Un/doing gender stereotypes in digital technology journalism

Vanessa Clark
Student number: CLRVAN002

A Media Creative Production submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the award of the degree of Master of Arts in Media Theory and Practice
Supervisor: Professor Herman Wasserman

Faculty of the Humanities
University of Cape Town
2021

COMPULSORY DECLARATION
This work has not been previously submitted in whole, or in part, for the award of any degree. It is my own work. Each significant contribution to, and quotation in, this dissertation from the work, or works, of other people has been attributed, and has been cited and referenced.

Signature: Signed by candidate Date: 27 July 2021

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About this Master's submission

This submission comprises three pieces of journalism and this analytical essay.

The three pieces of journalism:

1. *Calling bullshit*: a feature article. Interviewee: Kirsten Daniels[1] [word count: 4,789]
2. *Together*: three chapters of a digital technology entrepreneur's biography. Interviewee: Alexandria Procter [word count: 5,234]
3. *The Elbowroom*: pilot podcast episode. Interviewee: Jaishree Naidoo [45:52 minutes]

This essay's word count: 11,335

The articles and podcast were published on a website: elbowroom.co.za. Access to this site has been restricted to honour a confidentiality agreement with an interviewee.

[1] Not their real name

Introduction

Remote working has captured the public's imagination since the start of the Covid-19 health crisis in 2020. But for me, and many other freelancers around the world, remote working is unremarkable—and in my case has been the *status quo* for a decade and a half. It's not unusual to work with editors I have never met in real life, and sometimes not even had a voice conversation with. Our interactions are by email: they email me editorial briefs, I fire back any questions, and then file the copy by return of email.

This was what sparked my interest in the role of the editorial brief in shaping media outcomes, specifically gender stereotyping. I was concerned that the digital technology business media was producing and reproducing a gender-stereotyped image of digital technology entrepreneurs and I wondered what was influencing that outcome. In some cases, this was happening despite my editors actively recruiting a diverse set of freelancers to work with.

This situation was a thumbnail of a broader deadlock in feminist media theory that focussed on the representation of women by the media. Why, if newsrooms are becoming more gender equitable—South Africa has the most equitable newsrooms in the world (Robertson, Selva, and Nielsen 2021)—are women still under-represented in the media? My focus was the digital technology entrepreneur-as-man stereotype: as a digital technology journalist this was one of the main topics I wrote about and I wanted to avoid perpetuating this; as a member of the South African startup community I was excluded by this; and as someone who is typically hopeful about the impact of digital technology, I wanted to avoid inequality being coded into our futures due to only a sub-set of humanity "qualifying" to be digital technology entrepreneurs. Media studies literature indicated production studies might be a useful research avenue to explore this deadlock.

In this creative media production and essay I explored how the editorial brief impacts the creation of gender-stereotyped digital technology entrepreneurs in digital technology journalism in South Africa. A second objective was to explore how journalists can create alternative, non-gender-stereotyped stories about digital technology entrepreneurs in South Africa. Using critical reflection I compared and contrasted the production of a feature article, book chapters and podcast with my typical experience as a journalist, and considered the broader implications for digital technology business journalism. I paid

special attention to where authority lies during the production process. Using Ahl's strategies for challenging gender stereotypes in business school case studies about entrepreneurs as a guide (2007), I established there are methods that journalists and editors can deploy today to avoid gender stereotyping digital technology entrepreneurs.

The lens I used to consider gender is unfortunately a binary, heteronormative one, informed by a gender binary prevalent in much of the literature. While this enabled me to discuss and consider the gender inequality in how digital technology entrepreneurs are portrayed by the media at a simplistic level, it is a significant limitation and should not be seen as an endorsement of a gender binary or heteronormativity.

My findings, although limited by the size and nature of my project, could contribute to further research into media production in general, and the role of production factors in producing more feminist journalism. An unexpected implication for my work emerged during the pandemic with the shift to remote work. If editors will be increasingly briefing their journalists remotely, the role of the editorial brief is going to become ever more important. My work supports the thinking that editorial briefs can't be considered to be neutral or inert and so their impact should be carefully considered by editors and journalists.

Literature review

My point of departure for this reflective essay is the under- and misrepresentation of women in the media and the gendered stereotyping of digital technology entrepreneurs. Further, an additional departure point is my observation and experience as a freelance journalist that the editorial brief is the primary and most salient point of contact and interaction between a freelance journalist, their editor and the publication they are writing for.

This literature review provides a brief overview of feminist media theory through the lens of gender and media representation. It considers the shift from a "body count" approach (De Bruin 2000) to remedying the under-representation of women in the media to a broader, more nuanced solution that considers more than the role of the individual journalist. I

localise this primarily European and US theoretical canon with current South African and African research.

My creative media production and this essay examine specifically business-to-business digital technology journalism, and especially the portrayal of digital technology entrepreneurship. I go on to provide a brief overview of the emergence of the gender-stereotyped entrepreneur, including in the media, and also consider some of the impacts of this stereotype.

Finally, in an attempt to move beyond an employment equity solution to inequities in media and gender representation, I consider alternative approaches to telling stories about digital technology entrepreneurs. These approaches guide the creation and evaluation of my creative media production, exploring, as it does, how to tell alternative, non-gender-stereotyped stories about digital technology entrepreneurs in a South African context.

My discussion of gender representation in and by the media drew on literature from the media studies, journalism and communications fields. This research considers gender representation within the context of general newsrooms and news (although the Glass Ceilings Two report (Morna 2007) does consider the various beats in a newsroom, including science and technology). Given its nascency compared to, for instance, general news studies or political communications studies, there was no research focusing on digital technology business journalism, nor its representation of women entrepreneurs, within this body of work. I therefore intersected media studies, journalism and communications literature with literature in the business and entrepreneur studies field, as well as research carried out by the digital technology industry itself, to achieve more specificity in my study.

Definitions

Because the study of digital technology entrepreneurship is still nascent, and even entrepreneurship is “a multifaceted phenomenon with many different meanings and definitions” (Global Entrepreneurship Monitor n.d.) it is worth defining key terms I use in this study.

Entrepreneurship

The Global Entrepreneurship Monitor Consortium, which was formed as a joint research project between Babson College (USA) and London Business School (UK) in 1999 to research entrepreneurship around the world, defines entrepreneurship as: "Any attempt at new business or new venture creation, such as self-employment, a new business organization, or the expansion of an existing business, by an individual, a team of individuals, or an established business" (Global Entrepreneurship Monitor n.d.).

Digital Technology Entrepreneurship

Korchagina, Sychjova-Peredero and Korchagin synthesised a definition of digital technology entrepreneurship from the established notion of classical technology entrepreneurship combined with thinking about the digital economy. They propose the following definition of digital technology entrepreneurship: "Entrepreneurial activity in the course of which all or most of the consumer values are created by the direct use of digital technologies" (2019, 310).

Digital Technology Entrepreneurs

It follows then that digital technology entrepreneurs are people who start or expand businesses or ventures that use digital technology to create value. For example, my interviewee Naidoo starts her business to use digital technology, in the form of artificial intelligence (AI), to create value for doctors and patients through speedier radiography diagnoses.

