Study of the Contribution of Research into Women Entrepreneurship: A Meta-analysis of Discourses using ATLAS.ti

Overview of the aims

In recent years, women entrepreneurship research has made an encouraging start and has continued to gain comparatively cumulative attention in academia. From the late 1990s, the "wave" of research into women in entrepreneurship and small business has moved from being marginalized to centre stage. The situation is changing – women are no longer merely an "invisible" force and cannot be categorized as "others" (Kyrö 2009). The substantial growth in both the quality and quantity of women-owned/led enterprises, has to some extent been analysed within a multi-dimensional paradigm based on diverse approaches (Bruin, Brush and Welter 2006; Brush et al. 2010; Acs et al. 2011; Hughes et al. 2012), while contextual factors also shed light on research concerning how women develop their businesses, which includes not only internal (individual characteristics and ways to gather financial and/or social capital) but also external (environmental, cultural and demographic) factors (Brush et al. 2010; Hughes and Jennings 2012).

Still, we need to study the contribution that gender studies and women's entrepreneurship have brought to the field, as it cannot be self-evident: certain miscellaneous issues are evoking development (Sirec, Tominc, and Rebernik 2010) or are even being left as "atheoretical" at some point (Fischer, Reuber, and Dyke 2006), the "alternative" (Carrier, Julien, and Menvielle 2008) angle is accordingly meaningful for an in-depth exploration through the relevant materials. Therefore, we plan to set three objectives in this proposal based on the following questions:

- Why is it important to study women entrepreneurship?

- How does current research contribute to women entrepreneurship both from theoretical and practical points of view?
- What are the future concerns provided by the relevant discussions?

Literature resources are chosen with close attention to the keywords “women entrepreneurship” in current issues from journals and books (See Methodology and methods). To clarify the research aims in a more systematic manner, discourses related to diverse perspectives on studying women entrepreneurship will be highlighted and concentrated to form a meta-analysis. During the analysis, the ATLAS.ti program will be used as a supporting tool.

Seven points have been summarized after a preliminary search and reading of the literature, which presents certain initiatives and/or interests manifesting those areas of women entrepreneurship that are still rarely explored and need further analysis, how this has come about and why (Details listed in Methodology and method). Generally, absence in theoretical development and practical data-processing suggest a prevalent concern. Not only is the number of women-owned enterprises promising, but also their improved levels of achievement. Furthermore, “in recent years the subject of women’s entrepreneurship has attracted attention from a number of researchers, most of whom have compared the situation of women entrepreneurs to that of their male counterpart” (Carrier, Julien, and Menvielle 2008); however, “little progress has been made in understanding whether such differences are pervasive, let alone why they might exist” (Fischer, Reuber, and Dyke 2006).

Access to financial (and/or social) resources is somehow obstructed and narrowed due to the gender disparity. Certain “structural barriers” are excluding women from the strategy-making process (Sirec, Tominc, and Rebernik 2010). Indeed, it is imperative to improve the factual nature and quality of gender equality as well as certain well-organized empowerment tactics. The role of women entrepreneurs is highly emphasized through a professional impression instead of the traditional family-centred positioning. However, such barriers do exist regarding ethical and financial factors, which are in some way derived from the male-dominant stereotype. Normally, women entrepreneurship research empirically focuses on examples found in developed Western countries, whereas the similar data for developing countries are largely unexplored. A systematic view is therefore required so that instances from emerging countries (such as African, Asian and Latin American countries) can contribute a comparative facet to help approach a mutual understanding among different cultures.

Considering the above, we use a meta-analysis in this study in order to explore the outcomes of women entrepreneurship research – a broad field but still too little has been understood in terms of contributions to theory and practice.

Theoretical framework

Aiming to perceive the contributions that have evolved in women entrepreneurship research, four positions have been synthesized by Alvesson and Billing (2009) – “approaches to the understanding of women and leadership” – will be

“borrowed” to help classify and understand the theoretical background (Abbott 2003). Notably, the fact that entrepreneurs are different from managers (the former “desire to grow the business rapidly”; Gundry and Welsch 2006) is apparent in general; nevertheless, theories existing in entrepreneurship and management (leadership) are usually somehow intertwined when considering “venture success” for instance (Brush and Hisrich 2006). Yet by bridging gender into a multi-dimensional analysis, it is not wise to veil entrepreneurship from its interrelation with relevant organizational/institutional aspects (Brush et al. 2010; Hughes and Jennings, 2012). Although entrepreneurship is developing heterogeneity and becoming an independent discipline, its close link to management studies relatively speaking involves a process of inheriting and developing based on meaningful antecedents (Landström and Benner 2010; Landström, Harirchi, and Åström 2012).

