

THE SCIENTIFIC REPRODUCTION OF GENDER INEQUALITY

A Discourse Analysis of Research Articles on Women's Entrepreneurship

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This paper addresses a crucial question, namely how the practices involved in what is labeled *research* contribute to the reproduction of gender inequality. Through a discourse analysis of research articles on women's entrepreneurship, I show that, contrary to intentions, this research second-sexes women. I also show *how* this is achieved. Discussing the particular practices that bring this about, I discuss how this seemingly inevitable result may be avoided. The implications go beyond gender issues, however. They entail a challenge of the very basis of management research practices.

Theoretical and methodological departures

I depart from a social constructionist (or post-structuralist) understanding of gender. This means that there is nothing essentially masculine or feminine. These concepts are seen as socially constructed and vary in time and place. This differs from the liberal feminist view that much "women-in-management" research is based on. According to this view, what defines a human is her ability to think rationally and men and women are seen as equally well equipped with this ability. So, they are equally human. Any shortcomings with women must depend on discrimination or structural barriers. These removed, men and women would achieve equally. Liberal feminism thus assumes that men and women are "the same", but the man is the implicit norm (Calás & Smircich, 1996).

It also differs from social feminism, according to which men and women are seen as different¹. Not by birth, necessarily, but through early childhood experiences and continued socializing (Chodorow, 1988; Gilligan, 1982). Women are said to be more relational, caring and ethical than men. According to the post-structuralist view, men and women are neither similar nor different, but gender differences (and similarities) are produced in social interaction. So are gender relations. This production process, as well as the finished product, is the object of this study.

I use a discourse analytical approach, building on Foucault (1972). Foucault defined discourses as "practices which form the object of which they speak" (Foucault 1969/1972:49). Discourses have power implications in that they form what is held as knowledge, and as truth. For example, people drawing upon the discourse of "woman as a mother" might say that "there is nothing more important for children than a safe home with a caring mother". Those drawing upon the discourse of woman as a co-breadwinner might say "women should be able to support themselves financially on equal terms with men". These two discourses have different sorts of implications for the organization of social life, and for men and women. Discourses are therefore important study objects for the social sciences.

The purpose of this particular study is to analyze the discursive production of the female entrepreneur/female entrepreneurship in research texts. In line with the theory presented, research texts are not innocent, objective reflections of social reality. They are co-producers of social reality.

¹ Admittedly simplified, radical feminism, psychoanalytical feminism and early versions of standpoint theory might also be sorted in the "men-and-women-are-different" category

Discourses in research texts are particularly important study objects since researchers enjoy an expert status in society. They are the ones who are supposed to know.

The empirical material that is analyzed consists of 81 research articles on women's entrepreneurship published between 1982 and 2000. I included all articles on the topic in the four entrepreneurship research journals identified as leading by the entrepreneurship research community (Ratnatunga & Romano, 1977). These were *Journal of Business Venturing*, *Entrepreneurship Theory and Practice*, *Journal of Small Business Management* and *Entrepreneurship and Regional Development*. Because of frequent citations in these, an additional 13 articles from other journals were included.

I adapted Foucault's method as outlined in his inaugural speech to College de France, *The Discourse on Language* (Foucault, 1972). The production of discourses in each society is controlled, selected, organized and redistributed by certain procedures, writes Foucault. The prohibition is the first and most obvious of the *exclusion procedures*, but Foucault does not refer to legal prohibitions as much as to the assumed understanding that you cannot speak about everything, you cannot say anything at anytime, and not everyone can speak about everything. The second exclusion procedure is the division of reason and folly and the neglect of the latter. The third is the 'will to truth', understood as the historically contingent manner in which false is demarcated from true, and what counts as knowledge. This is dependent on institutional support, such as schools and university systems, publishing systems, libraries, laboratories, and so on.

Foucault also talks about internal rules, concerned with the principles of classification, ordering, and distribution. The first is the commentary. Each culture or discipline has a number of texts that are hailed as important and that are constantly commented upon. Whether the comments celebrate the original texts, try to explain them or criticize them, their role is "to say finally, what has silently been articulated deep down," writes Foucault, (1972:221) and in this way the discourse is repeated and reproduced. The foremost such text in the field of entrepreneurship research is Schumpeter's "The Theory of Economic Development" (Schumpeter, 1934/1983).