The problem with the "body count" approach

Van Zoonen's book, *Feminist Media Studies*, is a useful starting point for this discussion of feminist media theory with a focus on media and gender representation (1994). It broadened the early agenda of feminist media studies from under-representation, stereotyping and socialisation (McQuail 2010). Specifically, it provided a nuanced critique of the "first wave" of feminist media and its focus on employment equity as the solution to the under-representation of women in the newsroom and mass media (Van Zoonen 1994).

This employment equity focus emerged from Gaye Tuchman's foundational essay, "The Symbolic Annihilation of Women by the Mass Media" (1978) which appeared as the introduction to *Hearth and Home: Images of Women in the Mass Media*. This essay and the

work it introduced is widely considered, among Western scholars, to be the starting point for feminist theory in communication (McQuail 2010; Cuklanz 2016; Steiner 2017; Ross et al. 2020).

Employment equity was the focus of media theory during the 1970s and 1980s (Rao and Rodny-Gumede 2020). The thinking was that if only a critical mass of women in the newsroom were achieved, the issues around sexism and discrimination would be solved, both in the newsroom and in how women were represented in the media (Steiner 2017).

Although Van Zoonen did not argue that employment equity was an unimportant tactic in gaining gender equity in the mass media, she did maintain that it was too simplistic and narrow an approach. Primarily because it assumed a singular, stable view of women and gender, and it ignored the social and organisational contexts in which the media is produced that could also have an impact on how gender is represented (Van Zoonen 1994).

Despite Van Zoonen's subsequent critique and expansion of feminist theorists' initial focus on a body count solution, Tuchman's work cast a long shadow. The essay's title became academic shorthand for the exclusion of marginalised groups by the media and other institutions, and it is still cited today (Graber 2019; Mir and Paschyn 2018; Pastor and Verge 2021), including by me.

The enduring legacy of the body count approach could also be seen in recent international (Andı, Selva, and Nielsen 2020; Robertson, Selva, and Nielsen 2021) and local (Morna 2007; Morna and Rama 2009; Daniels et al. 2018) research, which focused on reporting employment equity statistics. To be sure, by 2018 the Gender Links report had broadened its scope to acknowledge that "the challenges for women in the South African media are becoming less about numbers, and more about the underlying sexism in the media, with new threats like cyber misogyny emerging" (Daniels et al. 2018, 7).

Indeed, South Africa offered a salient case study on the disappointing impact of employment equity on wider gender equality and equity in the media. By 2021, the country had the highest representation of women editors (60%) among the countries researched by the Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism and was the only country with a majority of women editors (Robertson, Selva, and Nielsen 2021). And yet, as the Gender Links report

highlighted, women journalists in South Africa still faced challenges due to sexism and misogyny (Daniels et al. 2018).

The debate over whether more women in the newsroom had an impact on news agendas and output continued well into the twenty-first century. While this debate was usually summarised into binary yes/no positions, the research showed that it's complicated. The impact, or not, of more women in the newsroom depended on a range of factors, including the seniority of their positions. For instance, research indicated a positive correlation between the number of women on editorial boards of US newspapers and the favourable coverage of women (Shor, van de Rijt, and Miltsov 2019). However, the same study did not find this correlation with more women at executive editor level. Another study showed that the gender of managing editors had little impact on the topics covered, but did affect the type of articles published, i.e. hard news vs features (Beam and Di Cicco 2010).

Additional complications arose with research that showed that journalist gender had no relationship to gendered news coverage (Meeks 2013). It was also argued that the prevalence of typically men's names compared to typically women's names in US newspapers was primarily a reflection of the predominance of men in society and not a symptom of the structure of the newsroom (Shor et al. 2015). And, as mentioned, gender parity in the newsroom didn't translate into real or perceived power for women journalists (Rodny-Gumede 2015; Rao and Rodny-Gumede 2020).

In all, it seems fair to take the position that theorists have over-emphasised the relationship between body count and the representation of women in the media (Steiner 2017). Although not unimportant and unnecessary, employment equity solutions are "theoretically and strategically unsound" (Van Zoonen 1994, 65) and not a silver bullet.

Moving beyond "body count"

The body count approach placed all responsibility for changing and reforming the media production process on the individual journalist. But, despite the myth of the independent, autonomous journalist, it could be argued that media production is intrinsically social and collective (Van Zoonen 1994). Therefore, one of Van Zoonen's recommendations was to look at the organisational production context in which journalists work for levers to drive innovation and change. This shifted the focus from the individual journalist to the

production circumstances in which they work, referred to as meso-level factors, distinct from macro media ownership and market influences (Hayes and Silke 2019). These were a set of multiple, sometimes contradictory influences that acted on the individual journalist and the media production processes, including organisational routines and requirements, social dynamics, and the economic considerations of the media organisation (Van Zoonen 1994).

This area saw less academic attention than the micro/individual level of production, content studies and reception studies (Van Zoonen 1994; Cameron 1996; Philo 2007; Frost 2015). However, a study of the working conditions of Irish freelance journalists showed that it was day-to-day practical considerations including time and resources that dominated the construction of news discourses (Hayes and Silke 2019).

Some meso-level factors were implicit, for instance socialisation into the journalism "profession" that made ideology-based choices appear *de facto*. But Cameron argued that explicit socialisation also took place, for instance through editorial style guides, which were an overlooked area of research (1996). Her research showed that newspaper style guides had an impact beyond functional outcomes, such as ensuring correct spelling and grammar, and also influenced ideological outcomes. Cameron proposed that "seemingly trivial style rules may have complex underlying motivations and serve serious purposes" (1996, 332).

Further, even ostensibly progressive adjustments to style guides, such as using gender-inclusive language, typically took place within the context of shifts that had already occurred in mainstream society (Cameron 1996). Therefore, rather than driving equality and equity in society, newspapers merely reflected where society had already moved.

Cameron urged media analysts to extend their scope from an examination of media texts to include production rules to gain a more complete picture of the creation and reproduction of meaning by media (1996). More recently, this call has been repeated by discourse analysts who have urged researchers to augment textual analyses, reception studies and circulation studies with production studies (Philo 2007; Frost 2015).

Despite the promise of production studies unlocking insights into building a more gender-equitable media, Van Zoonen cautioned that "it is difficult, if not impossible to draw a

straightforward connection between a gendered structure of production and the encoding of gender discourse" (1994, 62). Further, she pointed out that gender is only one aspect of the journalist's identity, and that other discourses such as ethnicity and professionalism also had an impact (Van Zoonen 1994)—this indicated the value of an intersectional approach. Nevertheless, despite these limitations and given the lack of research focus on this area, it may yet be fruitful to pay attention to the impact of the meso-level of influences on media production, and specifically in this essay, socialisation during the production process, with the editorial brief as a proxy for editorial style guides.

Digital technology business journalism and the entrepreneur

Along with her critique of the body count approach to media representation of women, Van Zoonen questioned the functionalist sender-message-receiver theory of media transition used by the first wave of feminist media theorists. This, she argued, was too straightforward and simplistic, and offered a limited conception of gender and communication. Instead, she proposed a cultural studies model based on Stuart Hall's encoding/decoding model. This model recognised that gender is a discourse, that reality is socially constructed and that media texts carry multiple meanings. Importantly, these meanings were finite, and there were preferred readings of texts that tended to reproduce dominant values (Van Zoonen 1994).

