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RETHINKING ENTREPRENEURSHIP THEORY AND RESEARCH PRACTICE: AN EXPLORATION INTO ALTERNATIVE THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVES

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ABSTRACT

Entrepreneurship has been gaining increasing respect from the research community as a field of scholarly study as well as practical application worldwide as a means to achieve wealth creation and personal fulfillment. In Africa, this enthusiasm has, in fact, been matched with calls to scale and mainstream entrepreneurship on the continent. Yet, entrepreneurship, as a theoretical construct and practical phenomenon, remains poorly defined and its interpretation fragmented.

This paper reviews and critiques the dominant perspectives on entrepreneurship. It calls into question progress that can be made by continuing to pursue lines of inquiry based on such orthodox perspectives. As away forward, the paper identifies alternative perspectives that have been explored as possible and more fruitful for engaging with the phenomenon.

Key Words:
Entrepreneurship theory, research and practice; gender; culture.

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INTRODUCTION

There is no agreed definition of entrepreneurship and this has, over the years, raised a concern over what entrepreneurship constitutes as a field of study (Bruyat & Julien, 2001). As many entrepreneurship scholars have observed, it seems likely that the desire for a common definition and a clearly defined area of inquiry will remain unfulfilled in the foreseeable future. as such, its unlikely that any one statement can capture all there is to say and as Down (2010) acknowledged, there are just too many angles to be incorporated and too many disciplines to view them from. Indeed, this problem is reflected in a history of efforts by entrepreneurial researchers to explain 'who' is an entrepreneur and 'what' constitutes entrepreneurship. The 'who' and 'what' constitute ongoing debate in the entrepreneurial discourse. But how did things gets to this situation in the first place?

This paper provides a review and critique of the dominant perspectives on entrepreneurship. This is done in three major sections. In the first section, a discussion of research which has tended to demonstrate the centrality of behavioural and trait theories of the entrepreneur is provided. The second section calls into question the progress which may be made by continuing to pursue lines of inquiry into the phenomenon based on such orthodox perspectives. Section three identifies alternative perspectives that have been explored as a possible and more fruitful way forward. In this respect, the process perspective is put forward.

ORTHODOX PERSPECTIVES ON ENTREPRENEURSHIP: A REVIEW

According to Van de Ven and Engleman (2004), orthodox perspectives on entrepreneurship are typically associated with a variance theory of change. Van de Ven and Engleman (2004) argue that a variance theory explanation of the entrepreneurship phenomenon is where an outcome-driven explanation examines the degrees to which a set of independent variables statistically explains variations in some outcome criteria (dependent variables). Thus, strategies for predicting entrepreneurial behaviour through a focus on variations in individual attributes have received a great deal of attention (Grant & Perren, 2002). Gartner (1989) observed that entrepreneurial traits and characteristics researchers use either of the following two conceptual frameworks as the basis for constructing their theories: the first framework deals with the differences between entrepreneurs and non-entrepreneurs, while the second framework is about entrepreneurial behaviour and cultural characteristics. These are discussed in more detail under the two subsections that follow.

Entrepreneurial trait approaches

According to Gartner (1989), the belief that individuals have predispositions toward entrepreneurial activities is central to the trait approach to entrepreneurship. That is, entrepreneurs have certain traits and characteristics that make them different from non-entrepreneurs. Examples here are studies comparing successful versus less successful/average entrepreneurs (McClelland, 1987; Utsch, Ruach, Ruthfub & Frese (1999), independent versus franchise entrepreneurs (Mesconi & Montanari, 1981), and types of independent entrepreneurs (Carter, Gartner & Reynolds, 1996; Gartner, Mitchell & Vesper, 1989). Five individual characteristics are commonly applied in trait approaches to entrepreneurship research (Chell, Haworth & Brearlely, 1991; Hayton, George & Zahra, 2002). These are: achievement orientation, locus of control, personal initiative, innovativeness, and competitive aggressiveness.

