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Why Research on Women Entrepreneurs Needs New Directions

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Research articles on women's entrepreneurship reveal, in spite of intentions to the contrary and in spite of inconclusive research results, a tendency to recreate the idea of women as being secondary to men and of women's businesses being of less significance or, at best, as being a complement. Based on a discourse analysis, this article discusses what research practices cause these results. It suggests new research directions that do not reproduce women's subordination but capture more and richer aspects of women's entrepreneurship.

Introduction

Several authors maintain that research on women entrepreneurs suffers from a number of shortcomings. These include a one-sided empirical focus (Gatewood, Carter, Brush, Greene, & Hart, 2003), a lack of theoretical grounding (Brush, 1992), the neglect of structural, historical, and cultural factors (Chell & Baines, 1998; Nutek, 1996), the use of male-gendered measuring instruments (Moore, 1990; Stevenson, 1990), the absence of a power perspective, and the lack of explicit feminist analysis (Mirchandani, 1999; Ogbor, 2000; Reed, 1996). While fully agreeing with the above, this article takes the critique one step further and discusses the consequences of such shortcomings and suggests some ways to amend the situation.

The suggestions are based on a discourse analysis of 81 research articles (73 empirical and 8 conceptual) on women's entrepreneurship published between 1982 and 2000 in four leading entrepreneurship research journals[1] (Ahl, 2004). The reviewed articles covered the psychology of women entrepreneurs, their personal background and business characteristics, attitudes to entrepreneurship, intentions to start a business, the start-up process, management practices, strategies, networking, family issues, access to capital, and performance.[2]

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1. The selection includes all 68 articles on the topic published in *Entrepreneurship Theory and Practice*, *Journal of Business Venturing*, *The Journal of Small Business Management* and *Entrepreneurship and Regional Development*, which Meeks, Neck, and Meyer (2001) and Ratnatunga and Romano (1997) hold as the leading journals. An additional 13 articles from other journals were included as they were frequently cited by authors in the original selection.

2. Reviewed studies in order of topic:
Personal Background and Firm Characteristics: Hisrish and Brush (1984), Scott (1986), Birley, Moss, and Saunders (1987), Holmquist and Sundin (1990), Carter, Van Auken, and Harms (1992), Dolinsky (1993), Rosa

This article is based on a feminist analysis, which entails the recognition and analysis of women's structural subordination to men (Calás & Smircich, 1996). Consequently, it focuses on the results of certain established research practices regarding power relations between the genders. These practices, which I call *discursive practices*, shape the discourse on women's entrepreneurship. In the following, I initially discuss feminist theory and gender and then define discursive practices. Thereafter, I identify such practices in the reviewed articles and discuss how they position the woman entrepreneur. The final section suggests some new directions for research on women's entrepreneurship.

What is Meant by Gender?

Feminist scholars introduced the term *gender* to distinguish between biological sex (human bodies with male or female reproductive organs) and socially constructed sex, i.e., social practices and representations associated with femininity or masculinity (Acker, 1992). The term has since then been co-opted, however, and is today often used in the same sense as biological sex—so also in the reviewed articles. By gender, the authors usually refer to men and women, and not to socially constructed sex. They also assume that men and women differ in important respects. Otherwise, there would be no reason for comparison.

This article takes a social constructionist or poststructuralist feminist position and uses the term gender in the original sense of the word, i.e., as socially constructed. Where does this belong in feminist theory? Following Harding (1987), feminist theory could be classified into three groups. In the first group, men and women are seen as essentially similar, in the second group they are seen as essentially different, and in the third group, similarities and differences are seen as socially constructed.

The first group, in which **liberal feminist theory** and feminist empiricism belong, sees men and women as essentially similar. It is inspired by liberal political theory, i.e., a human is defined by her ability to think rationally. Men and women are seen as equally able and any subordination of women must depend on discrimination or on structural barriers, as for example, unequal access to education. Such barriers can be partly or totally

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and Hamilton (1994), Dant, Brush, and Iniesta (1996), Shabbir and Di Gregorio (1996), Zapalska (1997), Shim and Eastlick (1998), Maysami and Goby (1999), and Spilling and Berg (2000).
Attitudes toward Entrepreneurship/Intentions to Start a Business: Scherer, Brodzinsky, and Wiebe (1990), Fagenson and Marcus (1991), Matthews and Moser (1995, 1996), and Kourilsky and Walstad (1998).
Psychology: Neider (1987), Masters and Meier (1988), Sexton and Bowman-Upton (1990), MacNabb, McCoy, Weinreich, and Northover (1993), Fagenson (1993), and Bellu (1993). *Start-Up Process*: Pellegrino and Reece (1982), Goffee and Scase (1983), Nelson (1987), Shane, Kolvereid, and Westhead (1991), Kolvereid, Shane, and Westhead (1993), Marlow (1997), and Alsos and Ljunggren (1998).
Management Practice and Strategy: Chaganti (1986), Olson and Currie (1992), Van Auken, Rittenburg, Doran, and Hsieh (1994), and Buttner (2001). *Networking*: Smeltzer and Fann (1989), Aldrich, Reese, and Dubini (1989), Cromie and Birley (1992), Andre (1992), and Katz and Williams (1997). *Family*: Cox, Moore, and Van Auken (1984), Nelson (1989), Stoner, Hartman, and Arora (1990), Dumas (1992), Marshack (1994), and Caputo and Dolinsky (1998). *Access to Capital*: Buttner and Rosen (1988, 1989, 1992), Riding and Swift (1990), Fay and Williams (1993), Fabowale, Orser, and Riding (1995), Carter and Rosa (1998), Greene, Brush, Hart, and Saparito (1999), and Coleman (2000). *Performance*: Cuba, Decenzo, and Anish (1983), Miskin and Rose (1990), Kalleberg and Leicht (1991), Fischer, Reuber, and Dyke (1993), Rosa, Hamilton, Carter, and Burns (1994), Chaganti and Parasuraman (1996), Buttner and Moore (1997), Lerner, Brush, and Hisrich (1997), Carter, Williams, and Reynolds (1997), Carter and Allen (1997), Cliff (1998), Fasci and Valdez (1998), Chell and Baines (1998), Anna, Chandler, Jansen, and Mero (2000), Boden and Nucci (2000), and DuRietz and Henrekson (2000). *Review/Conceptual*: Stevenson (1986, 1990), Birley (1989), Moore (1990), Brush (1992), and Berg (1997). *Other*: Baker, Aldrich, and Liou (1997), Nilsson (1997), Brush (1997), and Walker and Joyner (1999).

eliminated. This view has been criticized for having an unstated male norm. It does not question bureaucracy, leadership, and so on, but advises women to adapt to the existing order in society (Calás & Smircich, 1996).