Another screening or sorting device is by author. Authors choose what they write, but not entirely freely, and once they have written one work, the next is expected to show at least some cohesion with the first. Each epoch provides a certain author function and the author in turn reshapes it. This "author function" is particularly interesting in this study as the procedure of writing scientific articles is highly shaped and controlled.

Yet another restricting function is carried out by the disciplines, here in the sense of academic domains. The discipline regulates what is necessary for formulating new statements, through its "groups of objects, methods, their corpus of propositions considered to be true, the interplay of rules and definitions, of techniques and tools." (ibid:222). What counts and does not count as belonging to entrepreneurship research will be relevant here, as well as what counts as accepted methods for researching entrepreneurship.

Foucault discusses a third group of procedures enabling control over the discourses. It concerns a screening among the speaking subjects. Formal qualifications, expertise groupings or other means of excluding people are relevant, but also rituals about who can speak, how and when.

Some philosophical themes about an ideal truth and an immanent rationality may further strengthen these limitations, continues Foucault. They serve to hide the notion of the discourse being produced through and restricted by the practices discussed earlier. Epistemological assumptions of a neutral and cumulative knowledge development in entrepreneurship research may be such a restriction.

Applying Foucault's discussion on discursive practices to my particular research project, I interpret it to imply to look for the following:

1. Writing and publishing practices delimiting the discourse.

2. Rules and rituals pertaining to who is allowed to speak.
3. The institutional support for entrepreneurship research: financing, university research centers and their status in the academic community, and so on.
4. Founding fathers and foundational texts.
5. The content and the form: How do the research texts position female entrepreneurs? What are they compared and contrasted to? How are they described? What aspects are chosen as relevant to study in the context of women's entrepreneurship?
6. The exclusions: What likely areas are excluded from the discussion? What is not chosen as relevant? What is not, and what cannot be said? Are there any dissenting voices indicating points of tension?
7. The stated, as well as the omitted, reasons for studying women's entrepreneurship.
8. Ontological and epistemological premises guiding, and limiting, the production of knowledge.
9. Disciplinary regulations, particularly the research methods used. What methods are legitimate to produce what counts as knowledge? And how does this limit the discourse? Are there other disciplinary procedures regulating what counts as knowledge?
10. Ideas, or assumptions, that are taken for granted about women, society, research, entrepreneurship, etc.

The analysis techniques include a first reading based on a reading guide derived from the discussion above. To address the issue of how the research was argued, I performed a detailed analysis of the introductions sections. The positioning of women was studied through an analysis of the hypotheses. A thematic analysis revealed some underlying assumptions, as well as the presences of dissenting voices, indication conflicting discourses and points of tension.

Results

Theory bases, methods and samples.

In spite of the journals' international appeals, it turns out that 64% of the articles are from the USA, and 83% from the Anglo-Saxon sphere. This might imply difficulties when translating the results across cultures, a point which is seldom made in the texts. The studies are divided about equally between descriptive and explanatory studies. A large share (45%) are not theory related or use only empirical results from earlier studies in their frame of reference. The remainders depart from psychology, sociology and/or management theory/economics. References to feminist theory are absent from the majority of the papers and only four papers have an explicit feminist point of departure.

Cross-sectional survey studies dominate (61%) but there are also personal or phone interviews and a few instances of archival studies, case studies, experiments, focus groups and observation studies. 62% of the studies compare men and women on some dimension and 11% compare women entrepreneurs with other women entrepreneurs or with other categories.

Over a third of the studies used convenience samples, whereas 54% used statistical or purposive sampling. Number of respondents varied from 5 to over 5000. A majority analyzed their material statistically, but more than half of the studies using statistical analysis did not supply information on response rates, which made any general conclusions about this less meaningful.

Findings of the reviewed studies

A majority of the studies look for differences between men and women entrepreneurs and/or their businesses. Across a long range of psychological, attitudinal and other background factors, there were, however, many more similarities between male and female entrepreneurs than there were differences. Characteristics held to be typical for entrepreneurs such as need for achievement, risk taking propensity, independence and inner locus of control were similar for men and women (MacNabb, McCoy, Weinreich, & Northover, 1993; Masters & Meier, 1988; Neider, 1987; Sexton & Bowman-Upton, 1990; Zapalska, 1997). Management practices were also largely similar between the sexes (Chaganti, 1986; Olson & Currie, 1992; Van Auker, Rittenburg, Doran, & Hsieh, 1994).