Four positions will be demonstrated in the following part:

- Equal opportunities: “The advocates of the equal opportunity position to some extent consider ‘legitimate’ explanations for the lower instances of women in senior jobs, such as lower investment in a managerially relevant education and other priorities than a managerial career.”
- Meritocracy: “While the equal opportunities argument looks at obstacles and possibilities from an ethical-political point of view, the meritocratic argument is interested in combating irrational social forces, which prevent the full utilization of qualified human resources and thereby increase effectivity.”
- Special contribution: “Women possess complementary qualifications and, thus,

the potential for making new and important contributions to the field of management."

- Alternative values: "This approach has some similarities with the special-contribution view, but it stresses the difference between typical male and female values more strongly, and also emphasizes conflicts between the two. It is a direct offspring of the feminist perspective and therefore is basically critical of male-dominant institutions."

(Alvesson and Billing 2009)

In the discussion section below, certain understandings based on these four positions will be linked to the findings.

Methodology and methods

The methodology applied in this research paper is a literature-based analysis. The review is conducted on the basis of five special issues and six book compilations (selected from academically-respected and leading publications) on women entrepreneurship, which includes 27 articles and 111 book chapters, altogether 136 items chosen as a resource pool for this study (Table 1). A contemporary period has been set for material from 2000 onwards (from 2006 to 2012), when women entrepreneurship has been shifting from a marginalized discipline to a salient concept for research. In addition to the general keyword ("women entrepreneurship"), other relevant terms are also accounted for – women/female entrepreneurs/business owners/managers – in order to achieve a promising level of quality in the sample.

A qualitative meta-analysis is considered in order to approach proper views for understanding the importance of why it is valid to study women entrepreneurship and what contribution these texts provide for women entrepreneurship research. It is suitable for synthesizing and interpreting discursive construction in such a secondary analysis of qualitative data to present “idiographic integration” over “the intensive, case-oriented study of phenomena in larger and more varied samples” (Sandelowski 2004; Sandelowski and Barroso 2006). Various methods and techniques can be “borrowed” to initiate “analogy” in the process of moving from processing the research ideas to generalizing understandings (Abbott 2003), including thematic content analysis, discourse analysis and comparative analysis methods.

The initial step is to read through 11 introductory sections within each of the journals and books, from which a general picture can be depicted concerning the primary trend in women entrepreneurship research. The remaining literature (including 125 articles and chapters) will be examined under a thematic content analysis using ATLAS.ti for extracting keywords and patterns related to women entrepreneurship research. Seven codes have been summarized through interpreting and understanding the discourses beyond and across the texts. They are listed as follows (Table 2):

Systematic and reflexive thinking capabilities are required during the analysing process. A comparative analysis is needed meanwhile to compare and integrate categories aiming to delimit the interrelations and boundaries among different codes and quotations.

Findings

In the following section, relevant direct quotations with appropriate articulations will be discussed for each code. We plan to present each of them and review central issues within. Relevant points will be reflected upon correspondingly in accordance with our theoretical framework.

Code 1: The study of women entrepreneurship has achieved fruitful research results, where it is important to analyse women entrepreneurship and to recognize female entrepreneurs as a "heterogeneous" group from multifaceted contexts (Hill, Leitch and Harrison 2010). Theoretical studies are in various respects needed to broaden gender-differentiated issues – not only in order to allocate certain "equal opportunities" between female and male entrepreneurs (through the "feminist analytical lens" Hechavarria et al. 2012) – but also most importantly to consider the "alternative values" and/or "special contribution" of women entrepreneurs (from a series of perceptions such as "self-employment, financial and social capital").

Code 2: Studies concerning women entrepreneurship still remain marginal to some extent. Considering the conceptual development, previous work in some respects needs to be enriched or optimized – such angles are required for future attention: more data should be included with a careful selection of samples and variables (Birley 2006) and the kind of emphasis that should be concentrated on (e.g. differences among sectors or industries in which women entrepreneurs are positioned, whether there is a central boundary to advocate gender similarity or gender difference, and how to construct the feminist view based on their "alternative values" or "special

contribution”).