A point of departure for my work is that the dominant reading of the media's portrayal of entrepreneurship is one where the universal entrepreneur defaults to a man. This stereotype was borne out by multiple studies looking at general entrepreneurship (Baker, Aldrich, and Nina 1997; Bruni, Gherardi, and Poggio 2004; Achtenhagen and Welter 2011; Ahl and Marlow 2012; Hamilton 2013; Smith and Neergaard 2015). While there was limited work looking specifically at digital technology entrepreneurship in the context of media and gender stereotypes, there were indications that the media has a role to play in the formation of gendered stereotypes around computer science as a profession (Cheryan et al. 2013; Cheryan, Master, and Meltzoff 2015). While it is not strictly necessary to be a coder to be a digital technology entrepreneur, being a coder is wrapped up in the meritocracy myth and the "brotopia" culture of the Silicon Valley startup environment (Chang 2018).

These studies found that the media either ignored women entrepreneurs all together and failed to write about them, instead conflating the entrepreneur-as-man norms with the

universal entrepreneur, or cast women entrepreneurs as somehow exceptional or lacking. This certainly met the criteria for the symbolic annihilation of women by the mass media (Tuchman 1978). It would be simplistic and reductionist to lay all the responsibility for a gendered entrepreneur stereotype at the media's doorstep, but there is no doubt the media had a role to play.

This gendered stereotype of entrepreneurs had a range of real-world effects. It limited the number of women who became entrepreneurs because men didn't recognise women as entrepreneurs (Gupta et al. 2009). Further, a vastly disproportionate amount of venture capital money flowed to startups founded by men (Teare 2020). Between 2007 and 2018 less than 1% of venture capital funding in the UK went to women-founded startups and only 12% to startups with a founder team comprising men and women (Shuttleworth et al. 2019). Additionally, it was less likely that teams with at least one woman founder would receive further funding for the next stage of their growth (Shuttleworth et al. 2019).

One of the reasons this report suggested for the gap was bias in investment decisions. Venture capital investment in digital technology startups across Africa for 2019 showed a similar trend, albeit based on smaller total investments (Assou et al. 2020). While there was no data for women-only founder teams, a report showed that 13% of total investments went to startups with at least one woman founder (Assou et al. 2020). Startups with women on the board tended to produce better financial returns (Krentz and Harthorne 2018), so, a further effect of a gendered entrepreneur stereotype was non-optimal returns for investors.

Furthermore, research indicates that the media attention from specialised industry media had a positive association with the valuation and venture capital funding digital technology startups receive, and, by extension, their ongoing success (Petkova, Rindova, and Gupta 2013). Of specific relevance to this essay was that it was specialised industry media attention, rather than general media attention, that displayed this positive association (Petkova, Rindova, and Gupta 2013).

How do you tell non-gender-stereotyped stories about digital technology entrepreneurs?

Concerned that business school case studies were presenting students with unhelpful gender discourses and stereotypes around entrepreneurship and a lack of appropriate role

models, Ahl formulated three complementary strategies to improve the way business students were taught (2007). She set out to "challenge taken for granted assumptions about gender, business and success, and perhaps make students reflect about conditions for men and women in business" (Ahl 2007). I detail these criteria in the following section and will use them to evaluate and reflect on my creative media production's exploration of how to tell non-gender-stereotyped stories about digital technology entrepreneurs.

Methodology

The purpose of this creative media project and reflective essay was to explore how the editorial brief impacts the creation of gender-stereotyped digital technology entrepreneurs in digital technology journalism in South Africa. A second objective was to explore how journalists can create alternative, non-gender-stereotyped stories about digital technology entrepreneurs in South Africa. To explore these research questions this study used a qualitative, autoethnographic-driven approach. Autoethnography allows researchers to foreground personal experience and use this as a starting point for their research (Adams, Ellis, and Holman Jones 2017, 1). Further it enables the interrogation of taken-for-granted cultural practices, and offers the scope to offer alternatives to these practices (Adams, Ellis, and Holman Jones 2017, 3). Additional purposes of autoethnography are to communicate knowledge about a cultural experience as an insider; consider how researchers are implicated by their work; capture everyday experience that other research methods fail to take into account; and to create research output that is accessible beyond the academy (Adams, Ellis, and Holman Jones 2017, 3–4).

Ellis and Bochner acknowledged that autoethnography has evolved in a way that makes "precise definitions and application difficult" (2000, 739) and that there is overlap between autoethnographic methodological strategies and other qualitative research methods (2000, 740). The three main autoethnographic strategies I used in this study are in-depth interviewing, evocative narratives and critical reflection. In stage one of this project, akin to the data collection stage of a traditional research project, I used three in-person, in-depth interviews to produce three pieces of media content that tell the stories of the entrepreneurs. In stage two, akin to the data analysis stage, I reflected on both the interview and the media production process using critical reflection methods.

Although my time in the field was short compared to typical ethnographic studies (Adams, Ellis, and Holman Jones 2017, 3) due to the limited scope of this work, because I am an opportunistic complete member researcher (Ellis and Bochner 2000, 471) I brought with me decades of lived experience as a journalist and entrepreneur to the study.

Interviews and creative media production

I used purposeful, criterion-based sampling (Palinkas et al. 2015; Moser and Korstjens 2018) to select my interview subjects. The entrepreneurs I chose to interview were women who had founded businesses that created value using digital technology, thus they qualified as digital technology entrepreneurs according to the definition above.

Additionally, these entrepreneurs were beyond the idea and launch stage of their business and were now in the process of running viable startups, which I believed would give them more extensive real-world experience of being an entrepreneur. With such a small sample and considering my exploratory objective, I was not setting out to make a theoretical argument nor prove a hypothesis, but rather exploring the views of the interviewees on the topic being studied and gaining material for my creative media project.

As well as being standard journalistic practice, face-to-face, semi-structured interviews are an ideal technique for engaging with participants in a study of this nature because they facilitate “depth of thought and breadth of comments and ideas” (Reagan 2006, 74). They allow the interviewer to establish a relationship with the interviewee (Deacon et al. 1999, 67). Interviewees are less constrained in an “active, open-ended dialogue” (Deacon et al. 1999, 65), and interviewers can probe for deeper insights the participant might not have mentioned spontaneously (Reagan 2006, 76). These factors, combined with my experience in in-depth journalistic interviews made this a good methodological choice.

Beyond enabling an effective interview, this choice also helped me experiment with editorial authority. One of my concerns with how I was being briefed as a journalist was the instruction to establish editorial authority by paraphrasing the information my interviewees shared with me. Further, Ellis and Bochner pointed out the cultural expectations around the “authoritative interview situation” (2000, 757). In these works, I wanted to return authority to my interviewees and semi-structured interviews provided the flexibility for this, for instance by allowing interviewees to direct the conversation through their answers (Reagan 2006,

76). For this reason, my interviews tended to the looser side of the structured spectrum, without ever veering into radically unstructured (Schrøder et al. 2003, 165). My interview guide was minimal, as was my pre-briefing of my interviewees. My guiding parameters were my research topic, and I took a few starter questions into each interview.