Differences were found within groups of female entrepreneurs, between different occupational groups as entrepreneurs and managers (Bellu, 1993; Fagenson, 1993), and between entrepreneurs in different countries (Kolvereid, Shane, & Westhead, 1993; Shane, Kolvereid, & Westhead, 1991). A few studies point to women's relational management style, but the so called "integrative perspective" (Brush, 1992; Buttner, 2001) which posits that women see their businesses in a very different way from men is not supported (Chell & Baines, 1998).

Performance studies were common (Anna, Chandler, Jansen, & Mero, 2000; Boden & Nucci, 2000; Carter, Williams, & Reynolds, 1997; Cuba, Decenzo, & Anish, 1983; Lerner, Brush, & Hisrich, 1997). The "female underperformance hypothesis", while appearing in several studies (Chaganti & Parasuraman, 1996; Fasci & Valdez, 1998; Fischer, Reuber, & Dyke, 1993; Miskin & Rose, 1990; Rosa & Hamilton, 1994), did not hold when put to rigorous tests accounting for structural factors (DuRietz & Henrekson, 2000; Kalleberg & Leicht, 1991). If differences in preferences were taken into account as well, there seemed to be no support for such a hypothesis (Buttner & Moore, 1997; Cliff, 1998).

The start-up process is similar for men and women, and women appear to have no specific difficulties or information needs (Alsos & Ljunggren, 1998; Birley, Moss, & Saunders, 1987; Dolinsky, 1993; Marlow, 1997; Nelson, 1987; Pellegrino & Reece, 1982). Men's and women's networking are similar, except for the gender composition, which, however, has no bearing on the effectiveness of the network (Aldrich, Reese, & Dubini, 1989a; Andre, 1992; Cromie & Birley, 1992; Katz & Williams, 1997; Smeltzer & Fann, 1989). Women seem to be discriminated against by banks in several studies, but the explanations appear to be mainly structural; they own the types of businesses that banks associate with higher risks (Buttner & Rosen, 1988; Buttner & Rosen, 1989; Buttner & Rosen, 1992; Carter & Rosa, 1998; Coleman, 2000; Fabowale, Orser, & Riding, 1995; Fay & Williams, 1993; Greene, Brush, Hart, & Saporito, 1999; Riding & Swift, 1990).

The family is hypothesized to be of special significance for women entrepreneurs, either as an obstacle or as a resource (Caputo & Dolinsky, 1998; Cox, Moore, & Van Auken, 1984; Dumas, 1992; Holmquist & Sundin, 1990; Marshack, 1994; Nelson, 1987). Balancing family and work is experienced as a problem for many women entrepreneurs, but the studies do not report if men have similar feelings (Stoner, Hartman, & Arora, 1990). The studies show that family plays a significant role for women entrepreneurs, but, interestingly, male entrepreneurs are not asked the same questions.

When measuring students' intentions to start a business, male students were found to want this to a higher degree than females (Kourilsky & Walstad, 1998; Matthews & Moser, 1995; Matthews & Moser, 1996; Scherer, Brodzinsky, & Wiebe, 1990). A group of women investigated by Fagenson and Marcus (1991) also rated traits held to be masculine as more "entrepreneurial" than those held to be feminine. These studies suggest that entrepreneurship is perceived as something that men do (Baker, Aldrich, & Liou, 1997; Brush, 1997; Nilsson, 1997; Walker & Joyner, 1999).

So personal characteristics, the process of starting and running a business and the investigated aspects of the environment appear to be similar for men and women entrepreneurs. The main finding of difference that is somewhat consistent across the studies is that women's businesses are concentrated in the retail and service sectors and, because of this, their businesses are smaller than the average male owned business (Carter, Van Auken, & Harms, 1992; Dant, Brush, & Iniesta, 1996; Hisrich & Brush, 1984; Maysami & Goby, 1999; Rosa & Hamilton, 1994; Scott, 1986; Shabbir & Di Gregorio, 1996; Shim & Eastlick, 1998; Spilling & Berg, 2000).

Analysis of introductions

The typical introduction follows the following three steps, according to literary theorist Swales (1990): First, establish a territory by claiming the centrality or the importance of the research area. Second, establish a niche by indicating a research gap, making a counter claim or raising a question. Alternatively, indicate the continuance of a research tradition. Third, occupy the established niche. This is usually accomplished through the presentation of the work or its purpose and by announcing

the principal finding. I devised a table with the above steps and filled in the corresponding sentences from the introduction sections of each and every article. The arguments of step one are summarized in table 1 below.