Code 3: Recently, as reflected in statistical data, the amount of women-owned enterprises is increasing in a substantial manner. They are willing to start their own business with support from venture-capital injections. At the same time, many more women prefer to be self-employed, which provides a new field for researchers and practitioners to explore. Women entrepreneurs are becoming successful leaders in both large companies and SMEs worldwide with “a tremendous impact on employment and global business environments” (Kickul et al. 2010). Such great progress can be traced back to women’s “special contribution”.

Code 4: A disparity between male and female entrepreneurs exists not only in pursuing venture capital but also in developing social networks. “Structural dissimilarities between male-owned and female-owned businesses explaining most, but by no means all, of these contrasting funding profiles…viewed in terms of supply-side discrimination (ethical) or demand-side debt and risk aversion, remain controversial” (Carter et al. 2007). Women naturally correspond to family-oriented obligations; therefore, they constitute a lower involvement in entrepreneurial-related activities. Other features – inexperience background and inadequate motivation (lower level of self-confidence and/or self-efficacy) – really drag them out of a favourable situation inside the company. It is necessary to think about framing a rather optimal mechanism for female entrepreneurs to gain “equal opportunities” with their “special contribution” and/or “alternative values”.

Code 5: Women entrepreneurs are imprinted with difficulties accessing both financial

and social capital (especially for establishing a start-up). Besides the obstacles from the external environment (social, cultural and institutional factors), some women entrepreneurs eventually take the unequal situation for granted by following the gender-differentiated labour distribution (either consciously or unconsciously). In other words, "the relative silence and invisibility of women in entrepreneurial discourse…that the leadership involved in founding and running business is most naturally male" (McAdam and Marlow 2012). It therefore asks for concerns from both ethical/humanistic (equality and workplace humanization) and organizational efficiency perspectives.

Code 6: In recent years, women entrepreneurs perform an important role in both social and economic spheres. They are gaining comparatively more and more economic and political power. Meanwhile female entrepreneurs are labelled as "great problem solvers for keeping things in order" (Markovic 2007), which helps organizations achieve sustainability as a whole. One fact can be perceived as – women represent a significant position through having a "special contribution" and "alternative values" in the managerial or even decision-making process (not only in SMEs, family businesses or copreneurship firms but also in large companies).

Code 7: Studying women entrepreneurship in developed (western) countries is favoured by many researchers based on diverse occasions. Nevertheless, the women entrepreneurs in certain developed countries are emerging with remarkable levels of achievement; this is turning into a prominent topic for academic attention. The culture-related prospect can be reckoned a starting point for furthering more

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comparative analysis. “...in developing countries… the contribution of female entrepreneurship to economic development rests not only on its employment and wealth creation, but also on the diversity of entrepreneurial activity and the improvement of the overall quality of entrepreneurship” (Nissan, Carrasco, and Castano 2012).

Discussions and future concerns

A figure (Figure 1) will be drawn in order to show the interrelations between the findings summarized using the seven codes and the four positions of women in management. Code 1 focused on an overall demand for interest in women entrepreneurship development. We gathered direct quotations mainly from theoretical perspectives – female entrepreneurship research can be conducted by incorporating both personal (such as ambition, motivation, and self-efficacy) and environmental (referred to as social and economic) factors. For Code 2, the aim is to base our understanding on empirical study, which requires either a typical case study (such as self-employed entrepreneurs) or longitudinal research (including women entrepreneurs working in different types of enterprises). Apparently, both of these macro viewpoints can be synthesized accordingly to four positions. “Alternative values” and “special contribution” represent more aspects from the female entrepreneur side with comparatively peculiar personal characteristics. Equal opportunities and meritocracy favour organizational or social perspectives. Equal treatment tends to become a central tendency aiming to improve efficiency in an

organization, more valuably, in terms of a humane judge in society.

Through grouping four positions into two categories, we intend to discuss their internal logic linked to the relevant codes. “Women can contribute something essential to organizations…to prefer a people-oriented and democratic leadership style, to make the social structure less hierarchical, and to change the workplace climate so that empathy and intuition become more significant” (Alvesson and Billing 2009). Those special personal features differentiate female entrepreneurs from their male counterparts (Linked to Code 3, Code 4). Women entrepreneurs are more socialization-oriented. Nevertheless from a more radical perspective, feminists prefer an alternative change to the male-dominant stereotype that naturally exists in institutions (Linked to Code 5). Conflicts between female and male entrepreneurs are more emphasized in alternative-value viewpoints (Linked to Code 5). In this sense, women entrepreneurs are expected to exert remarkable influence in the decision-making process through appropriately reflecting and applying their advantageous capabilities (Linked to Code 6).