The discourse on entrepreneurship that has relied upon the above variables as a way of explaining entrepreneurial actions emphasizes psychological determinism. That is, it emphasizes the notion of personality traits as being a fundamental determinant of entrepreneurial inclination or success. The notion that entrepreneurs, as a group, share some aspects of personality that makes them different from non-entrepreneurs is intuitively appealing. However, attempts to identify and measure the personality traits of the entrepreneur using conventional psychological techniques have been criticized. The major criticisms point is whether the psychological and social traits are either necessary or sufficient for the development of entrepreneurship. According to Chell et al. (1991), character traits are at best modalities and not universalities, since many successful and unsuccessful entrepreneurs do not share the characteristics identified. Further, Stevenson and Sahlman (as cited in Chell et al., 1991) noted that historical studies do not show the same character traits in earlier entrepreneurs. Also, the studies of life paths of entrepreneurs often show decreasing entrepreneurship following success (Wickham, 2004). Such evidence at least raises the question as to whether the nature of entrepreneurship is immutably embedded in the personality from early stages of childhood development (Chell et al., 1991).

Entrepreneurial behaviour and cultural characteristics

The variation within the phenomenon of entrepreneurship is also explained by the variation in entrepreneurial behaviour and cultural characteristics in a given context. For instance, in a review of behavioural research on the association between culture and entrepreneurship, Heyton, George and Zahra (2002) scrutinized the association between national cultural characteristics and three categories of measures relating

to entrepreneurship or entrepreneurs, i.e., aggregate measures of entrepreneurship, individual characteristics of entrepreneurs and/or non-entrepreneurs, and aspects of corporate entrepreneurship, and observed that countries differ in levels of entrepreneurial activity. As Heyton et al. (2002) noted, most of the studies that focused on the association of culture and entrepreneurship used Hofstede's[1] (1980; 1991) conceptualization of national culture. According to Hofstede (1980), culture is defined as a set of values, beliefs, and expected behaviours. Thus, based on Hofstede's definition, cultural values indicate the degree to which a society considers entrepreneurial behaviours, such as risk-taking and independent thinking, to be desirable. According this view, cultures that value and reward such behaviour promote a propensity to develop and introduce radical innovation, whereas cultures that reinforce conformity, group interests, and control over the future are not likely to show risk-taking and entrepreneurial behaviour (Herbig & Miller, 1992; Herbig, 1994; Hofstede, 1980). Indeed, most researchers who have studied the relationship between culture and entrepreneurial behaviour have hypothesized that entrepreneurship is facilitated by cultures that are high in individualism, low in uncertainty avoidance, low in power distance, and high in masculinity (Heyton et al., 2002).

Billig (1994) also noted that a spate of books and articles by social scientists and journalists on the role of culture in economic development has emerged in recent years. According to Billig (1994), the question is: how do cultural mores, values and beliefs either encourage or discourage individuals from entrepreneurial activity? Billig (1994) argued that, unlike the earlier theorists on modernization, for whom Europe and the United States where the models of pro-entrepreneurial societies, a common theme among the works in the 1990s was why East Asian culture naturally leads to enterprise and development, in contrast to cultures of Africa, Latin America, and even American inner cities. Dodd and Anderson (2001) observed that enterprise culture policies in the UK could be summed up as implying that the generation of many new growing enterprises will create jobs and wealth and will inject dynamism and innovation into the economy.

Although conceptual arguments for the association of culture with entrepreneurship have existed for a long time, Heyton *et al*. (2002) noted that there has been a lack of an alternative formulation of culture's causal significance, in essence admitting Hofstede's values paradigm. Thus, cultural values as outlined in Hofstede's (1980; 1991) framework remain the major link between culture characteristics and entrepreneurship, as evidenced in Hayton et al's (2002) review. A number

[1]The definitions of Hofstede's dimensions and their relationship with levels of entrepreneurship have been extensively covered elsewhere (Harbig, 1994; Shane, 1992).

of reviews have been conducted (see Bing 2004; Hoppe, 2004) and criticisms have been directed at Hofstede's work in general (see McSweeney, 2002), so it is needless to make a detailed critique here.

