

Socialisation of Daughters in women-led FAMILY BUSINESSES

Growing up with
“Mentor Mum”

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“Your son is your son till he gets him a wife: but your daughter’s your daughter all the days of her life”
(17th-century English proverb)

- ▶ The global rise of women-owned businesses may be altering the way family and business interacts

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Many successful female entrepreneurs in New Zealand, as elsewhere, have two jobs: running a business and raising children.

Though seldom mentioned in the business press, there has been recent media coverage of notable female business success stories, including Peri Drysdale, founder of Snowy Peak and Untouched World, who works alongside her daughter Emily, and Colyn Devereux-Kay and Charlotte Devereux, the mother-daughter duo behind the internationally successful EGG maternity brand. Of course, this phenomenon is not unique to New Zealand. Female entrepreneurship is growing worldwide and it is challenging traditional paradigms along the way.

Spotlighting “Invisible” women

UNTIL THE mid-20th century, the division of labour in family firms saw Mum taking responsibility for raising the family and perhaps doing administrative work for the business after hours, and Dad conducting business operations as the public-facing proprietor. In a 1985 piece, ‘Women in family business: An untapped resource’, Amy Lyman, Matilde Salganicoff and Barbara Hollander described women in late-20th century businesses as “invisible”, and it is certainly true that a woman’s contribution was often unrecognised and uncompensated. Women had little chance of



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running a family business in New Zealand before the second wave of feminism, the equal pay disputes of the 1960s and 1970s, and the equal employment opportunity initiatives that influenced wider society in the closing decades of the century.

Now women can be found in a variety of family-business leadership roles, including owning their own family companies, co-founding family businesses, running inherited enterprises, working for parents as managers, forming management teams with siblings, and governing as board

members. These roles are quite different from those their grandmothers held in family businesses in the 1940s and 1950s. Indeed, Australian researchers Mary Barrett and Ken Moores, in their recent book, *Women in family business leadership roles: daughters on the stage*, use “spotlight” and “stage” metaphors to describe today’s daughters in family business.

“Mompreneurs”

ACCORDING TO the Ministry of Economic Development the number of women who have chosen to be self-employed has more than doubled over the past 30 years. Although represented in lower numbers than their male counterparts, New Zealand women are choosing this as a viable employment option at a much more rapid rate.

Patricia Greene, Myra Hart, Elizabeth Gatewood, Candida Brush, and Nancy Carter, in their 2001 collaboration, *Women Entrepreneurs: Moving Front and Center*, suggest that female entrepreneurs, their ventures and their entrepreneurial behaviours are a unique subset of entrepreneurship and as such should be studied separately. New Zealand-based researcher, Jodyanne Kirkwood, found that in setting up their ventures women entrepreneurs take into account not only personal and work related factors, but family ones as well. Moreover, women run their businesses differently from men, and more often than not integrate them into their existing social webs.

For women, this blurring of family-business boundaries often includes the responsibility of managing childcare. More often than not, these women are primary carers for their children, and are accountable for running households as well as businesses.



However, this is not all bad news. Indeed, the autonomy and control of self-employment allow women to make choices when managing the often competing demands of business and family life. Ultimately, such autonomy may result in a less stressful work-life balance than more structured corporate jobs. In his 2007 article, 'Mompreneurship as a Challenge to the Growth Ideology of Entrepreneurship', Steffen Korsgaard suggests that some women are choosing to set up their own businesses in part to facilitate balancing work and childcare duties. If so, "mompreneurs" may be challenging the very concept of entrepreneurship being driven by a desire for growth. And, with more mothers raising children while running businesses, what might this mean for their daughters?

Socialisation in Family Firms

MUCH OF the research to date on socialising a child to the family business has focused on how this process works when the firm's founder is the child's father. Collette Dumas was the first researcher to consider the dynamics within family firms when a daughter works with her parent (her studies were focused on daughters and their fathers). She found that when the family business is founded by the father, initiation into the business begins early in life, and it influences the daughter throughout her childhood.

Wendy Handler's research on next-generation succession, suggested that socialisation into the family firm occurs more profoundly when the child is closer to their mid-teens to early twenties. It may be most accurate to say that family business socialisation processes occur in two phases. First, in childhood, within the family or extended family unit, parents transmit values—including family-business values—to their descendants. Then, socialisation takes a more intentional turn when the

potential successor is identified (implicitly or explicitly) and begins formal, full-time work in the business with the parent.

Given the dearth of research on mother-daughter family business teams, and what family business socialisation might be like in such a relationship, I interviewed six mothers and their daughters about what it was like to grow up in and around a business that was owned and operated by one's mother. The remainder of this discussion highlights some of the anecdotal stories that the interviewees shared about the early socialisation process.