Two interviews were in-person in a restaurant and coffee shop. They took between 90 minutes and two hours, I recorded them using my iPhone and later transcribed them. I took a few handwritten notes as a backup but relied heavily on the recording and transcriptions to keep the interview as relaxed, informal and conversational as possible. Immediately after each interview I completed my field notes, which included first impressions, stand out themes, and my thoughts and feelings about the interviews.

The podcast

I chose to produce a podcast as one of the three media productions because I wanted to explore the potential of having the audience hear the interviewee's voice in an as unmediated way as possible. This was motivated by the potential for podcasts to be a medium where diverse women's voices can claim space (Tiffe and Hoffmann 2017). Additionally, unlike feature writing, in which I am experienced, I wanted to experiment with telling the story of a woman entrepreneur using a medium I was less familiar with, and possibly less professionally socialised in. This impacted the methodology outlined above, partially for practical and technical reasons, and partially due to my lack of experience with podcasting.

The podcast interview was more structured because I had restricted studio time in which to complete the recording. I wanted the safety net of a pre-defined set of questions to ensure I covered the core topics and achieved a narrative flow. For this interview I took a question and answer interview approach (Cheney 2001, 204), including sharing a list of themes and the order I wanted to discuss them in with the interviewee in advance of the recording. Further, a more structured interview reduced the amount of sound editing required. My interview guide also included a pre-scripted introduction and wrap-up, as well as segues to facilitate the shift from one topic to the next.

The media production

I set several principles to guide the production of my creative media pieces:

1. No pre-existing editorial brief.
2. The content of the interviews being the most important factor in determining the media production outcome, including genre, style and tone.
3. The importance of hearing the interviewees' voices and reducing the authority I, as the journalist, claim.

How I implemented these guiding factors and the trade-offs between them depended on the medium. For instance, with the podcast the audience hears the interviewee's voice, but there is less experimentation with how the story is told because I was less familiar with the medium. Further, I was not a neutral participant in the process, and unavoidably my biases and preferences became entangled in the production process.

Going into this project, I was heavily influenced by the New Journalists and the techniques they used to introduce immediacy, realism and emotional landscapes into non-fiction (Wolfe 1996, 46). While I don't claim to have used these techniques successfully, or at all, in these works, the spirit of New Journalism and creative non-fiction (Cheney 2001, 195) was an important source of inspiration for me. In addition, Denzin discussed the relationship between ethnographic writing and New Journalism, saying that "ethnographers have much to learn from journalists" (1997, 127). I wanted to explore whether this approach, especially the inclusion of an emotional and internal landscape, could help to avoid stereotypes. For instance, the scene-by-scene reconstruction of Procter's Kilimanjaro summit, along with her internal monologue, shows the reader her tenacity, single-mindedness, resilience, and self-confidence—all traits associated with men entrepreneurs.

I created two long-form non-fiction articles and one podcast episode. The three pieces of work were produced in serial, which was a factor of my schedule, but it also allowed me to take the learnings from each piece into the next. Based on the outcome of the interviews I chose an appropriate way to tell each entrepreneur's story. This determined the subsequent research, both into the story-telling genre and into supplementary information I needed to round out the piece. With the podcast, for the most part, I tried to avoid "on-trend" podcast

styles, as far as possible[2]. Each media production is discussed in some detail in the rest of this essay, so I will not duplicate that here.

I published the completed articles and podcast online at elbowroom.co.za, using the WordPress content management platform. Access to the site is restricted to honour a confidentiality agreement with one of the interviewees.

Critical reflection-driven analysis

Critical reflection is a suitable method to analyse my creative media production because successful critical reflection combines evidence, reflection on experience, as well as emotional and intellectual responses (Ashwin 2020). It enables judgements about "complex, often messy situations" (Ashwin 2020, 52) that are not suited to straightforward, rational, quantitative approaches.

Critical reflection offers the ability to define the problem ourselves, interrogate the *status quo* and challenge and transform assumptions (Dullaart 2021). Importantly, as well as analysing an issue we find challenging or problematic, successful critical reflection should result in action and changing the way we do things (Ashwin 2020, 64).

In my critical reflection on my creative media project, I drew on Schön's advice to focus on reflection-on-action rather than reflection-in-action (Dullaart 2021). The former offers the opportunity to "apply knowledge and experience to inform [future] action" (Dullaart 2021), while the latter tends to inform immediate action and is not easily analysed with rigour (Dullaart 2021). Crucially, reflection-on-action provides the scope to think about ways to do things differently in future and also considers the wider context in which the action took place (Dullaart 2021).

Additionally, I draw on Mezirow's framework for critical reflection, which includes content reflection (what I did); process reflection (how I did it); and premise reflection (why I did it) (Kitchenham 2008). The first two types of reflection can impact how we interpret specific information, but the third, premise reflection, is essential for transforming the frames of

[2] This was surprisingly difficult to do. For instance, when choosing music for the podcast, it was difficult to find something that didn't sound very similar to every other podcast I've heard. Everything sounded familiar.

reference for making meaning and understanding the world (Kitchenham 2008, 115) that guide how we incorporate new experiences. The last is what drives profound transformation.

Finally, to keep the focus on my research objectives, I concentrated my critical reflection by using Ahl's three strategies for challenging gender stereotypes in business school case studies about entrepreneurs (2007):

1. Show as many female protagonists as male protagonists and use gender-inclusive language.
2. Tell entrepreneurship stories that challenge gendered assumptions around entrepreneurship, business and success, and provide alternative messages.
3. Introduce students to narrative analysis skills.

Discussion

My creative media projects explored how the editorial brief impacts the creation of gender-stereotyped digital technology entrepreneurs in digital technology journalism in South Africa. A second objective was to explore how journalists can create alternative, non-gender-stereotyped stories about digital technology entrepreneurs in South Africa. I use Ahl's three strategies for writers of business school case studies (2007) as a framework for reflecting on my work. I then use this evaluation to extend my critical reflection by considering the role of the editorial brief in the creation of gendered entrepreneur stereotypes. My experience as a freelance journalist was that the editorial brief was often the only, and was certainly the key, point of interaction between my commissioning editors and myself. Hence my focus is on this specific aspect of the media production process. Finally, I reflect on the transformative impact and ethical implications of my work.

Evaluation against Ahl's recommendations

1. Show as many female protagonists as male protagonists and use gender-inclusive language.

Given the project focused on women entrepreneurs, the first part of this recommendation was easy to achieve from a body count point of view. However, it is worth exploring how I

was able to show women as entrepreneurs. In all three pieces, women entrepreneurs were the protagonists of the story. Naidoo acknowledges her co-founders and their roles but uses the first-person singular pronoun throughout when talking about the founding of her startup and also her plans and ambitions for the venture. Similarly, Procter acknowledges her co-founders and their input, yet her personality and charisma are obvious. She is the face of the company and the driving force behind it. Finally, Daniels is the protagonist of her story in a slightly different way: as well as being an entrepreneur she is a thought leader.