In the second group in which **social feminist theory**, **psychoanalytical feminist theory**, or **radical feminist theory** belong, men and women are seen to be, or have become, essentially different. Feminine traits are perceived as benefits rather than as drawbacks and as resources to be used constructively (Chodorow, 1988; Gilligan, 1982). Management research within this tradition has studied organizations that have attempted to remove the corporate ladder and build flat organizations, having shared leadership and consensus-oriented decision making (Iannello, 1992). This view also does not question the male norm; it merely provides an alternative or a complementary norm. Constructing men and women as different means that one understands "man" and "woman" to be essential, unitary (and different) concepts, which limits the repertoire of both sexes.

Social constructionist and **poststructuralist feminist theory** belong to the third group. This group is not concerned with what men or women are but with how masculinity and femininity is constructed and what effects this construction has on the social order. Gender refers to what is regarded as masculine or feminine and is independent of a person's biological sex. Gender is a result of upbringing and social interaction, and it varies in time and place. Gender is something that is "done," "accomplished," or "performed" rather than something that "is." Any seeming stability depends on the recreation or repetitive performance of gender (Butler, 1990, 1993).

One is not free to perform gender in any way one chooses. Each culture's norms restrain proper gender behavior, and these norms have social effects. Social constructionist feminist work investigates and challenges such norms or such notions about gender, which are taken for granted. When gender—not sex—is in focus, this means that the study object goes beyond men and women. Professions, for example, are gendered, and so is entrepreneurship, as will be demonstrated later. The study object of this article is neither men nor women, but constructions of gender in research articles about women's entrepreneurship.

The article makes no assumptions about differences between men and women. Neither does it assume that they are alike. Meta-analyses of psychological research on men and women show that the differences between individuals, even within the same sex, are invariably much larger than the average difference, if any, between the sexes (Doyle & Paludi, 1998; Fausto-Sterling, 1992). That is, if one were to plot the test results on a normal distribution curve, the curve for women and the curve for men would largely, if not entirely, overlap. The more common assumption, however, is that men and women are indeed systematically different and that such differences have social effects. I argue that the assumption of sex differences has little basis in scientific observations but have large and important effects regarding the power relations between men and women. Research, as far as it recreates a binary polarization between groups of individuals based on their sex, risks reproducing the subordinate role of women.

What is Meant by Discursive Practices?

Discursive practices help shape the discourse on any phenomenon. A discourse, loosely defined, is how something is presented or regarded. A discourse is never neutral—it has power implications for the object of which it speaks in that it forms what is held as knowledge or truth (Foucault, 1969/1972). A dominant discourse of women as primarily suited for childcare, for example, means that society's institutions are likely to follow suit and favor a social arrangement in which the man is the breadwinner and the

woman is the caregiver. A discourse of men and women as equally fit for careers and childcare will result in different arrangements with, for instance, public, subsidized childcare so that both parents can work. Such discourses have implications for the life of individual women or men, whether they agree with them or not.

Discourse in Foucault's terminology also includes material and other practices that shape how something is presented. Such practices are here labeled as discursive practices. Foucault (1972) details these in *The Discourse on Language*. Adapting his discussion to women entrepreneurs as portrayed in research journals, the discursive practices include, to begin with, the *preferred research and analysis methods*. These are informed by theory and, therefore, the term also includes the studies' *theoretical points of departure*. Both are, in turn, dependent on a researcher's *ontological and epistemological premises*.

According to Foucault (1972), the foremost of the practices that shape the research process are *assumptions that go unquestioned*. Research on women's entrepreneurship holds certain assumptions of business, gender, family, society, the economy, and the individual, all of which influence the research questions asked, the methods chosen, and the answers received. The assumptions also include *what is excluded*, i.e., factors or circumstances that are not perceived as relevant for entrepreneurship research.

Each field has its *foundational texts*, which every author must relate to whether agreeing or objecting, and which help shape the research field. Other practices of importance concern issues of legitimacy—who is allowed to speak on the subject and what channels count? *The writing and publishing practices* of entrepreneurship research are relevant here as well as the available *institutional support*, which both enable and restrain the research. I have considered each of these discursive practices based on a multimethod approach including content analysis, argumentation analysis, deconstruction, and genre analysis (Ahl, 2006).

Effects of Discursive Practices

Discursive Practice 1: The Entrepreneur as Male Gendered

Several authors point out that entrepreneur and entrepreneurship are male-gendered concepts, i.e., they have masculine connotations. It is not only the frequent use of the male pronoun (this was standard in science until the 1980s) but also the way the entrepreneur is described. It could be argued that this is because entrepreneurs have traditionally been men, but several scholars maintain that women entrepreneurs were made invisible in research as well as in the media (Baker et al., 1997; Sundin, 1988). Other authors discuss male-gendered measuring instruments (Moore, 1990; Stevenson, 1990), gendered attitudes to entrepreneurs (Nilsson, 1997), or male-gendered theory (Bird & Brush, 2002; Chell, Haworth, & Brearley, 1991; Mirchandani, 1999; Reed, 1996).

The following feminist deconstruction[3] of some of the foundational texts in the field clearly demonstrates this point. Foundational texts are those that scholars within any field

3. A basic idea of deconstruction is that a text says as much by what it does not say as by what it says. The silences in a text can be said to hide or make ideological assumptions appear neutral or absent. Analyzing them can make the devalued "other" visible. A deconstruction is of course always subject to further deconstruction—there is no end point where one has "revealed it all." Feminists have mixed feelings about it for this very reason. Some feminists favor positive knowledge claims on which to build political action. I agree with Joanne Martin, however. She writes that deconstruction is a powerful analytical tool, and "the risks are worth it" (Martin, 1990). Scholars using deconstruction employ a number of systematic strategies for analyzing the silences and the absences in a text. The technique that I have developed here is inspired by

build upon or openly argue against (Foucault, 1972). In both these cases, they help shape the research field. Historically, theorizing entrepreneurship was the domain of economics. To see how the founding fathers envisioned the entrepreneur, I therefore selected Hébert and Link's (1988) comprehensive overview of economic thought on entrepreneurship, which begins with French economist Cantillon in the early 1700s and ends with mid- and late twentieth-century American scholars. Secondly, I analyzed Schumpeter's (1934/1983) *The Theory of Economic Development.* His 1934 edition is, in spite of its age, by far the most cited work about entrepreneurship, even among contemporary writers.[4] Thirdly, to see if there was any connection to the classics, I selected contemporary articles from the management and entrepreneurship research literature concerned with defining entrepreneurship and the entrepreneurship research domain (Carland, Hoy, & Carland, 1988; Gartner, 1988; Grégoire, Déry, & Béchard, 2001; Hornaday, 1990; Kirzner, 1983; Low & MacMillan, 1988; Meeks et al., 2001; Shane & Venkataraman, 2000, 2001; Singh, 2001; Stevenson, 1984).