Table 1 Establishing a Territory

Arguments used to establish centrality of research area	No.	%
Entrepreneurship, and women's entrepreneurship is important for the economy	53	65
Women's entrepreneurship has received increased attention	11	14
Women's entrepreneurship has been researched but the research is flawed	7	9
My particular research area is important because I say so	10	12
	81	100

The analysis suggests that women's entrepreneurship is important mainly for instrumental reasons. Greene et al. (1999:168) made the point in one sentence only "Entrepreneurship is recognized as the engine of growth in the US economy" referring, as many others, to Birch (1979) who found that most of the new jobs were created in small businesses. The researchers write that women's businesses have, or should have (depending on country and prevalence of female entrepreneurs) an important impact on the economy in terms of jobs, sales, innovation and economic growth and renewal.

The reasons given for why researchers have begun looking at women's entrepreneurship is, at least in the USA, that its magnitude is a new phenomenon. It is implicit that before, when the number of women entrepreneurs were fewer, they had no impact on the economy and were therefore not important. Since this is what motivated research in the first place, it is possible to interpret the second and third argument in table 8.1 above as derived from the first one. In a sense then, an overwhelming majority of the papers use instrumental arguments to establish the centrality of their territory. I note that equality arguments are absent and conclude that these are either not interesting, or not legitimate as reasons for studying women's entrepreneurship in the selected journals.

Analysis of hypotheses

I analyzed the research problems and hypotheses (which were not necessarily confirmed by the findings – often quite the contrary) to see how the authors envisioned the female entrepreneur at the start of their articles². The result was that well beyond half of the articles focused explicitly on some sort of problem or proposed shortcoming associated with women. A recurring problem is the often-quoted small sizes and low growth rates of women's businesses (e.g. Hisrich & Brush, 1984; Kalleberg & Leicht, 1991; Rosa et.al, 1994; Fasci & Valdez, 1998). Explanations for this are often thought to reside within women themselves. Women are discussed as:

- Having a psychological make up that is less entrepreneurial, or at least different from a man's (Neider, 1987; Sexton & Bowman-Upton, 1990; Fagenson, 1993).
- Having less motivation for entrepreneurship or for growth of their businesses (Fischer et al., 1993; Buttner & Moore, 1997; Carter & Allen, 1997).
- Having insufficient education or experience (Boden & Nucci, 2000).
- Having less desire to start a business (Scherer et al., 1990; Matthews & Moser, 1996; Kourilsky & Walstad, 1998).
- Being risk-averse (Masters & Meier, 1988).
- Having unique start-up difficulties or training needs (Pellegrino & Reece, 1982; Birley et al., 1987; Nelson, 1987).

² The research questions are not always stated as formal hypotheses by the authors. Also, it is not *always* evident that the relationships as described here are those that the authors seek to prove. It could be that there is a statistical "null" hypothesis to be disproved in favor of an alternative. The discussions surrounding the formulations of the research questions lead me, however, to the contrary conclusion.

- Using less than optimal, or perhaps “feminine” management practices or strategies (Cuba et al., 1983; Chaganti, 1986; Olson & Currie, 1992; Van Auken et al., 1994; Carter et al., 1997).
- Behaving irrationally by turning to unqualified family members for help (Nelson, 1989).
- Not networking optimally (Aldrich et al., 1989a; Smeltzer & Fann, 1989; Cromie & Birley, 1992; Katz & Williams, 1997).
- 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).

One might, as Zapalska (1997:76), question if women entrepreneurs do at all “possess the characteristics required for effective performance as entrepreneurs”. Being a woman seems to be a potential shortcoming in and of itself, judging from the papers that investigate the impact of the variable gender on for example performance (Chaganti & Parasuraman, 1996; Chell & Baines, 1998; DuRietz & Henrekson, 2000), new firm foundation (Shane et al., 1991), firm ownership (Rosa & Hamilton, 1994), the start-up process (Alsos & Ljunggren, 1998), participation in economic development organizations (Andre, 1992), and access to capital (Carter & Rosa, 1998; Coleman, 2000) to mention some of the researched areas. Several of these authors explicitly designed their studies to *contest* the idea that women were in some way inferior, but the struggle against this conception is very poignant in the texts.