Culture has also been criticised for being both too narrow and too broad a concept to be useful in social analysis (Diagne & Ossebi, 1996). For instance, in his criticism of what is referred to as the cultural theories of enterprise, Billig (1994) argued that they tend to essentialize culture and view it as static in which abstracted 'traits' are reified. In a similar critical tone, Dodd et al. (2001) argued that the enterprise culture is presented as a large-scale explanatory model, which sheds light on the past, sets programmes for the future, and re-moralizes the world of individual social action. They add that "notions of progress, development and universality are inherent in the enterprise culture paradigm, replete with ontological and soteriological content" Dodd et al. (2001, p. 17). They suggest that in that way, the cultural paradigm for entrepreneurship in such models attempts a grand narrative with the assumption that economic society is logically progressing towards some logical and rational end goal. However, as Dodd et al. (2001) argued, considering entrepreneurship as the heart of a socio-economic paradigm is ideologically problematic. According to Billig (1994), the problem with considering enterprise as the heart of a socio-economic paradigm is that if we think of culture as a collective ideology, it can be seen as a way of making sense of the everyday and an acceptance of the norms and mores of society. But, as Billig (1994) and Dodd et al. (2001) argued, how then can entrepreneurship, which is an individual act, imbued with personal attributes and intensely particular, even idiosyncratic action, be reconciled into an 'everyman' general social attitude? In this regard, Billig (1994) argued that an ideology based purely upon individualism appears to have little social glue to hold its adherents together.

As Heyton et al. (2002) suggested, an alternative conceptualization of culture's causal significance, and a comprehensive model of the association between culture and different outcomes of entrepreneurial behaviour (e.g., new venture creation, corporate entrepreneurship, self-employment) need to be developed that take into account entrepreneurial dynamics.

CRITIQUE OF RESEARCH PRACTICES IN ORTHODOX STUDIES ON ENTREPRENEURSHIP

Inadequacies in comprehending the phenomenon of entrepreneurship by the orthodox approaches have led to the criticism that the concept of entrepreneurship is discriminatory (Billig, 1994), gender-biased (Moore, 1990; Stevenson, 1990), ethnocentrically determined, and even in some respects ideologically controlled

(Armstrong, 2001; Ogbor, 2000). More specifically, Ogbor (2000) argued that the discourse on entrepreneurship can potentially sustain not only prevailing societal biases, but also serve as a tapestry for unexamined and contradictory assumptions and knowledge about entrepreneurs. Feminist critics have similarly pointed out weaknesses in the ability of the orthodox frameworks in small business and entrepreneurship research to advance theories relevant to women's experiences. Moreover, despite appeals by researchers (Davidson & Wilklund, 2001; Low & MacMillan, 1988; Shane & Venkataraman, 2000) for alternative approaches, Steyaert (1997; 2007) argued that many problem formulations and research themes in the entrepreneurship literature are mainly approached from a particular paradigmatic orientation. Therefore, a critique of the orthodox research practices takes two directions: feminist criticism and a paradigmatic critique.

Feminist critique of entrepreneurship discourse and research practices

Much of the research on women's experiences of entrepreneurship focuses on identifying similarities and differences between female and male entrepreneurs, and on providing explanations for the differences identified. This suggests that approaches to women and entrepreneurship are more steeped in variance-type explanations as discussed earlier. That is, researchers tend to use gender as a variable, rather than as a social construct. In this respect, three factors which are said to explain the differences between female and male entrepreneurs has been advanced in the literature. First, that women and men are socialized differently, and as a result have different orientations; second, that women face certain structural barriers; and third, that women have unique ways of conducting business. Each of these is briefly considered below.