The foundational texts are mainly concerned with theorizing entrepreneurship as a function in the economy. However, few of these can resist the temptation to describe the individual who carries out this function. The emerging image is that of the heroic self-made man. Schumpeter (1934/1983, pp. 93–94), describes the entrepreneur as a man of daring and decisiveness who is motivated by "the dream and the will to found a private kingdom, usually, but not necessarily, also a dynasty," which offers him a sense of power and independence. He is driven by the will to conquer: "the impulse to fight, to prove oneself superior to others, to succeed for the sake, not of the fruits of success, but of success itself . . . Our type seeks out difficulties, changes in order to change, delights in ventures." According to him, such men are unusual. Many men can sing, he writes, but the Carusos are rare.

As could be expected, the contemporary texts were less prone to use the male pronoun. Also, a central theme was the discussion of whether it makes sense to theorize entrepreneurial traits or not. However, those who advocated a continued focus on the person still saw the entrepreneur as an unusual and extraordinary figure with levels of achievement orientation, optimism, self-efficacy, internal locus of control, cognitive skills, and tolerance for ambiguity above the ordinary (Shane & Venkataraman, 2000).

Table 1 contains the words used to describe the entrepreneur in the selected texts. It is juxtaposed and compared with the words describing masculinity from Bem's (1981) widely used masculinity and femininity index. Sandra Bem, most well-known for her book *Lenses of Gender* (1993), is a psychologist who, following thorough research in the United States, developed an index of which characteristics are generally held to describe masculinity versus femininity.[5] In today's language, one might say that she captured social

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Saussure (1983), who said that one can only make sense of something by picturing what it is not. "Woman" is "not man" or "the opposite of man" and vice versa. For a full description of the method and the lists of words and their opposites, see Ahl (2004).

4. See for example "entrepreneurship" in the *International Encyclopedia of the Social and Behavioral Sciences*, which identifies Schumpeter as the most influential scholar on entrepreneurship. He is also cited more than any other researcher. His 1934 edition was in March 2006, cited 2,418 times at http://scholar.google.com, which lists citations in contemporary work in the social sciences. The economist Knight's (1933) *Risk, Uncertainty and Profit* comes second with 1,377 citations. Then there is a jump down to 752 for Kirzner's 1978 book *Competition and Entrepreneurship*. Contemporary influential writers like, for example, Bill Gartner stop at 311 citations for his most cited article.

5. Masculinity and femininity are, in Bem's research, seen as two separate constructs. There is not a continuous scale with femininity on one side and masculinity on the other. An individual can score high or low on each construct. Bem devised a four-by-four matrix where people were masculine, feminine, androgynous

Table 1

Masculinity Words Compared to Entrepreneur Words

Bem's masculinity words	Entrepreneur
Self-reliant	Self-centered, internal locus of control, self-efficacious, mentally free, able
Defends own beliefs	Strong willed
Assertive	Able to withstand opposition
Strong personality	Resolute, firm in temper
Forceful, athletic*	Unusually energetic, capacity for sustained effort, active
Has leadership abilities	Skilled at organizing, visionary
Willing to take risks	Seeks difficulty, optimistic, daring, courageous
Makes decisions easily	Decisive in spite of uncertainty
Self-sufficient	Independent, detached
Dominant, aggressive*	Influential, seeks power, wants a private kingdom and a dynasty
Willing to take a stand	Stick to a course
Act as a leader	Leading economic and moral progress, pilot of industrialism, manager
Individualistic*	Detached
Competitive*	Wants to fight and conquer, wants to prove superiority
Ambitious*	Achievement oriented
Independent*	Independent, mentally free
Analytical*	Exercising sound judgment, superior business talent, foresighted, astute, perceptive, intelligent

* = words that did not apply in Sweden.

constructions of gender. Her index has since been validated for use within other cultures. Persson (1999), for example, found that 70% of Bem's words also distinguished masculinity from femininity in a Swedish context. (The words that did not apply in Sweden are marked with an asterisk.) Bem's femininity words do not match the list of entrepreneur words above. Is femininity then constructed as the opposite of entrepreneurship? In order to determine this, I made a list of the opposites to the entrepreneur words using an antonym dictionary and tried to match it with Bem's femininity words. The result is shown in Table 2. Besides demonstrating that entrepreneur is constructed as something positive

(high on both dimensions), or undifferentiated (low on both dimensions). Bem's original idea was that it was psychologically healthier to embody both masculine and feminine characteristics than to have only one set of traits. How people score in the test is not of interest here, however, but the culturally accepted norms of what is masculine and feminine. Both Bem's American sample and Persson's Swedish sample turned out to be mostly undifferentiated or androgynous, which is yet another demonstration of this article's claim that ideas of gender differences do not correspond to actual measurements.

Table 2

Femininity Words Compared to Opposites of Entrepreneur Words

Bem's femininity scale	Opposites of entrepreneur words
Gentle	Cautious
Loyal	Follower, dependent
Sensitive to the needs of others	Selfless, connected
Shy*	Cowardly
Yielding*	Yielding, no need to put a mark on the world, subordinate, passenger, irresolute, following, weak, wavering, external locus of control, fatalist, wishy-washy, uncommitted, avoids power, avoids struggle and competition, self-doubting, no need to prove oneself
Gullible*	Gullible, blind, shortsighted, impressionable, making bad judgments, unable, mentally constrained, stupid, disorganized, chaotic, lack of business talent, moody
Sympathetic, affectionate, understanding, warm, compassionate, eager to soothe hurt feelings, soft spoken, tender, loves children,* does not use harsh language,* cheerful,* childlike,* flatterable*	(No match)

* = words that did not apply in Sweden.

(as the opposite words are largely negative), Table 2 also shows its gendering. Some of Bem's femininity words such as loyal, sensitive to the needs of others, gentle, shy, yielding, gullible, and childlike are the direct opposites of the entrepreneur words. The other femininity words, affectionate, sympathetic, understanding, etc., do not seem to be present in the entrepreneurship discussion at all. They are neither on the list of words describing the entrepreneur, nor are they the opposites of such words. The conclusion drawn is that entrepreneur is a masculine concept, i.e., it is not gender neutral. The implication is that any investigation of women entrepreneurs that builds on earlier scholarly work risks comparing them to a male-gendered archetype.

