apparent (as scholars of entrepreneurship) that the model mirrors that of traditional entrepreneur stories in many respects. Significantly, it is narrated in a different sequential order. This demonstrates the socially constructed nature of storytelling but, in particular, of entrepreneurial narrative *per se*. The diva cycle (as it is best described) is a long painful road from rags to riches. It is no Cinderella fairy story. The diva cycle is perhaps a necessary evil for the ordinary working girl. This is so because during the early years she must learn to ply her trade and develop the skills, experience and social capital necessary to become 'other' and be accepted as an entrepreneur in her own right. In these early stages (1-3) it is the impresario who bears the risk financially. The diva, impresario relationship can take two forms. The first takes on the countenance of a destructive relationship whereby the relationship mirrors that of pimp-working girl. The second format is that of mentor – client. Thus, the obvious exploitation of femininity can be reconstructed as an alternative form of apprenticeship. During an apprenticeship one does not expect to be well-rewarded for one's effort. It is possible to reconstruct the story as an entrepreneurial process.

In the Celebrity phase, it is the impresario who benefits financially, and it is during this stage that the diva realises she is worth more. It is perhaps this realisation that makes a contribution in the formation of the genuine diva attitude. In the press, this attitude is portrayed as being unreasonable and the result of an unstable character, however, it can also be interpreted as a process of learning to renegotiate one's worth. It is not the item being demanded that is important but the diva's ability to renegotiate the unwritten contract between findling and finder. It is a necessary learning curve in the

ontology of becoming other. This phase leads inevitably, and often inexorably, to the 'Fall from Grace' scenario. In this stage, it is necessary that a breakdown of trust occurs between impresario and diva. If this process does not run its course, the starlet is unlikely to earn diva status and will continue a career as the property of the impresario. This destructive phase is essential to turn talent into capital, and it is significant that unlike the male entrepreneur or impresario, women benefit from this fall from grace. In typical entrepreneur stories the masculine entrepreneur is not afforded this opportunity, as a fall from grace brings ridicule and humiliation from which few men recover.

6. Conclusions

This section of the paper revisits the research questions, namely:

- Whether women relate to the socially constructed 'Diva' narrative as an entrepreneurial identity; and
- If so what are the implications for women in business?

The 'Diva stereotype' or more likely the 'Diva archetype' is an important addition to the complex archetypal architecture that underpins the behaviour of women and therefore, how they may behave as entrepreneurs. It is also important because it supersedes the "two guys in a garage model" that we have come to associate with entrepreneurship. It is perhaps too early to claim that women *per se* relate to the diva construct as an entrepreneurial identity? This will obviously require extensive empirical testing which lies outside the remit of this paper. However, from an examination of the micro case

studies presented above it is possible to theorise that this may well be the case. Granted there will be women who reject diva status, but then this will only be natural as one model cannot be expected to fit all circumstances and life stories. For example diva status is likely to be rejected by those who exhibit archetypal masculine traits and behaviours. It may well be rejected by free thinking women who have no need of a legitimising construct in the first place. Clearly, further research is required.

In order to address the second research question of “*what are the implications for women in business*”?, some speculation is necessary. It can, however, be stressed that the diva construct is a living construct that provides those who adopt it with a readymade identity. Such an identity is in tune with the socially constructed nature of femininity that allows the diva to be first and foremost herself and to express this via face, voice and artefacts such as clothing and jewellery - to be ‘*herself*’ with all that entails. The fact that she may or may not be an entrepreneur is not important. After all it is merely another label to add to the existing archetypes of mother, girlfriend, sister, and so forth.

The key results from this study illustrate the socially constructed nature of entrepreneurial narrative and the diva storyline. Furthermore, the paper provides evidence of the influence of journalistic licence on how successful women are portrayed as ‘Diva’s’. The study, incrementally, adds further credence to the power of male dominated journalistic practices to vilify enterprising behaviour to sell newspapers. There are obvious limitations to the work in that the sample of newspaper articles and biographies selected were chosen via search parameters which mention the word ‘Diva’ and, as a result, was bound to bias the results.

Nevertheless, the findings have important implications for scholars and journalists relating to how we tell and decode entrepreneur stories (and variants thereof). Although journalists are not policy makers they, nevertheless, influence popular constructions of enterprising individuals and, as such, have responsibilities to a wider readership. This paper, in critically discussing how the 'Diva' stereotype informs our understanding of the socially constructed nature of how we tell, understand and appreciate entrepreneur stories makes an important contribution. In many respects this original paper makes a unique contribution by illustrating that like entrepreneur stories, the storylines which constitute the 'Diva Cycle' are constructed from the same storylines narrated in a different order. In doing so, the paper provides yet another heuristic device for understanding the social construction of gendered entrepreneurial identities and will be of interest to feminist scholars of entrepreneurship and to social constructionists alike. The diva storyline does appear to be an alternative social construction of female entrepreneurship through which women can engage with the troublesome masculine construct that is entrepreneurship.

Footnotes

[1] Interestingly, as a man, the author found it amusing that the emphasis was on the screaming voice.

[2] It would have been possible to concentrate on the theoretical aspects of social constructionism but such expositions have been done elsewhere with more rigour (Ahl, 2002).

[3] This mirrors the profile of the hard working entrepreneurs in the West, as portrayed in novels, who are single minded in pursuit of business.

[4] Like the template of Horatio Alger's boys, the original Heidi was an orphan girl raised by an aunt. When the aunt leaves the six year old to seek work in Dresden, Heidi is left in the care of her grumpy grandfather but leads an idyllic childhood with her best friend Peter the goatherd until her aunt returns and takes her back to Dresden to look after an invalid girl Clara. Heidi escapes into an inner world of self-education and metaphorically loses herself in books, teaching herself to read and write. Ill health (epilepsy) sees her return to her grandfather, but Heidi continues to write to Clara and convinces her aunt to send Clara to the Swiss mountains where she is nursed back to good health. However, whilst the plot of a typical Alger book is about making good, the only plot open to Heidi was to 'do good'.

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