The pieces make it clear that none of these women was "just" in the room. It was their table and they invited others to join them. Further, they are relatable in different ways that speak to a varied audience: a self-described original "geek girl", the classic student entrepreneur, and a specialist doctor making a mid-career lane change. This relatable-ness is achieved in part by the glimpses into their interior worlds (Wolfe 1996, 46) and lives that the pieces offer: Daniels's frustration with code not being used; Procter's obsession with flight and engineering; and Naidoo's relocating her family to achieve her goals.

The use of gender-inclusive language was easily achieved by simply using gender-neutral language where possible, and re-writing where this was not possible. However, I needed to balance my commitment to this with my objective of presenting the participants' voices in an unmediated way. For instance, Naidoo referred to doctors using a masculine pronoun exclusively in the podcast. If I had paraphrased this quote, I would have changed the pronoun to a gender-neutral one.

2. Tell entrepreneurship stories that challenge "taken for granted, male-gendered notions of entrepreneurship" and provide alternative messages. This includes challenging assumptions around gender, business and success.

Each piece offers a different challenge to a taken for granted discourse around entrepreneurship.

2.1 The classic heroic entrepreneur story

While heroic stories might be a typical and ubiquitous way of telling entrepreneur stories (Smith and Neergaard 2015, 232), Daniels's story offers an alternative. Instead of our protagonist facing a series of obstacles that they overcome to ultimately achieve demonstrable entrepreneurial success—typically financial (Ahl 2007, 673; Ahl and Marlow 2012, 544)—she encounters a series of rolling obstacles. In a traditional heroic

entrepreneurship story, Daniels's narrative might have ended when she signed her first client as an entrepreneur, or later when she won a major South African corporate as a client. But instead, each time an obstacle is overcome, another one appears. Furthermore, all this is backdropped against the ongoing systemic challenges she faces as an entrepreneur and the challenges of being a woman entrepreneur. You can hear the weariness in her voice when she says "It's hard. It's semi-sustainable," during the interview.

There is no neat conclusion, no closure, no resolution in this entrepreneur story. Daniels does not arrive at a state of success, whether that is funding, an exit, a listing on a stock exchange or even a sustainable business model. This challenges the popular mythology that entrepreneurship is a meritocracy (Ahl and Marlow 2012, 544; Dy, Marlow, and Martin 2016, 286) and entrepreneurs are the captains of their fate, and that if you hustle, success will come. Instead, this is the story of an open-ended, ongoing journey of challenges, wins, setbacks, mistakes and learnings, systemic inequalities, and distractions.

Arguably, Daniels's story is a more accurate reflection of the typical entrepreneurial journey for all genders than the neatly packaged classical entrepreneur stories that are modelled on Silicon Valley heroes such as Steve Jobs, Jeff Bezos and Elon Musk. And this alternative narrative better supports the typical entrepreneur traits of hard work, independence and perseverance (Ahl 2007, 673–74). But it complicates the standard entrepreneur story by demonstrating that these and other ideal, typically masculine-coded entrepreneur qualities are not automatic predictors of success. You can do everything right and still not be exactly where you want to be, nor have achieved success yet. Further, entrepreneurs are subject to the same outside forces everyone else is, as well as the same open-ended, iterative narratives that make up real life.

This alternative entrepreneur narrative is not specific to women entrepreneurs. It can equally be told about entrepreneurs of all genders. As well as offering a more realistic view of entrepreneurship, it has the flexibility to highlight the additional challenges faced by entrepreneurs from marginalised groups.

This article was the first one I wrote and was the most challenging to produce. In the end, I settled on an experimental mix of interview, reporting from research and my own experience, oral history, and narrative literary journalism. Producing this piece raised

important ethical dilemmas about the work I am doing for this project. I will unpack these issues during the general discussion about my project.

2.2 The entrepreneur biography

Procter's interview presented itself as the raw material for an entrepreneur biography. I produced an introduction and two chapters of a hypothetical biography for this project. In terms of style and substance, this meets Ahl's suggestion: "how about a story about a female entrepreneur who displays all the stereotypical male traits?" (2007, 691).

When I first had the inspiration to write Procter's story as a biography, I noticed the gendered nature of digital technology entrepreneur biographies. Men get biographies written about them by famous journalists (Isaacson 2011; Stone 2013; Vance 2015). Big, muscular, personality and narrative-driven books that use the word "titans" (Vance 2015, np) to describe the digital technology hero, such as Musk, Bezos or Jobs. These stories perpetuate the myth of the lone wolf entrepreneur—glossing over McKenzie Bezos's role in the founding of Amazon, or Steve Wozniak's in Apple, or the dozens, hundreds of unsung girlfriends, wives, family members and other partners that propped up their genius entrepreneurs.

Women digital technology founders and leaders appear to need to write their books themselves (Huffington 2014; Sandberg 2013). And these are typically neither autobiographies nor memoirs. They are instructional manifestoes for middle-class women who want to survive and thrive. They try to fix a system or at least improve how you operate in a system. They tend to have a blind spot around women who aren't white and middle class, and other marginalised groups. The authors tell their stories, but they also cite scientific and academic studies to back up their hypotheses.

By comparison, stories about men digital technology entrepreneurs are instructive without needing to offer up an additional thesis or tap into a set of authoritative citations to be worthy. And, despite the cachet of having your name on the bookstand and best-seller list, at this stratospheric level, it seems that the implied objectivity, endorsement and authority of a famous journalist writing about you counts for more.

In my work, Procter's story displays many of the typical masculine-coded characteristics of entrepreneurship (Gupta et al. 2009; Hamilton 2013; Meyer, Tegtmeier, and Pakura 2017). I

didn't have to work very hard to find tales of adventure, daring, courage, competitiveness, independence, decisiveness, hard work, resilience and risk-taking in Procter's life story that I could use to draw parallels with her entrepreneurship story. She freely shared her philosophy around life, ambition and business that I could use to elevate her startup story. And in addition, as a part of that story, she shared her experience as a woman digital technology entrepreneur. The chapters, supplemented with desktop research, almost wrote themselves. It was outside of the scope of this project to interview other people about Procter, which is a typical feature of biographies.

In the biographies mentioned previously, the writers spend a significant amount of time at the outset of the books setting out the parameters of the engagement, their independence, or lack of independence, and whether the subject saw or signed off on the copy before publication. I did the same, describing how my preconceptions were mistaken and outlining the conversation with Procter around copy approvals, confidentiality and balancing telling her story with protecting her startup. This anecdote did double duty as a demonstration of Procter's worldview:

> *[She] gets it. "This is what I've always been about. Rocking the boat. Being outrageous. Let's do it." She signs the forms with no restrictions.*

While this piece doesn't strictly offer an alternative way of telling entrepreneur stories in terms of challenging clichés, it does demonstrate that masculine-coded entrepreneur qualities are equally displayed by women entrepreneurs. And that a gender-stereotyped way of telling stories about men entrepreneurs isn't unique or exclusive to men. Women's stories are as interesting, dramatic, educational, and narrative-driven as men's stories. Unfortunately, this is also an example of a piece that, as Ahl points out, could be dismissed as contrived (2007, 675) because it doesn't conform to readers' expectations around gender and entrepreneurship. Further, it could work to legitimise a certain set of masculine-coded entrepreneurship traits at the expense of other, equally valid and valuable traits. A reader of any gender that doesn't identify with Procter's adventurousness and risk-taking might decide entrepreneurship is not for them (Gupta et al. 2009).