Discursive Practice 2: Entrepreneurship as an Instrument for Economic Growth

Repeating the analysis but this time using the word "entrepreneurship" revealed that it is characterized by words such as innovation, change, risk taking, opportunity

recognition, driving force, and economic growth. It is constructed as something positive, leading to improvement. It fits nicely into the grand narrative of modernity in which development not only implies change but also implies progress, which is both valued and expected (Foucault, 1969/1972; Lyotard, 1979/1984).

An analysis of the introductory sections of the reviewed articles clearly reflects the understanding that the main use of entrepreneurship is as an instrument for economic growth. Literary theorist Swales (1990) writes that scientific articles consist of a separate literary genre with its own distinctive marks. He found that introductory sections usually follow a certain three-step procedure. First, they establish a territory by claiming the centrality or the importance of the research area. Second, they establish a niche by indicating a research gap, making a counterclaim or raising a question. Third, the established niche is occupied typically by presenting the outline of the work or its purpose or by announcing the principal findings. The articles in this analysis showed no exceptions. In fact, they followed the pattern to the letter. Using a table based on Swales' scheme, I inserted the arguments used in each article and then compared them crosswise. The result of the first step is presented in Table 3.

Table 3 suggests that women's entrepreneurship is mainly important as an instrument for economic growth. Researchers write that their businesses have, or should have (depending on country and prevalence of women entrepreneurs), an important impact on the economy in terms of jobs, sales, innovation and economic growth, and renewal. Sixty-five percent of the articles use this as the reason for why researching women entrepreneurs is important. As the second and third argument (that they have received increased research attention and that the resulting research has been flawed) are results of work based on the first argument, one may conclude that economic growth comes out as *the* legitimate reason for entrepreneurship research. Step two usually indicated a gap, either by claiming that women entrepreneurs were underresearched or not adequately researched. Eight percent of the introductions, however, claimed that women entrepreneurs did not perform to standard and must be subject to further investigation. Concerning the third step, all strategies suggested by Swales were present.

The growth argument is a strong discursive practice. It allows research to consider certain questions and ignore others. It tends to make research on women entrepreneurs

Table 3

Establishing a Territory

Arguments used to establish centrality of research area	No. of papers	Percent
Entrepreneurship is important for the economy	53	65
Women's entrepreneurship has received increased scholarly attention	11	14
Research on women's entrepreneurship is flawed	7	9
My particular research area is important because I say so	10	12
Total	81	100

focus on performance and growth issues while ignoring issues such as gender equality and gender/power relations.

Discursive Practice 3: Men and Women as Essentially Different

Provided the two previous discursive practices, there is a certain logic to the typical research article. It begins with declaring the importance of economic growth and the role of entrepreneurship in securing this. Granted this, the phenomena to be studied are the performance and growth of women's businesses. To evaluate this, it was usually compared to another group. Seventy-three percent of the reviewed articles compared women entrepreneurs to other groups, and 62% compared them to men or men's businesses.

When evaluating men and women without controlling for what type of business they own, women tend to come out on the losing side. Their businesses are generally smaller, grow more slowly, and are less profitable (Fasci & Valdez, 1998; Hisrish & Brush, 1984; Kalleberg & Leicht, 1991; Rosa & Hamilton, 1994). This is referred to as the "female underperformance hypothesis" (DuRietz & Henrekson, 2000).

Given the rationale of economic growth, women's "underperformance" is then positioned as a problem, and the possible reasons for this as something worth investigating in more detail. Several articles in the selection focus on liberal feminist arguments, i.e., any problem with women depends not on women but on discrimination. Discrimination by bank loan officers was researched in several articles, but the results were mixed. When accounting for structural factors, there was little evidence of direct discrimination. Instead, women tend to own businesses with very little collateral and therefore have more difficulties in securing a loan (Coleman, 2000; Fabowale et al., 1995).

If discrimination is not the case, perhaps something about women can explain why they perform less? Apart from the bank discrimination studies, all of the explanatory studies in the review had research questions or hypotheses focusing explicitly on some type of problem or proposed shortcomings of women. Women are discussed as:

- Having a psychological makeup that is less entrepreneurial or at least different from that of a man's (Fagenson, 1993; Neider, 1987; Sexton & Bowman-Upton, 1990; Zapalska, 1997)
- Having less motivation for entrepreneurship or for growth of their businesses (Buttner & Moore, 1997; Fischer et al., 1993)
- Having insufficient education or experience (Boden & Nucci, 2000)
- Having less desire to start a business (Carter & Allen, 1997; Kourilsky & Walstad, 1998; Matthews & Moser, 1996; Scherer et al., 1990)
- Being risk averse (Masters & Meier, 1988)
- Having unique start-up difficulties or training needs (Birley et al., 1987; Nelson, 1987; Pellegrino & Reece, 1982)
- Using less than optimal or perhaps "feminine" management practices or strategies (Carter et al., 1997; Chaganti, 1986; Cuba et al., 1983; Olson & Currie, 1992; Van Auken et al., 1994)
- Behaving irrationally by turning to unqualified family members for help (Nelson, 1989)
- Not networking optimally (Aldrich et al., 1989; Cromie & Birley, 1992; Katz & Williams, 1997; Smeltzer & Fann, 1989)
- Perceiving other women as less cut for the role of entrepreneurship (Fagenson & Marcus, 1991)

- Attributing loan denials to gender bias instead of flaws in the business plan (Buttner & Rosen, 1992)

When testing the hypotheses, measuring instruments reflect the male gendering of the entrepreneur concept. That is, the scales comprising "entrepreneurial qualities" are designed to measure factors such as decisiveness, boldness, ambition, and independence (Stevenson, 1990). Sometimes, a contrasting scale with feminine qualities such as modesty, weakness, and sensitivity is constructed for comparison purposes (Chaganti, 1986). There is an idea that men and women would score differently on these scales and that women would be "less entrepreneurial" than men (Cromie & Birley, 1992).

Contrary to hypotheses, few (if any) differences were found. Men and women scored very similarly. Differences within each sex were much larger than the average differences, if any, between the sexes. Women's "underperformance" could not be explained by differences between men and women. In fact, when controlling for structural factors, there was no evidence of women's underperformance (DuRietz & Henrekson, 2000; Watson, 2002).