Overlapping Boundaries

IT SOON became apparent that boundaries between home and business were blurred through most of the daughters' early years. For some, even the physical location of the business had a profound impact on the daughters' interactions with their mothers. In the case of two of the mother-daughter dyads interviewed, the family home was also, literally, "the business". For others, business premises became "home" because of the amount of the time the daughters spent there with their mothers.

When the business was actually located at home, both mothers and daughters talked about boundaries between home and work being nonexistent. Sisters Molly and Marie (these and other names have been changed to protect identities), who are both in their 20s, recall life with their mother, Maggie, who founded and ran a full-time business in the publishing industry from a large office within the family home. Molly recalls:

"It was pretty crazy at times because you've

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always got staff observing your family life.” Marie adds, “I remember, every day, the secretary used to be working away, typing, and then she would stop and take me to school, and then would return to typing.”

Anne, a daughter in another business, had a similar experience:

“When I got home from school, Mum would be at the restaurant, and so I would go down to the restaurant and be a part of everything there. We had dinner there every night. It would be the only time I could really see Mum.”

Mothers described juggling childcare with business responsibilities and what this meant for their daughters. It wasn’t always smooth sailing. Maggie was legal guardian to nieces and nephews as well as primary caregiver to her own children.

“People would assume that I wasn’t working in the holidays because I was ‘home’ and the kids were home—but I would be, and I might have had five kids there. We would set the backyard up and manage from there...I was working and still mothering at the same time.”

Some of the mothers interviewed talked of their children being “dragged around with them” from business meeting to business meeting. Caroline remembers her mother Caryn’s first business venture, “I have very early recollections of going with her to visit contract workers, and I was very, very young”. Alice, currently a clothing designer and manufacturer, talks about her daughter Anne’s early years in and around her own numerous business ventures:

“Anne was here all the time, this was her playground, she grew up in it. She would need to come along to all the meetings that I had with fabric warehouses. Actually, my husband and I would fight about it. He was working for himself too and I couldn’t understand why he couldn’t leave work and get her, while I had to leave a shop that’s open ‘til five. So she basically lived here in the store.”

The daughters agreed that awareness of what their fathers did for employment didn’t come as early as their understanding of what their mothers did because they didn’t spend the same amount of time with their fathers in the workspace.

Talk over the dinner table featured prominently in the lives of the daughters interviewed, though they didn’t always find it a pleasant experience. Marie says, “talking business over the kitchen table all the time made me so angry. It makes me angry still.”

Perhaps it is only natural that an entrepreneurial age erases, or at least blurs, the rigid boundaries between “work” and “home” life that evolved during the industrial age. Such flexible work arrangements are normally associated with small firms. However, as the highly publicised case of Yahoo’s chief executive Marissa Mayer illustrates, bringing young children to corporate headquarters (admittedly with a nursery next to mom’s office) is at least becoming the subject of speculation and conversation. Once we understand that boundaries are created in our minds, we might explore just how far we can push those boundaries in practice, in organisations large and small.

Working in the Business

BOTH MOTHERS and daughters spoke of early formal work experiences in the business. Anne, talks about first helping in the clothing business of her mother, Alice:

“I first started by helping to put clothes away on coat hangers and things like that. Then at secondary school age I finally graduated to being able to work there on a Sunday.”

Molly and Marie, remember photocopying in their childhood years, and then in their early teens editing for the home-based publishing business run by their mother, Maggie. Molly recalls, “We had holiday jobs, whenever they needed us; we would check and make

corrections in books. And then at about 14 or 15 we’d start illustrating for them.” Dot, who ran a dance school when her daughter, Diana, was a child, says:

“Because Diana learned the piano, she would come along and play the piano for class as well as teach, and help me in the class. She’d come up Saturday mornings and help with the little ones.”

Diana, who now runs the studio with Dot, started teaching dance when she was about 12 or 13 years old.

For all the daughters interviewed, becoming formally involved in the business was a gradual process that usually began in their preteen or teen years. That daughters were not merely exposed to their mother’s business, but eventually took on increasingly responsible jobs within the business, is not surprising. What is surprising is the young age at which they were doing this as a result of their mothers trying to balance carer and entrepreneur roles. That is perhaps the point; namely, that circumstances meant that these girls were not passive by-standers in the family business, but were involved at a young age. They generally demonstrated initiative early on and progressively took on increasingly challenging and important roles within the business, with their mothers as natural mentors. Without this subconscious mentoring relationship, daughters are likely to pursue other interests.