2.3 The business podcast

Naidoo's podcast offers an alternative entrepreneur story, that of the mid-career entrepreneur. While mid-career entrepreneurs aren't rare (Patrickson, Say, and Hallo 2015) they certainly break with the stereotype of a young, hoodie-wearing man who is a graduate (or drop-out). Further, Naidoo did not leave her original profession out of necessity or lack of opportunity—she was one of the few paediatric radiologists in South Africa—but rather out of passion and ambition.

> *I realised I had a greater purpose and my purpose is not going to be just one more hospital in one country, it's going to be a continent, it's going to be worldwide, it's going to be using technology.*

Finally, her background is not technical—the stereotype suggests digital technology entrepreneurs come from a computer science background. Unprompted, Naidoo mentions her age and non-technical background in the interview and goes on to make the case for the advantages of both.

What Naidoo does have in common with most entrepreneurs is that she spotted a problem and solved it. In her case, given her specific background and experience, it wasn't a way to have food delivered faster or to book accommodation in a new city, it was a way to improve the accuracy of her field, increase patient care and amplify the reach of paediatric radiologists to people who currently don't have access to any.

> *My why for developing this algorithm and doing the AI is that we are only 20 paediatric radiologists on the continent … using an algorithm like ours I can multiply my role and I can have access to places that I don't have to physically visit. My role can be multiplied exponentially using technology.*

The benefit of choosing a podcast format for this interview was that it allows the listener to hear the voice of the entrepreneur. As Tiffe and Hoffman note "Podcasting allows women and other minorities access to broadcast media but with far fewer restrictions. For one, there are no norms regarding how to speak. In general, the more you sound like yourself the better" (2017, 117). Naidoo sounds like a woman and a South African, in contrast to the

often US-based men entrepreneurs that we typically hear from and about. This also challenges the entrepreneur-as-man stereotype on a sensory level.

From an editorial point of view, there are of course choices that I made that impacted the final product: who I spoke to, what questions I asked, how I framed the conversation, the order I presented the information in, and what I included and what I edited out. I made a deliberate stylistic choice to leave the podcast interview as natural and unedited as possible, to offer Naidoo's voice in an unmediated way, while still holding the listener's attention and telling the story coherently.

2.4 Additional comments

Within the norm of entrepreneurs as men, it is acceptable that women embark on "mumpreneur" or lifestyle entrepreneurship ventures (Hamilton 2013, 94; Rouse, Treanor, and Fleck 2013, 455; Swail and Marlow 2018, 259) and it is worth reflecting on this in the context of my media productions.

Two of my interviewees are mothers, and both mentioned their children unprompted by me. Neither raised the challenges around balancing startup commitments with their families. Nor did I ask, as I wouldn't consider asking a man entrepreneur this. Perhaps this is the wrong way around, and journalists should also be asking men about this aspect of entrepreneurship. But, in the context of this interview series, it felt like asking this would be akin to Procter's comment about investors asking women questions that lead to defensive answers. Had I asked the interviewees about being mothers and entrepreneurs, I would be setting the interview up to present them as "safe" and "acceptable" women entrepreneurs and so bolster a sexist narrative that is as harmful to men entrepreneurs as it is to women, rather than presenting an alternative entrepreneur story.

Additionally, none of the interviewees is a lifestyle entrepreneur. Both Procter and Naidoo have international ambitions for their startups, and Daniels was in the process of developing a new product. I omitted to ask explicitly what ultimate success looks like for each of the entrepreneurs, which on the one hand was an oversight, but also demonstrated that the topic did not arise organically for any of the interviewees. This further challenges the assumptions around gender, business, and success. These entrepreneurs say they are driven by purpose, rather than the financial and reputational rewards typically ascribed to entrepreneurs.

3. Introduce [students] to narrative analysis skills

This third recommendation is important because it bridges any gap in expectations the audience might have when presented with alternative stories that challenge their preconceived ideas about entrepreneurship (Ahl 2007, 675). As shown above, it is possible to find and present these stories, but this third recommendation is the glue—the required cognitive shift—that makes these stories stick.

There are meta elements in the creative media productions that cast a critical eye on "doing" entrepreneurship. The articles provide some context to the entrepreneurs' stories that go beyond the surface level story. This context could provide readers with some of the narrative analysis tools needed to recognise similar circumstances in other entrepreneur stories. For instance, talking about challenges with achieving media coverage for startups serves to throw a spotlight on how the media constructs a story. Readers get a critical, behind the scenes look at media decisions around what information is presented, how it is presented, who retains authority and how images are selected. If editors urge journalists to use an authoritative style, this is inevitably at the expense of someone else.

Another example of journalistic authority raised is photography choice. The decision to include a photo of a captain of industry who is a man over a digital technology entrepreneur who is a woman in a thought leadership article might be made on economic grounds, but it has multiple effects. The decision casts a vote for the stereotype of entrepreneur-as-man. Further, I'd argue this is more than a missed opportunity for the woman entrepreneur but is a vote against her. She was not deemed worthy of a photograph so her contribution to the article is not to be valued equally. Readers of all genders are reminded that digital technology thought leaders align with a certain fixed type that some people can simply never achieve. This also demonstrates the ways of doing journalism that my work is a response to.

Daniels's critique of conferences does a very similar thing, demonstrating how the playing field is levelled against women, even if they are included on the speaker list. Finally, the article sidebar points out the trend of valuing startup and entrepreneur models from abroad more than those that emerge locally. This broader issue includes the men entrepreneur stereotype modelled on Silicon Valley protagonists.

Procter discusses that, during meetings with investors, women entrepreneurs tend to be asked questions that result in defensive answers, while men entrepreneurs are asked questions that allow them to highlight the potential of their startup—this observation is borne out by research (Kanze et al. 2018). Again, this critical, behind the scenes look at acquiring investment makes visible a hidden inequity in how entrepreneurs get to tell their stories. This awareness serves as a warning for other entrepreneurs, a flag for the audience (perhaps at a startup competition) to consider how entrepreneurs of different genders are framed positively or negatively, and (hopefully) awareness for investors to stop raising barriers for women entrepreneurs that don't exist for men entrepreneurs.

The editorial brief

Having demonstrated how I have applied Ahl's strategies in my media productions, I went on to consider the impact of the editorial brief and its role as a part of the media production process.

Based on my experience as a journalist, I considered the impact of the editorial brief on the resulting media production from two main points of view:

1. Practical factors (word count, word rate, deadline)
2. Editorial factors (angle, target audience, genre, tone and style)

1. Practical factors

Removing and resetting the practical parameters of an editorial brief gave me the scope to think, experiment and research compared to the typical two-week deadline I get for feature articles. This meant I could avoid defaulting to journalistic techniques and shortcuts that have worked before for me and allowed me to think more creatively and deeply about how to tell the entrepreneurs' stories. Being unrestricted by a word count meant I could dive more deeply into the stories and offer more detail and nuance. For instance, it is likely that if I mentioned Procter's Kilimanjaro trip in a typical feature article it would have been one line, not a detailed narrative woven into the larger piece.