To compare female and male entrepreneurs without clear regulations will eventually direct researchers to enter an endless cycle. This suggest the need for a solid prerequisite – either from the personal or institutional point of view. The ultimate goal at this point can be stated as to achieve equal opportunities distributed in an organization. Organizational instrumentality corresponds to ethical concerns in respect to less discrimination. Furthermore, in society, people need to be treated equally according to their capabilities and regardless of other concerns or prejudice.

Positions and privileges can thus be properly allocated with the aim of enhancing organizational efficiency and to achieve the common good. Meritocracy is not a utopia but an ideal situation anticipating optimal harmony both in micro (organizational) and macro (societal) dimensions. This is also applicable throughout the world despite differences between nations and cultures. We try to clarify and summarize the discussion as a flowchart. (See Figure 2)

Women entrepreneurship is indeed worthwhile researching, and contributions are diversified depending on the great variety of concerns. It cannot simply be defined as marginalized within entrepreneurship research; on the contrary, women entrepreneurship research will to some extent broaden and enrich the existing theoretical development of entrepreneurship. The aim is to provide a study with relevant preliminary and exploratory proposals. Meanwhile, further discussion and possible debate should definitely be developed according to this area of research. This requires distinct perceptions of theoretical development – for instance, an understanding of the business life cycle can be added to direct future research. Or it may be of value to analyse more publications emerging since 2012. In addition, we intend to achieve certain statistical results which can show how many articles correspond with each position. Through numerical data, reliability can be enhanced; reciprocity between the theoretical framework and the findings is furthered.

Furthermore, from the practical perspective, certain points can be suggested to relevant practitioners, for example, entrepreneurs, managers, policy/law-makers and lenders among others. Further issues can be explored, such as: Why it is important to

study women's entrepreneurship? What position would be set for a female entrepreneur in an organization? How is it possible to help women entrepreneurs to make good use of their advantages and resources? What policies or laws could be established to attain an equal/efficient situation. (Answers to these questions are useful for considering as a starting point: from the internal perspective: to improve women's own self-awareness and self-confidence; from the external perspective: to support them with equal access to financial/social capital.)

Nomenclature

ATLAS.ti: is defined as a computer software program, which has been largely applied in qualitative research for exploring different types of materials especially without particular structures (e.g. "text, pictures, sound and video"). Researchers are able to categorize each document based on codes which can be created partly in accordance with their interpretation and logic. By analysing the relationship between the codes, theoretical ideas can be generalized in a transparent and visualized way.

Code: is meant as a text segment located, selected and marked by researchers based on the research objectives/questions of a paper; it can be identified directly as a quotation or defined by the researchers themselves with a new name in a streamlined version.

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Appendix

Table 1. Research Data

Year	Title	Editors	Publisher	Chapters/articles	Collecting method
2006	Towards Building Cumulative Knowledge on Women's Entrepreneurship	Bruin, Brush, and Welter	Journal of Entrepreneurship Theory and Practice Special Issue	6	Directly downloaded from the official website (university online environment)
2006	Women and Entrepreneurship: Contemporary Classics	Brush et al.	Edward Elgar Publishing	30	Scanning based on paper-format book
2007	Advancing a Framework for Coherent Research on Women's Entrepreneurship	Bruin, Brush, and Welter	Journal of Entrepreneurship Theory and Practice Special Issue	7	Directly downloaded from the official website (university online environment)
2007	The Perspective	Markovic	Inforamtion Age	18	Directly downloaded

	of Women's Entrepreneurship in the Age of Globalization		Publishing		from the official website (university online environment)
2008	Women Entrepreneurship and Social Capital: A Dialogue and Construction	Aaltio, Kyrö, and Sundin	Copenhagen Business School Press	11	Downloaded from the online resource from university E-library
2009	Women Entrepreneurship in the Broader Zone	Aaltio, Kyrö, and Sundin	Journal of Enterprising Culture	6	Directly downloaded from the official website (university online environment)
2010	Women Entrepreneurs and the Global Environment for Growth: A Research Perspective	Brush et al.	Edward Elgar Publishing	17	Downloaded from the online resource from university E-library
2011	Small Business	Acs et al.	Journal of Small	6	Directly downloaded