The conception of women as being *less* than something is thus prevalent in this research. Less than what? For the most part, “less than a man” is explicitly stated but sometimes authors write “less than entrepreneurs in general”. Knowledge of the latter is largely derived from research on males (Stevenson, 1986) so for practical purposes the propositions are the same.

Measuring against a male norm

An analysis of classical and contemporary texts on entrepreneurship (Ahl, 2002) shows that the entrepreneur is described with words that associate with masculinity and not femininity. This conception of entrepreneurship as something masculine is reflected in measurements used in the reviewed research. An example would be the Jackson personal Inventory and the Personality Research Form-E test instrument used by Sexton & Bowman-Upton (1990). The description of the variables in this instrument portrays the entrepreneur as an independent, active, energetic, change oriented, uncompassionate and danger seeking risk taker.

Studies trying to figure out the personality of female entrepreneurs typically envision two possible versions. They call one of them masculine and one feminine, or one entrepreneurial and the other feminine, and then administer various tests to see how men and women entrepreneurs score. An example would be a study which modeled two possible ways of management. One model assumed that men and women managed in an identical way. This model was called “the successful entrepreneur”. The other model assumed that “women behave differently as entrepreneurs and managers” (Chaganti 1986:19), and this model was labeled “the feminine entrepreneur”. Already the labeling indicates that a feminine model is an exception, of less value, and the other one a norm. The model tells the story of the successful entrepreneur (who is not feminine), who is detached, rational, calculative, bold, decisive, aggressive and result-oriented. The feminine model is the opposite of that. One is modest in goals, weak in expertise, irrational (does not use experts or hire trained personnel), unassertive, and emotional. Similar polarized measuring instruments were used by Buttner & Rosen (1988) and Fagenson & Marcus (1991) who investigated others’ perceptions of men and women. The latter used Spence and Helmreich’s Personal Attributes Questionnaire, which had a masculine and a feminine scale. The items in the masculine scale were “competitive, active, independent, able to make decisions, does not give up easily, feels very superior, self confident”, and “stands up well under pressure”. The feminine scale was comprised of “emotional, understanding, warm, able to devote oneself completely to others, gentle, helpful to others, kind”, and “aware of others’ feelings”. They found that women were indeed perceived as more feminine, and men as more masculine (or entrepreneurial), which confirms that there is an idea of what women are like, and an idea of what

entrepreneurs are like, and that these ideas are different. The feminine side is in this context consistently valued as less cut for entrepreneurship than the “entrepreneurial”. The studies that look for psychological differences between men and women entrepreneurs, however, seldom succeed at this. Very few, if any, differences between men and women entrepreneurs are found. Men and women score very similarly on the tests. This does not, however, lead the authors to depart from the idea that men and women are different. It is as if the idea of essential gender differences has more power over the mind than has result figures in tables measuring personality.

How authors explain their results

Most of the findings refuted the idea of men and women being different, or treated differently. While some accepted this at face value, several authors were not willing to give up the idea of differences that easily. The discussion sections of the papers are particularly revealing. I found three different, and sometimes overlapping strategies present. I call them “making a mountain out of a mole-hill”, “the self-selected woman”, and “the good mother” strategies.

- ***Making a mountain out of a mole-hill***

The first strategy is to overemphasize the few differences that are actually found. Usually, authors report statistically significant differences, dropping the word “statistically”, and portraying them as socially significant, which they seldom are (McCloskey, 1998). Most surveys – which are the majority of the studies in this review – use Likert type scales. An example is Anna et al. (2000) who used a seven point Likert scale to measure venture efficacy for women in “traditional” (retail and sales) versus “non-traditional” (male dominated) industries. A result of the study was that women in traditional industries had “significantly higher” career expectations of life balance and security. The difference between the groups was actually only 0.39 and 0.54 respectively. How important is a 0.39 difference on a seven-point scale? And does it matter? The standard deviations were 1.07 and 1.54 respectively. The overlaps between the two groups seem to be more significant than the differences, but the discussion is seldom geared towards this, but rather towards stressing the few differences found³.

Miskin & Rose (1990:28), building on Nina Colwill (1982:12-15), warn that 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.” This warning is quite applicable in the gender-and-entrepreneurship research field.