The idea that gender differences existed was, however, so pervasive that several authors tried to explain away their results. I identified three such strategies. One explanation I have chosen to call **making a mountain out of a molehill**, which entails the overemphasis on a statistically significant (which is not the same as significant) difference, however small, while ignoring the similarities and the overlap between the groups. An example is a study by Olson and Currie (1992, p. 2) who concluded that "the results support the notion that male and female entrepreneurs perceive their business start-up environment differently" in spite of having found only a minor difference in just one of nine items.

Another strategy stresses that women entrepreneurs must be different from ordinary women, even if the study had no comparative data defining "ordinary women" (e.g., Aldrich et al., 1989; Buttner & Rosen, 1989). I call this **the self-selected woman** strategy. Women entrepreneurs are said to be, or said to have become, tougher than other women. This strategy maintains and preserves the idea of the existence of the ordinary, caring, and relational woman.

I have called the third strategy **the good mother**. It cherishes any small differences found and combines them with general ideas of women and picture the relational and caring woman entrepreneur (e.g., Buttner, 2001; Carter et al., 1997). This strategy turns women's proposed differential disadvantages into advantages but does not challenge the male norm. It rather becomes a complement.

The assumption of essential gender differences is a strong discursive practice. It affects research questions, hypotheses, methods, and interpretations of results. It may even lead to questionable research results. Not only researchers but also men and women entrepreneurs usually subscribe to the idea of men and women as being different. In surveys that measure stereotypically gendered qualities, there is a risk that one evaluates and compares oneself and others with such stereotypes as well. Cliff, Langton, and Aldrich (2005) showed that while women managed in a similar manner as men, they *claimed* to use more "feminine" strategies. So gendered measuring instruments may lead to results that confirm hypotheses of differences, even if there are none. The end result of this discursive practice is that women are cast as "the other" of men. They are cast as secondary, as a complement or, at best, as an unused resource.

Discursive Practice 4: The Division between Work and Family

The reviewed articles assume a division between work and family and between a public and a private sphere of life. Definitions under "family" and "private" are seen as

the woman's responsibility. This becomes particularly clear when comparing texts about women's entrepreneurship to general entrepreneurship research. Whereas the former examines family issues, family seems to be nonexistent in the latter.

The authors usually position the family as being a problem. Several studies have investigated to what extent a family is an impediment for a woman to start and run a business. Stoner et al. (1990), for example, examined the work–home role conflict in female owners of small businesses. They discussed their findings in terms of "interference, conflict, crossover," which confirms the idea of the two competing spheres. The article suggests that the problem is particularly female, just as the considerable crossover is a particularly female phenomenon. Men are not mentioned (see also Carter & Allen, 1997; Cox et al., 1984). Other authors position the family as a source of inspiration. They argue that this is where women develop their unique skills at democratic leadership, networking, and relationship marketing (e.g., Brush, 1992; Buttner, 2001).

Women's entrepreneurship may also be positioned as a particular kind of opportunity for society. Caputo and Dolinsky (1998) provide an illustrative example. They advise governments to supply microloans to women so that they can contribute to the family income by starting a business that enables them to be flexible and work around the schedule of their husbands. They can take care of the children when the husband is at work and run their business at other times when the husband is available for childcare. The authors claim that this arrangement presents an opportunity for society since it will save taxpayer expenditure for public childcare.

Whether a problem, a source of inspiration, or an opportunity for society, the family is seen as being separate from work, perceived as the woman's responsibility, and it is taken for granted that the man is the primary breadwinner. Giving the woman double responsibilities—work *and* family—means that she cannot compete on equal terms with a man in the same line of business. Her business is constructed as secondary and complementary to both male-owned businesses and her primary responsibility, the family. Women's entrepreneurship could potentially challenge these arrangements, but this possibility is not typically considered in the reviewed texts. This discursive practice thus reinforces the preceding one in casting women's businesses as being secondary.

Discursive Practice 5: Individualism

A fifth discursive practice concerns the individualist focus of entrepreneurship research. The texts focus upon the individual entrepreneur and her business. Contextual and historical variables affecting the business such as legislation, culture, or politics are seldom discussed. It is as if the future of the business depends solely on the individual. Even when structural factors are accounted for, such as access to business education, useful business networks, or managerial experience, problems in these areas are still held to be amended by the individual. Women are advised to enhance their education, to network more efficiently, and to obtain a more relevant experience (e.g., Cromie & Birley, 1992; Fischer et al., 1993).

There is a corresponding trend in how feminist theory is discussed. Fischer et al. (1993) introduced feminist thought in this literature by discussing liberal and social feminism. Liberal feminism holds that the reason why women have achieved less is because of direct or indirect discrimination. There is a power perspective in this line of thought, but also a basic male norm. If women were not deprived, the reasoning is that they would behave and achieve as do men. Social feminism, on the contrary, says that women are not likely to make the same choices as men. The authors designed a study to examine structural discrimination, value systems, and performance based on these

theoretical perspectives. This was taken up by several other studies, but apart from Cliff (1998), other authors omitted the word "feminism" with its implicit power perspective and instead wrote about "situational and dispositional variables" (Brush, 1997; Carter et al., 1997; Greene et al., 1999; Walker & Joyner, 1999). This tends to make feminist thought and action an individual undertaking. The collective dimension is lost. The result is that women's subordination to men is not discussed. Making gender power structures invisible serves to exclude any discussion of how the social world is arranged and the possibility of structural changes. Shortcomings are attributed to individual women and not to social arrangements.

Some British articles, however, explicitly challenged this and argued for an increased focus on structural and contextual variables (Birley, 1989; Chell & Baines, 1998; Goffee & Scase, 1983; Marlow, 1997; Rosa & Hamilton, 1994). But their arguments were not taken up.

Discursive Practice 6: Theories Favoring Individual Explanations

The preferred theories are congruent with and reinforce the assumptions discussed earlier. The theoretical base for the studies is generally weak. A large share, 45%, use only empirical results from earlier studies in their frame of reference (see Table 4). The remainder depart from psychology, sociology, and/or management theory/economics. But even studies using theories from the latter two fields favor models that explain social phenomena by independent variables related to the psychological makeup or behavior of the individual. References to feminist theory are largely absent.