Being unrestricted by a word rate that pegged my work to an economic value meant I wasn't constantly weighing the time spent on the media productions versus other income-generating work. The word rate journalists are paid today mean that as a freelancer I

already subsidise my editorial work (and by extension the media publications I write for) with the higher rates I earn in corporate journalism. For instance, Daniels's article was the most experimental and the most difficult to write. It was the first piece in the series of media productions, so I was exploring new ground for myself as a journalist and a writer as I tried to present her voice in an as unmediated way as possible. This took additional time, research into genres and deep, creative thinking. This simply would not have been financially responsible to do typically, and I would have reverted to familiar ways of feature writing.

Similarly, a longer deadline gave me the time to experiment, research and do deeper thinking, which, as mentioned, allowed me to avoid a formulaic, "safe" approach to the articles and podcast. It also gave me the time to reflect between pieces, which meant I was more likely to take learnings from one to the next, as well as grapple with the ethical issues that arose, which I cover below.

2. Editorial factors

A significant outcome of relaxing the editorial conditions of the brief was the ability to experiment with giving my interviewees more authority. Instead of retaining authority for myself, and by proxy the publication, I passed the microphone to the interviewees. Further, instead of shoehorning what they said into a prescribed, familiar format, I let what they said dictate how the story was told. This resulted in an experimental, mixed genre long-form feature article, a biography and a podcast.

As the writer/interviewer, I am not absent from nor artificially invisible in the productions though. Vanessa Clark is clearly in the room, with all my subjectivity, positionality, assumptions, biases, experiences, and frames of reference. This presence draws attention to the fact that their story is still being mediated by a non-neutral filter. Making this apparent is more honest and truer to life than unachievable claims of objectivity or authority from an invisible, unknowable editorial voice. Further, acknowledging and identifying my subjectivity gives the audience a position from which to evaluate the works.

Relaxing editorial factors also contributed to me being able to better comply with Ahl's recommendations. Take the use of gender-neutral language. One of the publications I regularly wrote for doesn't, to my knowledge, officially publish a style guide. (If it does, as a freelancer I have never seen it.) As part of the standard brief, the editor references centre-

right publication *The Economist* as the tone and style benchmark to aspire to. The latest edition of the best-selling *The Economist Style Guide* is dismissive of attempts to achieve gender-neutral language (Wroe 2018, np). It half-heartedly suggests using the singular they "if you believe it is 'exclusionary' or insulting to women to use he in a general sense" (Wroe 2018, np). By implication then, the publication I write for agrees with this stance or at least endorses it through omission. It certainly doesn't consider this something it should engage with and challenge. Of course, this doesn't stop journalists from using gender-neutral language when writing for the publication, but neither does it cast a vote for presenting the world more equitably.

Reflection on Ahl's recommendations and the editorial brief

It is worth reflecting on the aspects of my analysis together as their effects are intertwined and impact each other. With awareness and willingness, it was entirely possible to meet Ahl's recommendations. Further, relaxing the typical editorial production conditions imposed by editorial briefs gave me the conceptual space and time to do this. However, this took more time and effort than the production of a typical editorial piece would have.

Does this mean the reverse is true? That the typical editorial production conditions inevitably lead to stereotyped writing about entrepreneurs? While this project doesn't explore that, my sense is that this is not a foregone conclusion. However, I would argue that typical editorial production conditions do favour the *status quo*, which, as has been shown, results in a gender-stereotyped view of entrepreneurs.

Would these media productions be published?

Having demonstrated that experimenting with the way digital technology journalism is produced can avoid producing and reproducing the universal stereotype of a man entrepreneur, it is worth reflecting on whether these media pieces have a life beyond this academic environment. Would they be published, would they be read and heard by diverse audiences, and, importantly, should they be published?

A full exploration of this is beyond the scope of this discussion and incorporate wider systemic media issues. But limited early feedback makes me think that the two less typical pieces (Daniels and Naidoo's pieces) would be less acceptable editorially, while the piece

that adheres most to existing formats is more acceptable editorially. Of course, this may also just indicate that I executed Procter's piece better than the other two.

While anyone can publish anything online today (as I have done with these pieces) it is important, I believe, that content that challenges the universal stereotype of a man entrepreneur be published in the mainstream media. As Daniels explains in her article, it is not enough for the media to cover women's entrepreneurship during women's month. This merely siloes this content and contributes to the othering of women entrepreneurs. Alternative portrayals of entrepreneurs need to be mainstreamed to achieve credibility and challenge the existing stereotype.

If it is the case that this article and podcast is unpublishable in the mainstream media, it is worth considering whether, as a journalist, I upheld my side of the interviewer-interviewee bargain. There is, I would argue, in digital technology business journalism, an unspoken agreement between the journalist and the interviewee (and often their PR agency). The interviewees supply 45 minutes to an hour of their time, and access to their story, insights and opinions without being too overtly sales-focused, while the journalist supplies the opportunity to be published in a relevant publication. And while publication is never guaranteed—although the typical articles I work on are commissioned so are almost definitely going to be published, I may decide to not include a specific interviewee if what they said wasn't relevant or was too promotional—there is an obligation from the journalist to produce a piece of media content that meets the publication's standards. I couldn't produce a podcast in response to a brief for a feature article, nor submit 3,500 words in response to a commission for 1,200 words.

Another consideration is that the production process I followed is practically and economically unviable for mainstream business media today. Production windows are linked to advertising sales and are short, plus it is unlikely a publisher would be able to pay me a fair rate for the effort it took to produce these pieces.

As mentioned, there are wider systemic issues at play here too which are outside the scope of this essay. But what might be a more important issue to consider than whether these media productions would be published, is should they be published at all?

Does "can" always mean "should"?

I believe journalism should have a social justice obligation, and specifically, in the context of this work, a commitment to gender equity. An attempt to report objectively on reality can have the outcome of not challenging the inequalities and inequities in society. It means being uncritical and unquestioning of the entrepreneur-as-man stereotype. Instead, I believe journalism has an obligation to make the invisible visible and, by giving something a name, gaining the ability to interrogate it, reflect on it, and challenge it. Further, I'd argue that journalism that is socially just doesn't mean only producing advocacy or solutions journalism. It means tackling everyday inequality in all journalism—using gender-neutral language is a perfect example.

But life is seldom a neat narrative with clear demarcations between right and wrong. As demonstrated in Daniels's story, the entrepreneur protagonist rarely has a straight line to success. Life is complicated, as is the outcome of my intention to produce socially just work. On the one hand, with my creative media project I wanted to challenge the entrepreneur-as-man stereotype to make space for other entrepreneurs to succeed. This is undoubtedly a positive outcome—it works to repair past inequity, it is simply the right thing to do, and it avoids coding injustice into our digital futures.

On the other hand, as with Daniels, my path to a successful outcome was not straight and clear. What if, in working towards my social justice goal, I negatively impact the business and reputations of the entrepreneurs I wanted to achieve justice for, and who gave their time to help me? This could happen because, as Ahmed points out: "A complainer becomes a foreigner, a complaint a confirmation that you are not from here." (2020). She means that in the act of drawing attention to and requesting action about injustice, the complainer also draws attention to their otherness, that they do not belong. Daniels expresses it in this way: "…if I've already pissed off half the male population, I'm on the back foot, right?"