- ***The self-selected woman***

The second strategy is to explain the lack of differences by stressing that women entrepreneurs are different from ordinary women. I call it the “self-selected woman” strategy. Buttner & Rosen (1989), for example, found that male and female entrepreneurs did not differ on attributes associated with entrepreneurial success. They explained this by writing that this is most likely because female entrepreneurs differ from women in the general population on the entrepreneurial attributes: need for achievement, independence, leadership, autonomy, aggressiveness and (lack of) conformity. Likewise, Cromie & Birley (1992), who found that women entrepreneurs’ personal networks were similar to men’s, reasoned that the women in their study had “recognized their deficiencies”, made a “sustained effort” and “proceeded to develop them vigorously”. They had seemingly made up for their deficiencies by hard work. Or by acting like “entrepreneurs” as the words describing such (“active, high energy level, endurance” etc.) in the previous section indicated. By making a concerted effort to behave like a man, they have supposedly overcome the deficiencies associated with being a woman.

³ Davidsson (1995) discusses how little it takes to produce a statistically significant result. In a study comparing values between populations in two cities (230 respondents in one city, 216 in the other) he found a statistically significant difference of 0.38 on a scale with a possible variation between 4 and 16. To achieve such a results, writes Davidsson, it only takes that 20 respondents from one of the cities fill in an answer on the four questions related to this factor that is one scale step more “entrepreneurial” than 20 respondents from the other city, while the mean for all the others is identical in the two cities.

Yet another version of the “self-selected woman” strategy is to distinguish between “normal” women entrepreneurs, and those who display a pattern more associated with success, such as running a large business or one in manufacturing (Anna et al. 2000; Carter & Allen 1997). The underlying idea in these studies is to see if there are differences between the woman entrepreneur who behaves like a regular woman entrepreneur, and the one who is more successful, that is, not like a regular woman.

The examples above are ways of saying that there are regular women and there are women entrepreneurs, alternatively, regular women entrepreneurs and more *entrepreneurial* women entrepreneurs. In both cases, the former is associated with the idea of womanhood and some sort of weakness, and the latter is an exception. It is as if the idea of womanhood must be saved.

- *The good mother*

The third strategy, which I call the “good mother” strategy, is to cherish the small differences found and from these, combined with general knowledge on women and women’s life situations, mold an alternative, female entrepreneur model. Brush (1992) is the most cited author on this. Leaning on Gilligan (1982), Brush writes that ...women’s ‘reality’ is characterized by connectedness and relationships...rather than the autonomy and logic more typical of men’s reality . Men’s reality is seen as separate and autonomous, with decision making being logical and rule-based” (Brush, 1992:17). This led Brush to propose the “integrated” perspective where she concludes that women perceive and approach business ownership differently than men and integrate their business into their lives in a web-like manner.

“The good mother” strategy turns women’s proposed differential disadvantages into advantages, but it does not challenge the dichotomized and gendered understanding of entrepreneurship. The difference is that the “feminine” column is still different, but not necessarily “in lack”. Rather, it is complementary. The “male way” is still a norm, albeit not as positive as in the earlier versions.

Constructions of work and family

Research on entrepreneurship hardly mentions family. When research focuses on women entrepreneurs, however, it becomes apparent that life consists not only of work, but also of home, family and children – but the spheres are seen as separate entities. The division of life between a public and a private sphere and between work and family is an assumption, which is taken for granted and goes mostly unquestioned in most of the reviewed studies. Consequently, what sorts under “family” and “private” is also seen as an individual and not a collective responsibility. Stoner, Hartman, & Arora (1990), for example, who explored work-home role conflict in female owners of small businesses, discuss their results in terms of “interference, conflict, crossover” which confirms the idea of the two competing spheres. The article further suggests that the problem is particularly female, just as the considerable crossover is a particularly female phenomenon. Females cross boundaries, and this is proposed as potentially troublesome. Men are not mentioned at all.

Caputo & Dolinsky (1998) recommends their government to supply micro-loans for women business starters, since home-based entrepreneurship makes it possible to care for children and run a business at the same time, thereby saving taxpayers money for dependent care. For a Scandinavian, this sounds very odd and not very pro-woman. I see the woman in this scenario working constantly. The most evident solution to me is not micro-loans, but public childcare, in which case men and women can participate in the labor force and provide childcare on equal terms.