In spite of the journals' international appeal, 64% of the articles originate from the United States and 83% come from the Anglo-Saxon sphere. Another 4% compare English-speaking countries with another country. The remainder are from Norway, Sweden, Israel, Pakistan, Poland, and Singapore. This means that certain cultural understandings of entrepreneurship, gender, equality, and business dominate and shape research. There may be difficulties in translating any results to cultures having different understandings of, for

Table 4

Theory Bases of the Reviewed Articles

Theory base	No. of papers	Percent
Not theory related	7	9
Refers to empirical results from previous research	29	36
Sociology (i.e., networks, social learning)	13	16
Psychology (traits, psychoanalysis, etc.)	9	11
Management theory/economics	6	7
Combinations of the above mentioned theories	13	16
Feminist theory (+ institutional theory in 1 article)	4	5
Total	81	100

example, what constitutes an individual and a collective responsibility, but this point is seldom made in the texts. Entrepreneurship as a solution to childcare problems, for example, is seen completely differently in the United States and in Scandinavia. Caputo and Dolinsky (1998) recommended women to start home-based businesses in order to combine entrepreneurship and childcare. This could make sense in a country without any subsidized day care confirmed by law, but not in Sweden where the opposite applies. In Sweden, the government recommends women to start day care businesses to provide professional child care for the children of other working parents (Proposition, 1993/1994: 140). Both countries still consider child care as being a woman's job, but whereas one country sees it as a private responsibility, the other sees it as a public responsibility.

Favoring individual explanations means that social and institutional aspects, which could affect conditions for entrepreneurship for both men and women—but perhaps differently for men than for women—remain undertheorized.

Discursive Practice 7: Research Methods that Look for Mean Differences

The preferred research methods entail a further reinforcement of the individualist focus in entrepreneurship research. As can be seen in Table 5, cross-sectional survey studies and structured questionnaires are predominant.

Convenience samples are prevalent (41%). The rest use purposive, stratified, random or systematic random sampling. There are also a few census studies. Sample sizes vary from below 20 to above 1,000 but response rates are generally on the low side, if at all stated. As many as 45% give no such information, 14% have a response rate below 30%, and 12% are in the 30–49% interval.

The vast majority (73%) compare groups of women entrepreneurs with other groups, usually male entrepreneurs (62%), but also managers, employees or other women entrepreneurs (11%). The results are presented with only descriptive statistics in 33% of the

Table 5

Research Design of the Empirical Studies

Research design	No. of papers	Percent
Cross sectional surveys (36 by mail, 5 personally)	41	53
Longitudinal (repeated surveys with structured questionnaire, four by mail, two by phone)	6	8
Personal face-to-face interviews (9 open or semistructured, 6 with structured questionnaire)	15	19
Phone interviews with structured questionnaire	3	4
Archival, database	4	5
Case studies	2	3
Experimental design	2	3
Focus groups	3	4
Observation	1	1
Total (77 instead of 73, as 4 used a combined design)	77	100

empirical studies, whereas the rest use a range of analysis techniques such as correlation tests, *t*-tests, multiple regression, manova, anova, factor, cluster, discriminant analysis, and logit models.[6]

The main point of such tests is to find statistically significant differences between groups. The methods used as such may be neutral. However, *in combination* with the assumption that men and women are different (discursive practice number 3) and that explanations are to be found in the individual, not in institutional arrangements (discursive practice number 5), these methods lend themselves to a search for psychological differences between men and women entrepreneurs in order to explain, for example, differences in company size or growth rates. The assumption of gender differences did not receive much support by the results but was nevertheless argued for in the texts as discussed earlier. One reason for this, besides the pervasiveness of the assumption of sex differences, may be the status that these methods, and particularly the term "statistically significant," have in the research community. Researchers may be more likely to publish a study in which a statistically significant difference can be found, however insignificant, than one that shows no such result. As Nina Colwill (1982, pp. 12–15) warned, research designs based on the search for differences "tend to favor a focus on differences rather than similarities which often results in the publishing of studies that find significant differences but not reporting similar studies where no significant differences are found. This can lead to inferences from published research of differences larger than actually might exist."

The preferred research methods thus act as a discursive practice, which tends to reinforce the idea that women are different from men and less suitable for entrepreneurship than men. The preferred methods may also reinforce the idea that explanations are to be found in the individual rather than on a social or institutional level. To research social explanations such as culture, history, legislation, industrial, financial and educational structures, and family policy and so on, methods other than survey research may be more suitable.

Discursive Practice 8: An Objectivist Ontology

The most common research question in the reviewed articles was related to finding differences between male and female entrepreneurs, but few differences were found, and the results were sometimes contradictory. As discussed earlier, researchers were unwilling to accept such results. Some authors gave methodological explanations as to why no differences could be found. One stated that the research designs were unsatisfactory, with unsophisticated statistical methods, small sample sizes, and convenience samples in combination with insufficient sampling information and/or careless referral practices (Brush, 1992; Moore, 1990). The basis of this critique is that the differences are there—if researchers had only looked well and closely enough, they would have found them. Another explanation maintained that male-gendered measuring instruments and preformulated questionnaires were used, making it impossible to capture anything "differentially feminine" since only more or less of what is already imagined is measured (Stevenson, 1990). Both these critiques, however, build upon an objectivist epistemology, which assumes that there is something female or male that can be measured.

But is there? Could the lack of systematic differences depend upon the circumstance that the investigated entities such as attitudes, value systems, and motivation are scientific constructs, produced by the very search for them? The act of filling out one's attitudes on

6. Detailed tables with descriptive statistics of sample types, sample sizes, response rates, analysis methods, use of comparison groups, use of feminist theory, and countries of origin are available from the author.

a questionnaire with Likert-type scales produces the attitude (Payne, Bettman, & Johnson, 1992). Moreover, even if one assumes that there is such a thing as a pre-existing attitude, it is questionable if there is any point in trying to measure it as research has shown little support for the assumption of attitude–behavior consistency (Abelson, 1972; Foxall, 1984; Wicker, 1969). Payne et al. (1992) argue that measures of behavioral intention reflect past behavior and thus serve as a justification for actions taken in the past, more so than as a prediction for the future. That is, they follow a logic of justification or of appropriateness rather than a logic of consequentiality (March & Olsen, 1989).

If stable, inner gender characteristics do not exist (and even if they do, they cannot explain behavior), then it should come as no surprise that the reviewed studies show inconclusive or unexpected results. To look for something either essentially female or male is thus to be looking for something in vain. This research, however unproductive in terms of finding differences, nonetheless produces something in the making. By focusing on gender as an individual characteristic rather than as something socially and culturally constructed that varies in time and space, the research tends to overlook structural factors and proposes that women have shortcomings.