Both Daniels and Procter were concerned when I asked them to sign my department-mandated consent forms that say they agree they will not have the opportunity, barring fact-checking, to approve what I write. And they were right to be concerned—they should protect their businesses. My conversation with Procter about this ends up forming part of

the introduction chapter because it shows the audience an important aspect of who she is—a revolutionary who wants to change the world.

In part, this is an artificial situation created by my department's ethical guidelines. I do not typically get my interviewees to sign consent forms before interviews. Furthermore, there is the (perhaps mistaken, perhaps deliberate) assumption on my part that, as corporate spokespeople, my interviewees have been briefed that everything is on the record and not to request copy approval. This is a slightly precarious ethical tightrope journalists (I) deliberately walk to a greater or lesser degree. It is not in my interest to draw my interviewees' attention to my editorial independence, and perhaps make them more circumspect in the information they share with me. I had far richer, more meaningful, and more real conversations with Daniels and Procter than I did with Naidoo, who completed the consent form in advance of her interview.

However, I acknowledge that the interviews in my typical work as a journalist are very different to the ones that took place for this project. The latter went way beyond a "tell me about your startup" conversation to a far more personal and vulnerable place. It is worth noting that neither Daniels nor Procter had to be dragged there. There was an almost therapeutic quality to the conversations at times—this was stuff they wanted to get off their chests.

On reflection, and in discussion, I considered whether my hard-line stance on editorial independence is, in this circumstance, something I should soften. This nuance is something I will take into my work as a journalist. Sometimes ethics of compassion should outweigh a claim of editorial independence. But does that mean the social justice imperative falls by the wayside? Perhaps not, if I took a more collaborative approach to the media production process. If the journalist and interviewee have shared goals, build a close and trusted relationship, and co-create the resulting content, then that social justice imperative could be maintained. The onus would be on the journalist to uphold journalistic integrity, however, and not let the content slide into a promotional piece. Transparency would be an important factor too: in the same way the biographers mentioned earlier in this essay go to great lengths to demonstrate their editorial independence, collaborative journalists could lay out the parameters and rules of engagement with their interviewees. This transparency could ameliorate any loss of trust by the audience due to reduced editorial independence.

Rather elegantly, this could also solve the concerns I had over the elements of authority I still retained in my media productions for this project. For instance, I made decisions around genre, which information to include, the salience given to different content etc. unilaterally, despite my commitment to giving the interviewee as much authority as possible. Whether this way of working is practical, especially for early-stage entrepreneurs who should be spending their time on growing their businesses, is unclear though.

Limitations and future research opportunities

Three limitations of this work are: 1) my choice of critical reflection to analyse my work, 2) that I only consider one aspect of marginalisation in my exploration of the stereotyping of digital technology entrepreneurs, namely that of gender, and 3) that my approach may be seen as based on a simplistic, heteronormative view of gender.

Although critical reflection is a methodology suited to evaluate my creative media production, my findings are limited by my small sample size. Further, I reflect on my work, limiting the perspectives and interpretations available. This limited perspective undoubtedly reduces the range of insights that emerge and does not balance my positionality and biases with other standpoints. In addition, I have used critical reflection to consider aspects of media production that are out of my control (for instance, the word rate freelance journalists are paid, or editorial lead times), instead of limiting my work to factors that I can influence (such as the use of gender-neutral language and who I interview) (Ashwin 2020, 54).

However, critical reflection is an evidence-informed process (Ashwin 2020, 61), and can inspire more formal research (Ashwin 2020, 51). For instance, it would be useful to understand how other digital technology journalists and editors experience and navigate the elements of production explored in this work. Content analysis could quantify how and how often women digital technology entrepreneurs are presented in digital technology business media in South Africa. Similarly, a discourse analysis could explore how gender stereotypes are created, maintained, and reproduced. More broadly, research into how editors and freelancers work together would be useful and interesting, especially with remote working set to remain commonplace in the future.

I didn't interview a black woman entrepreneur, nor did I engage with the intersection of gender and race with my interviewees. While beyond the limited scope of this study, this is a noteworthy omission in a country such as South Africa, which is still struggling to achieve race-based equity 27 years after the end of apartheid and its first democratic elections. Given the potential of entrepreneurship to grow the economy and create jobs, I would argue it is important to challenge the imported, Silicon Valley-based stereotype of digital technology entrepreneurs in South Africa along both race and gender lines. Further, I do not explore class (all my interviewees were middle-class), or any other locus of marginalisation, resulting in an over-simplified feminist position. An intersectional critique of the media's portrayal of digital technology entrepreneurs would be a valuable future contribution to this topic.

Similarly, I default to a simplistic, heteronormative binary-based view of gender in this work. This could be improved in future by, for instance, producing works about men entrepreneurs that don't conform to stereotype: the lifestyle entrepreneur who is a man and wants to spend more time with their children (Ahl 2007, 675). Or considering digital technology entrepreneurship through a queer theory lens.

Conclusion

By changing the way digital technology journalism is produced it is possible to tell stories of digital technology entrepreneurs that do not default to a gender stereotype. Further, I'd suggest that unless the typical production process is changed, it will continue to uphold the *status quo* and the entrepreneur-as-man stereotype. My exploration, although by no means broad enough to make a theoretical argument or prove a hypothesis, does offer some pointers to what these changes might be.

Starting simply, it could include publishers and editors deliberately supporting gender-neutral language in their publications in explicit style guides, rather than leaving the decision (or not) to individual journalists or osmosis. Second, the issue of journalistic authority is an important one, and publications could cede some of the authority they claim back to marginalised groups. Third, publications could also stop creating siloes for coverage of groups such as women and instead ensure equal representation throughout

the year, and throughout the publication. Finally, adopting Ahl's three recommendations could be useful, specifically around building narrative analysis techniques and considerations into the production process.

Without shifting the focus back to the micro-level of production, I'd argue individual journalists, myself included, have a role to play here in actively engaging with their editorial briefs, favouring the most progressive and socially just interpretations, and pushing their publications to do the same.

These changes would, in the context of digital technology business journalism, make an important and valuable contribution to ensuring that the future that the digital technology industry and digital technology startups are currently designing and programming truly does have equality baked into its source code. Repairing the representation of women and other marginalised groups across the media at large would have similar positive outcomes, as well as simply being the right thing to do.

However, we should also proceed with caution and consider the ethical dimension of this work. Just because you can tell a story in a certain way, it doesn't always mean you should. The way media is produced should take a compassionate stance towards the entrepreneurs it is reporting on.

More broadly, my work supports the view that a focus on production studies is a rich vein for researchers to mine (Philo 2007), complementing content and reception studies. Furthermore, if researchers exclude media production from critical inquiry they overlook a potentially significant site of meaning-making and marginalisation. Future research could investigate the working relationship between editors and freelancers/remote media workers and its impact on media productions; the overlooked editorial brief and editorial style guides are also a worthwhile site for research into the production and reproduction of stereotypes by the media; and content and discourse analyses could better describe the creation of gendered stereotypes in digital technology business media. Finally, an intersectional approach to the creation of digital technology entrepreneur stereotypes would greatly enrich our understanding of this topic.

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