Such a collective solution to something that is perceived as a private problem is, however, not present in the texts. This underlines the individualist perspective of entrepreneurship. It is the individual entrepreneur and her business that is in focus and contextual or historical variables affecting the business such as legislation or family policy are seldom discussed. Some investigate structural factors such as women’s level of education and previous business experience as explanations for why

women's businesses do not perform as well as men's, but the remedy is envisioned as individual. Either individual women are advised to change their goals and attitudes and to get the right education, or policy makers are advised to arrange entrepreneurship training for women. I would label this as individual adaptation to existing structures, not structural change.

There is a corresponding trend in how feminist theory is discussed, in the few cases when it *is* discussed. Liberal and social feminism was introduced by Fischer et al. (1993) but later studies using it (Brush, 1997; Carter et al., 1997; Greene et al., 1999; Walker & Joyner, 1999) have done away with the word "feminism" with its implicit power perspective and instead talked about "situational and dispositional barriers". This tends to make feminist thought and action into an individual undertaking. The collective dimension was lost.

A few articles challenged the individualist construction of entrepreneurship and argued for the inclusion of structural factors as well as for research from the perspective of women's subordination in society (e.g. Goffee & Scase, 1983). These articles were mostly British. They contested the dominant model, but this discussion was a discussion *against* the mainstream, and *among* the British. Mainstream did not listen, nor participate, in this discussion.

Conclusions

The results showed that throughout the reviewed texts, women entrepreneurs were positioned as secondary to men. This section discusses the discursive practices that produce this result. The most important ones are the assumptions that are taken for granted. The first, and almost universal assumption is that entrepreneurship is a good thing, leading to economic growth. Having this as the reason for studying women entrepreneurs blocks alternative reasons, such as those of equality or of correcting the research record. It also portrays women as "less" since their businesses do not, on average, perform as well as men's according to growth-related performance standards.

A second, silent assumption is that of entrepreneurship as a neutral concept, even though it is highly male gendered. This is reflected in the measurements used for both the entrepreneurs and for their businesses. Controlling for sector and size of business, men and women have similar growth and (lack of) growth ambitions (Davidsson, 1989), but the reviewed texts portray it as a female problem. Somehow men get to be free riders on their few growth-oriented fellow businessmen, while the women are marked out as the non-growers. Why some men grow their businesses is not explained by how men are, but surprisingly, it seems all right to explain it by how women are not. The construction of the entrepreneur is the stereotypical independent self-made man. This is not an image that fits most women (nor indeed many men) very well, so women are rendered insufficient already by the research design.

The third assumption is that men and women are different. The studies frequently look for such differences. When not finding any, they use one of three rhetorical strategies to explain that differences are there anyway. I labeled these "making a mountain out of a molehill", "the self-selected woman" and "the good mother" strategies. Some also call for more methodological rigor (Brush 1992, Moore 1990). The idea behind this critique is that is that the differences are there – if researchers only looked well and closely enough they would find them. Others attack the male gendered measures – looking only for something masculine in women means that anything feminine would escape researchers (Stevenson, 1990). This assumes, however, that there is something essentially feminine to be measured. This assumption is highly questionable as shown not only by feminist scholars, but also by psychologists themselves. Research on psychological differences in motivation, values etc. is commonly referred to as attitude research. Attitudes, defined as "predispositions to behave in a characteristic manner with respect to specified social objects or classes of such objects" (King & McGuinnies, 1972:111) have been shown to be neither stable, nor related to behavior (Abelson, 1972; Wicker, 1969). They are constructed, not merely revealed, in the generation of a response to a judgement or a choice task. (Payne, Bettman, & Johnson, 1992). Things like courage, independence, caring, listening skills, achievement orientation, family orientation and all the other things that entrepreneurship researchers "measure" are socially constructed and vary in time and place

irrespective of gender. Such a position, however, would render much entrepreneurship research invalid, since attitudes (in this case presumably varying with gender) are one of the most popular research areas.

The fourth assumption concerns the division between a public and a private sphere of life. Giving the woman the responsibility for the private sphere means that she must work double shifts and it means that she cannot compete with male competitors in the same business on equal terms. She is given as secondary, complementary role in business while men's responsibility for children is rendered invisible. The fifth, and last assumption is the individualist focus in entrepreneurship research. This precludes collective solutions to problems that are conceived of as individual, as for example public day care as a solution to child care problems. It severely restricts the study of entrepreneurship, and the effect is that individuals are to be blamed or, even worse, to blame themselves for all the problems in the world, while institutional arrangements remain largely unquestioned. The neglect of social aspects also means that the power perspective is lost. Issues of women's subordination to men are seldom touched upon and there is no talk of collective action to change gender inequalities.