Discursive Practice 9: Institutional Support for Entrepreneurship Research

The training and socialization of researchers may reinforce any of the discursive practices outlined above. Ph.D. students are taught the proper statistical methods to use, and time and money restraints usually mean that research projects tend to favor cross-sectional mail surveys, which have all the problems previously discussed built into them. Institutional support in terms of research funding and research centers is also part of discursive practices. Entrepreneurship is a rapidly growing research field in academia. The last 30 years has seen a rapid expansion, and research financing is increasingly available from both private and public funds (Cooper, Markman, & Niss, 2000). Many governments, as well as the European Union, fund entrepreneurship research as it has been shown that increase in employment comes largely from newly established and small firms (Birch, 1979; Davidsson, Lindmark, & Olofsson, 1994). Private funding is geared more toward performance issues. None of these focus on gender relations or power issues. Women become only a variable in the growth equation in which they are rendered inadequate. The pragmatic focus on growth and performance in combination with the other discursive practices (the male norm, the individualist focus, objectivist ontology, assumptions of gender differences, the private/public divide, and the theories and methods congruent with this) serve to both shape and restrain the research questions and contribute to the positioning of women as secondary.

Discursive Practice 10: Writing and Publishing Practices

Suppose one could disregard all the previous discursive practices and produce research that questioned gender/power relations in entrepreneurship from, let us say a Marxist feminist perspective, which challenged the primacy of economic growth. Would this be published in entrepreneurship research journals? Probably not, or at least not without major changes as there is a discursive practice which perhaps more than any reinforces the status quo, namely writing and publishing practices. Researchers' careers depend on being published in mainstream journals. If these encompass the practices outlined earlier, this means that articles submitted will also conform. Outliers are not likely to submit as they risk to be ruled out, or they will have to adapt as a result of the

review process. The transformation of liberal and social feminist theory into "situational and dispositional variables," which firmly turns gender/power relations into individual undertakings, may be a result of such a process.

There is also a geographical bias accompanied by certain ideas of what is good and publishable research. I analyzed the composition of the editorial boards in the four main journals selected and found that they mostly consisted of U.S. scholars. The figure was 65% for all of them in 2001 and 92% for the *Journal of Business Venturing*. Many of the members serve on more than one board, and most of them had participated in the same entrepreneurship research conference, as can be seen from the list of participants at the Babson conference in 2001. They form a discourse community,[7] which is likely to attract research that shares its assumptions and reject studies based on different ones (Swales, 1990).

Critical, feminist work on women's entrepreneurship exists but is published elsewhere; in books, in sociology, history, cultural geography or anthropology, in critical theory journals, or in gender research journals (Ahl, 2002; Goffee & Scase, 1983; Mirchandani, 1999; Mulholland, 1996; Nutek, 1996; Ogbor, 2000; Sundin, 1988). Critical or feminist work does not seem to be considered by entrepreneurship research journals. The trend is rather toward more streamlining as the "publish-or-perish" system, including journal ranking, is graining ground outside the United States (Huff, 1999). The review system thus conserves and maintains the discursive practices discussed here and hence has the final say in the continued reproduction of women's subordination by entrepreneurship research.

There is no reason to believe that this was the intention of the authors, on the contrary. Research on women's entrepreneurship is marginal in the academic field (Baker et al., 1997), and it may take a tenured position to be allowed the opportunity to conduct such research. This research often demonstrates a sincere interest in giving women a more prominent place in science, as for example a study by Brush, Carter, Gatewood, Greene, and Hart (2002), which aimed explicitly at dispelling myths about women entrepreneurs as being secondary to men.

Then why does it still turn out this way? The answer can be found in discursive practices. The name of the game, in itself, produces this particular result. The way to give women a voice in a field in which they are marginalized is to speak through normal discourse—which normally denigrates women. It is a "damned if you do, damned if you don't" situation.

Making the discursive practices visible and demonstrating their effects is the first step in opening up for critical and feminist perspectives. It also provides the necessary tools for reconstruction. In the following, I outline a research agenda that does not entail the reproduction of women's subordination and which will enable research to capture more and richer aspects of the phenomenon of women's entrepreneurship.

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7. Swales holds that a discourse community is a community with a broadly agreed set of common public goals. It has mechanisms for interaction among its members who are used to provide information and feedback. It uses and owns one or more genres in the communicative furtherance of its aims. It has acquired some specific lexis. Finally, it has a threshold level of members with a suitable degree of relevant content and discoursal expertise. All requisites apply to the editorial boards. Furthering entrepreneurship research may be the common goal. Scientific articles published in research journals are a mechanism for interaction and also make up a genre. Any article in these journals will reflect the specific lexis used and, as the analysis of the composition of the editorial boards showed, the community certainly has a threshold level of members with relevant content and discoursal expertise.

Suggestions for Future Research on Women's Entrepreneurship

To research women entrepreneurs without reproducing their secondary position would mean challenging the established discursive practices outlined above. I would therefore suggest the following two steps:

1. Expansion of the research object
2. A shift in epistemological position

Improvements could be achieved by implementing either of the two steps. The matrix in Figure 1 illustrates my thoughts.

The limitations and consequences of the first quadrant (individuals or individual businesses as research objects combined with essentialist assumptions) have been dealt with in detail throughout this article. If anything more could be said, one might call for more care when interpreting research results of statistical differences. Today, findings of differences are favored at the expense of findings of nondifferences, and any overlaps tend to be ignored. Statistically significant differences are examined at great length even if the size and nature of these would seem to be rather insignificant. As shown earlier, findings of nondifferences were also interpreted through a mental framework of differences. Can there be some sort of bias so that finding differences is regarded as better? Or are such results more likely to be published? Is there a "drawer problem" of interesting studies showing no differences, which are not even submitted for publication? If so, conclusions about the existence of differences from published work rest, as Nina Colwill (1982) warned, on loose ground.

The second quadrant indicates that one need not necessarily abandon an objectivist position in order to improve the situation. What would be necessary here, however, is to account for factors "outside" the individual entrepreneur or her business such as legislation, social norms, family policy, economic policy, structure of the labor market regarding the degree and type of women's participation, and so on. A contingency study approach would study relationships between, for example, family policy and the degree and type of women's entrepreneurship. To avoid a static picture, one also needs to study the effects of any changes in these factors. To avoid the risk of not questioning the norms and values of one's own culture, comparative work with researchers from different countries would be recommended. Such a research agenda allows international, comparative, and contingency studies. By comparing different social orders within these dimensions, alternative ways of social organization with alternative implications for women could be revealed.