	Economics on Female Entrepreneurship in Developed and Developing Economies		Business Economics Special Issue		from the official website (university online environment)
2012	Extending Women's Entrepreneurship in New Directions	Hughes et al.	Journal of Entrepreneurship Theory and Practice Special Issue	7	Directly downloaded from the official website (university online environment)
2012	Women's Entrepreneurship and Economics: New Perspectives, Practices, and Policies	Galindo and Ribeiro	Springer	15	Directly downloaded from the official website (university online environment)
2012	Global Women's Entrepreneurship Research: Diverse Settings,	Hughes and Jennings	Edward Elgar Publishing	13	Scanning based on paper-format book

Questions and Approaches

Table 2. Code

Code	Name	Perspective
1	Women entrepreneurship overall research development	Theoretical perspective
2	Empirical data gaps	Practical perspective
3	Enterprising promise of women entrepreneurship	Practical perspective
4	Comparisons between male and female entrepreneurs	Theoretical and practical perspectives
5	Barriers (inequality) for female entrepreneurs	Practical perspectives
6	Important role of women entrepreneurs	Theoretical and practical perspectives
7	Cultural (national) differences for studying women entrepreneurship	Theoretical and practical perspectives

Figure 1. Understanding of women entrepreneurship positioned in four approaches (Source: adapted from Alvesson and Billing (2009)

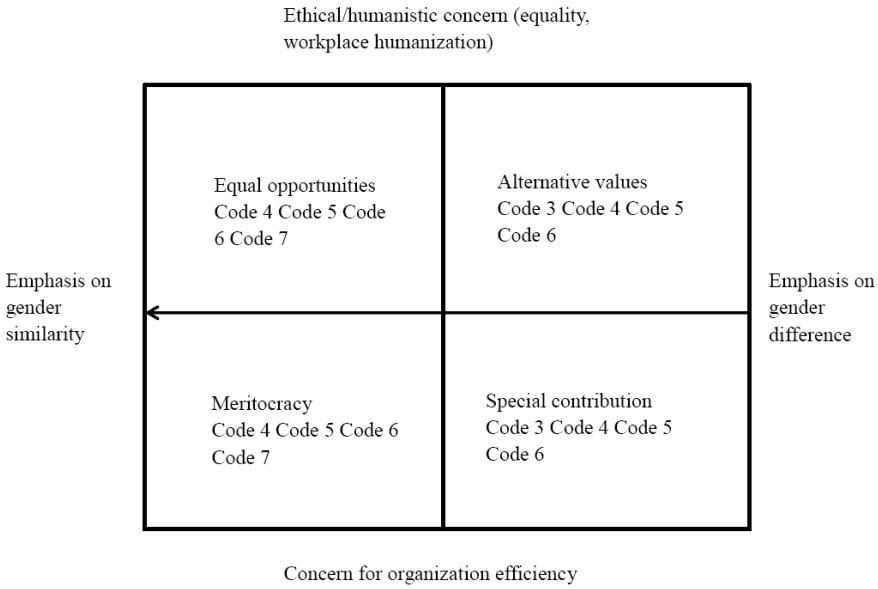
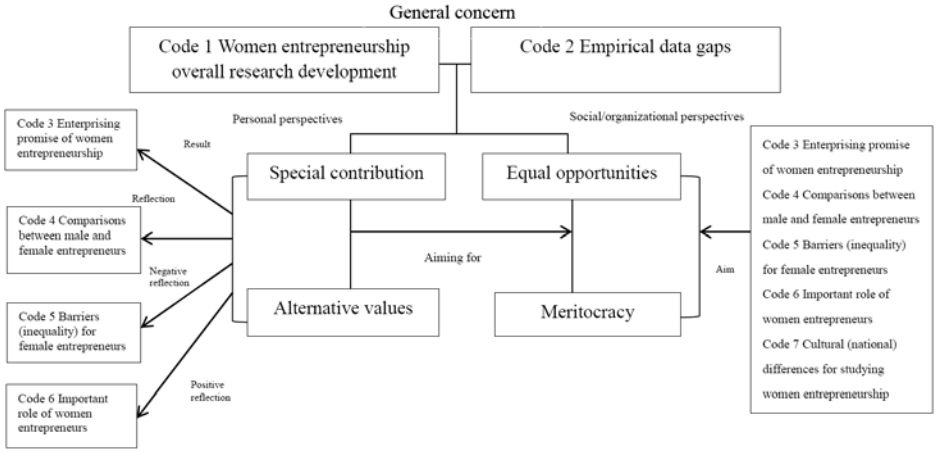
Figure 2 Internal logic between codes and positions