But the discursive practices go beyond assumptions. The disciplinary regulations, to use Foucault's terminology, favor theories that concentrate on the individual and/or the individual firm. They include certain methodological preferences, namely surveys and statistical analyses that favor analyses of differences. They also include an objectivist epistemology which, combined with the search for essential gender differences and the male norm, renders women secondary.

The writing and publishing practices further supports this. Researchers' careers depend on getting published in mainstream journals. If these encompass the practices outlined above, this means that articles submitted will also conform. Outliers will not submit, or they will be ruled out or made to conform as a result of the review process. I analyzed the composition of the editorial boards in my four main journals and found that they were comprised mostly of Americans, many of them served on more than one, and most of them went to the same entrepreneurship research conference. They form a discourse community which is likely to attract research that shares its assumptions (Foucault's author function) and reject studies based on different ones.

The training and socialization of researchers may reinforce any of the assumptions and preferences outlined above. Institutional support in terms of research funding and research centers is also part of the discursive practices. Funding is increasingly available for entrepreneurship research, but the interest is either in growth (government funding) or business performance (private funding). None of these focus on gender relations or power issues. Women become only a variable in the growth equation where they are rendered inadequate.

As mentioned earlier, I have no reason to believe that this was the intention of the authors. Then why did it turn out this way? The answer is because of the discursive practices. The name of the game produces this particular result. The way to give women a voice in a field where they are marginalized is to speak *through* the normal discourse – which oppresses women. It is a “damned if you do, damned if you do not” situation.

Suggestions for future research

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

1. Expansion of the research object
2. Shift in epistemological position

Improvements could be achieved by either step, and even more so by the two steps in combination. The following matrix illustrates my thoughts:

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

Figure 1 Expanding the research on women entrepreneurs

The limitations and consequences of the first square (individuals or individual businesses as objects combined with essentialist assumptions) have been dealt with in detail throughout the paper. If anything more should be said about this, one might call for more care when interpreting research results of statistical differences.

The second square indicates that one needs not necessarily abandon an objectivist position to do critical, feminist work. 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 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 changes in these factors. To avoid the risk of not questioning the norms and values of one’s own culture, comparative work, with scholars from different countries would be recommended. Such a research agenda makes for international, comparative studies and contingency studies. By comparing different social orders on these dimensions, alternative ways of organizing “the social” with alternative implications for women might come to the fore. Information from such research is valuable for feminist studies, in the same way that statistics from feminist empiricism is valuable.

To do research in squares three and four, one would have to take the more radical step of making a shift in epistemological position. Instead of looking at physical men and women and using their sex as an explanatory variable, one can look at 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*, from gender as something firmly tied to bodies to gendered anything – concepts, jobs, industries, language, disciplines, and so on. This includes businesses as well. These are not gender neutral, they are gendered just as most everything else is. Certain types of businesses are more readily available to a woman than others. Certain businesses are compatible with a subject position as “woman” while others are not. The reverse is, of course, also the case.

Such a research approach could be used for the purposes of exposing power relations between male and female. The division between squares three and four in figure 1 is somewhat artificial since a constructionist position entails that it is not meaningful to look at an individual separate 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. In square 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 outsiders. This study did not simplify explanations for women’s subordination to what individual men and women did (or how they were, for that matter), but also accounted for the choices available through the discursive order. So, “the social” was accounted for even if studying individuals.

In square four, focus would be 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 would be objects for study.

An example would 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? Shortly, what is the public discourse on women's entrepreneurship and what are its consequences? Abandoning the essentialist position and cross-fertilizing with, for example, feminist theory, critical theory, or institutional theory would most likely make entrepreneurship research more rewarding.

At least two problems related to the discursive practices analyzed in this paper remain, however. One is to get funding for this kind of research, the other one is to get it published in a place that furthers the researcher's career. As of today, critical feminist work is published in one type of journals, and entrepreneurship research in a different type, with little or no exchange with the former. And entrepreneurship scholars are not rewarded for publications in journals focusing on gender issues. This shows the paradox of how the institutionalization of research may be the biggest obstacle of all for new and rewarding ways of studying the social world.

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