Figure 1

Expanding Research on Women Entrepreneurs

	Current research object	**Expanded research object**
Objectivist epistemology	(1) Individualist focus and essentialist assumptions	(2) More factors Contingency studies Comparative studies
Constructionist epistemology	(3) Studies of how women entrepreneurs construct their lives and their businesses, how they "do gender"	(4) Studies of how social orders are gendered and of the mechanisms by which this gendering is reconstructed

Information from any such research is valuable for feminist studies in the same way that statistics resulting from feminist empiricism is valuable.

While research in quadrant two would expand the current research area, it still regards gender as being an essential attribute. It categorizes people as women and men and uses this as an explanatory variable. It is useful for showing differences in, for example, salary levels or levels of education, but it can only go so far in explaining why this should be so. A richer research agenda opens up when making a shift in epistemological position to study how gender is done, which is exemplified by this article. It shows how gender is produced by research texts on women's entrepreneurship. The constructionist approach uses gender as a starting point for research, not as an explanation. Gender is used as an analytical category, but instead of taking it for granted, one looks at how it is constructed. Instead of using sex as an explanatory variable, one studies how gender is *accomplished* in different contexts. A shift in thought is necessary, from gender as something that *is* to gender as something that is *done* and from gender as something firmly tied to bodies to gender as tied to anything—concepts, jobs, industries, language, disciplines—or to businesses. The reviewed studies seem to regard the type of business a woman starts as a matter of individual choice. But businesses are not gender neutral. Certain types of businesses are more readily available to a woman than are others. Some are compatible with an identity as "woman" while others are not. The reverse is, of course, also applicable. A man who starts a beauty parlor should, in my country, considers this very carefully if he wants to project a heterosexual, unambiguous "he-man" image.

A constructionist research approach may be used for the purposes of exposing power relations between male and female. If regarding gender as a relational concept, as something that is accomplished over and over again but is different in different contexts, there are many interesting research projects to be carried out. These would be placed in quadrants three and four in Figure 1. The division between quadrants three and four is somewhat artificial as a constructionist position entails that it is not meaningful to look at any individual separated from her social world. If separating the constructs, one must acknowledge and study how they constitute each other. The construction of social reality may, however, be studied with either construct in focus. One can use the individual or the social perspective as a lens.

In quadrant three, I envision studies of how individual men and women perform gender in daily interaction. An example is a study by Gherardi (1996), who showed that there was a discursive limitation to what subject positions were available for professional women in male working environments. As a result, the women remained as outsiders. This study did not only simplify explanations for women's subordination to what individual men and women did or how they were but also accounted for the choices available through the discursive order. So, "the social" was accounted for even when studying individuals. Another example is Fournier's (2002) study of women farmers in Italy. Contrary to the women in Gherardi's study, they actively resisted being cast in categories of otherness such as women (to men), peasant (to urban majority), "educated Other" of the farming community or "entrepreneurial Other" of the "apathetic farmers," and so on. They used these categories as it suited them while at other times denying them. They resisted the researcher's attempts to understand them by piling up these categories of otherness to a uniform picture, but this could only be achieved by their active work of disconnection, by continuously moving "somewhere else."

A research suggestion in quadrant three would be to study a bank interview between a woman entrepreneur seeking a loan and a male bank loan official through videotaping and conversation analysis (Silverman, 1998). This would allow a detailed study of how the conversants develop different subject positions and how gender impinges upon this. It

would reveal more about the issue of gender discrimination than a simple yes/no count. It might even conclude that discrimination is a mutual achievement, given the subject positions available through discourse for a man and a woman.

Another suggestion would be to study how the construction of entrepreneurship impinges on men entrepreneurs. Entrepreneur was found to be a male-gendered concept, which in itself rendered women entrepreneurs as "the Other" (deBeauvoir, 1953). However, research that compared men and women on personal characteristics showed that both sexes reflected the norm to the same extent—so it is not that men automatically score high on the desired attributes just because they are men. The "achieving individual" is a particular, cultural construction of masculinity, which many men may find oppressive, frustrating or just distasteful and which limits the choices for individuals. It puts strict limits on what a man can do and what a man can be, leaving all "feminine" options out of reach. Men who want to do something that does not conform to this idea of masculinity (where it prevails) must do this in constant opposition if they want to maintain their masculine identities.

A similar observation concerns the growth argument. Not growing, or not wanting to, or being unable to expand one's business was in several of the articles constructed as a female problem. But very few small business owners, usually sampled by entrepreneurship researchers, want to grow, irrespective of gender (Davidsson et al., 1994). They are content with a manageable business that provides them with a living. The growth ideal is therefore another gendered attribute that merits a closer look and more research. There seems to be a discrepancy between the official discourse of economic growth as trumpeted by policy makers and the desires of individuals, be they men or women.

In quadrant four, focus is on the gendering of institutional orders and how they are constructed and reconstructed. Business legislation, family policy, support systems for entrepreneurs, cultural norms, how childcare is arranged, gendered divisions of labor, and so on could be suitable objects for a closer study. An example is Nilsson's (1997) study of support systems for women entrepreneurs in Sweden. The Swedish government instituted a program of women counselors for aspiring women entrepreneurs. The counselors received appropriate training, and later evaluation showed that they had done a very good job. However, they were not fully accepted or acknowledged by their colleagues in the regular counseling system. A women-only counseling system was regarded of less value than the regular system. Using institutional theory, Nilsson showed the mechanisms by which this result was achieved.

A research suggestion in quadrant four could be a study of the institutionalization of support systems for women entrepreneurs that are common throughout Europe. What are the arguments used, how are the programs designed, and how do they position the woman entrepreneur? In short, what is the public discourse on women's entrepreneurship, and what are its consequences? Are the programs really beneficial for women, or do they cast them in the category of the helpless and needy? Is such casting necessary for all the organizations supporting women entrepreneurs and therefore unavoidable? Abandoning the essentialist position of gender as a variable firmly tied to male and female bodies and cross-fertilizing with, for example, feminist theory, critical theory, or institutional theory would probably make entrepreneurship research even more rewarding.

However, at least two challenges related to the discursive practices analyzed in this article remain. One is to find funding for entrepreneurship research that does not have economic growth or performance as its main focus; another is to expose and publish it where the researcher's career will be acknowledged and furthered. Presently, work concerning gender relations is only published in one type of journal and entrepreneurship research is published in another type of journal with little or no exchange between the two.

This acts as a barrier for new and possibly rewarding ways of studying the current social world. To improve this situation, entrepreneurship research journals need to broaden their focus and invite contributions from other fields and consider contributions from other than those based on economic perspectives.

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