The Third Generation—*Déjà vu*

MANY OF the adult daughters interviewed have children of their own, and both mothers and adult daughters talked about how the third generation are already being socialised into the family business. This often sees both first and second generation—mother and adult daughter—juggling caring for the children of the third generation in the business. Anne says, “when my own daughter

was four months old she wouldn’t take her bottle. So she came in to work. At times it was ridiculous because she would be in her walker in the middle of the shop while I was trying to do everything. But Mum helped heaps here in the store.” Anne’s mother, Alice, says that her



six-year-old granddaughter is already talking about when she will own the stores.

“She said just the other day; I’m going run the stores. She has got in her mind that that’s what women in her family do.”

Some of the mother-daughter teams interviewed are in the fashion design/clothing manufacturing business, and the granddaughters in each of the businesses are taking an interest in design already. Anne says her daughter designs t-shirts. “She does her little drawings and little hearts on it like she’s seen me do. So we got one printed onto t-shirts and gave them to family for Christmas. That was her first fashion design. Of course now, with every drawing, she asks is that good enough for a t-shirt?” Caroline talks about her oldest daughter, who is nine years old and who also spends time designing, going to the next level.



“She was down there in the store the other day showing the customers the clothes and suggesting that this would look good on them, styling them. She is interested in what we do.”

Some third generation even go on business trips away with their mothers and grandmothers. Anne says of her own daughter:

“She thinks hotels are a common occurrence now. She stays in them all the time. She’s the first to go ‘this one hasn’t got a pool!’ And here I am thinking, Oh God—what have I brought up.”

Oh daughter, where art thou?

THE PURPOSE of the research was not to compare and contrast mother-daughter businesses with father-son family businesses. A great deal of attention has already been paid to family succession in family-run businesses. Far less is known about how daughters growing up in a business become socialised toward taking part in that business and eventually assuming an ownership role. Though male entrepreneurs and owner-managers often refer to the balance between their business and home life, the women interviewed in this study led busy enterprises—sometimes a series of businesses—while also juggling significant childcare responsibilities. Daughters raised in homes that were the business, or where the business premises became an extension of the family home because of the amount of time spent there, learned first-hand about the business very early in their childhoods. And socialisation didn’t stop at the end of the business day; it continued into the evening with business talk around the dinner table. These daughters took job roles at an early age and rapidly took on more responsibility.

Though some of the first and second-generation mothers in this study also had sons, this study only included the perspectives of daughters. Implied in the interviews with mothers and adult daughters were hints of different dynamics with the socialisation process for sons. Research that compares the experiences of the sons raised in women-led family businesses in traditionally female industries may provide more diversity in results and perhaps enable further comparisons to be drawn with Iannarelli’s, and Keating and Little’s, earlier work where sons and daughters were socialised differently. Also worthy of further study is the socialisation process when women head businesses in industries that aren’t traditionally female.

Most of the women interviewed ran (and still run) businesses in what might be considered traditionally female industries such as fashion, design and dance schools. Where the businesses were run from the family home, there were no boundaries between home and business. Those with stores or business premises accommodated the children, and mothers frequently took their young daughters to off-site business meetings. In the case of the dance school the children could attend classes while their mother was working because she was teaching a class or in the office on site. As one of the daughter participants suggests:

“I don’t have any memories of hanging with Dad on a work day. And that’s probably to do with it being a fairly hazardous area for a kid as he worked on building sites and things.”

It would be interesting to find women entrepreneurs running more dangerous businesses and compare the level of on-site time and its consequences for their daughters’ attitudes toward the business. In the cases at hand, not only did business

ownership for these women give them more flexibility in childcare arrangements, the type of industries that these women were working in could support overlapping home and work commitments. Moreover, in many cases the grandmother contributed support and deepened the socialisation of the third generation into the business.

As the quotations above suggest, daughters grow up rather quickly in terms of applying themselves to the needs of the business and it is only natural that they should join their mothers in it. This defies the lingering stereotype that girls don’t find business interesting. Indeed, growing up with an entrepreneurial mother makes owning the business (or a business) an expected way of life for some—but not all—daughters. Given that small businesses are the world’s fastest growing business sector and that women are starting businesses at a faster rate than men, it is worth thinking about the impact women entrepreneurs are having on their daughters, and the impact these future generations will have on the business world. ■



KEY TAKE-OUTS

- Many women entrepreneurs, who are also mothers, are choosing to set up their businesses in order to juggle work and caring for their daughters.
- This overlap of family and business is leading to early socialisation of daughters to their mother’s business, possibly earlier than in male-led businesses.
- The number of women-owned businesses world-wide, and the compounded impact of their daughters, may represent a significant shift in the way family and business interact in the future.



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