The focus on socialization as an explanation for differences between female and male entrepreneurs (and for differences amongst female entrepreneurs) means that researchers adopt a sex-role approach to understanding gender differences (Eagly & Wood, 1991). As such, the approach prioritizes voluntarism over power dynamics. That is, by suggesting that men and women each have their designated role, each role is constructed as equally powerful. However, such an approach fails to illuminate the ways in which certain structures support, perpetuate and even create gender differences, rather than merely reflecting the orientations of those within them (Marcek, 1995).

Rather than using socialization as a starting point, other theorists attempt to identify barriers which female business owners face by focusing on the social structures which support gender differences (Buttner & Rosen, 1989; Carter & Rosa 1998;

Fischer, Reuber & Dyke, 1993). These studies suggest that men's entrepreneurial success can be used as a standard by which women's barriers to this success can be identified. According to Mirchandani (1999), the gender differences studies suggest that what is needed is for women to train or educate themselves better, develop more appropriate networks and mentoring relationships, and re-assign domestic work. Therefore, despite the focus on structural barriers, it is women, rather than the structures, which are seen to require change so that the experiences of female and male entrepreneurship can be equalized.

A third approach to comparisons between female and male entrepreneurs attempts to develop a 'female' model of entrepreneurship to parallel the existing male model. For instance, Lee-Gossien and Grise (cited in Green & Cohen, 1995) argued that women strive towards small and stable firms, and in this way they are able to balance their entrepreneurial role with family and social roles. While these studies draw attention to gender differences in the division of domestic labour and the provision of childcare, they often characterize women as a homogeneous group. Such an approach, therefore, homogenizes women's experiences by assuming that a narrowly-defined set of family concerns are central to all female business owners. Moreover, it also conceptualizes the division of domestic responsibilities as static and given, rather than under continual negotiation by family members (see also Mariussen, Wheelock & Baines, 1997).

Feminist critics have argued that traditional theories have been applied in ways that make it difficult to understand women's participation in social life, or to understand men's activities as gendered (as opposed to representing 'the human'). In addition, critics argue that while these feminist versions of traditional theories have done much to rectify the androcentrism[2] of traditional analyses and are valuable in their own right, they raise questions about whether even feminist applications of these theories can succeed in producing complete and undistorted accounts of gender and of women's activities. Thus, with its emphasis on women (Beg, 1997) or femaleness, there is little guidance from orthodox research on female entrepreneurship in the dominant perspectives discussed earlier, or on how gender and entrepreneurship are produced and reproduced in social, as well as business practices. What seemed to concern many a scholar in such studies was establishing what Mulholland (1996) noted as an automatic relation between the qualities of an entrepreneur (leadership, risk-taking, rational planning, etc.) and a model of male rationality without attention to the power relations contained in economic structures.

[2] Androcentrism here is in the form of the taken-for-granted notion that the traditional male-centered business model is the neutral or normal model (Stevenson, 1990).

The above discussion suggests that while the research on female entrepreneurship has provided much insight into the behaviours and characteristics of some women business owners, much of the focus has remained on strategies through which female entrepreneurs can mimic the male norm. Such an orientation is guided by an interest in sex-equality, defined as women's similar access to success in business ownership as men's. Citing the limitations that have been recognized with these basic approaches to the study of women and gender which initially looked promising, Harding (1987) argued that they are inadequate for understanding gender and women's activities. Harding's argument was that the women's own perspectives are lost in these strategies of adding women, not merely by their under-representation in research, but by the fact that whenever they are represented, they are represented in the terms controlled by the dominant groups, rather than their own terms and with their own voice.

Paradigmatic critique of orthodox entrepreneurship research orientations

In a review article in which they attempted to map the paradigms adopted by small business and entrepreneurial case-study researchers, Perren and Ram (2004) provided a useful discussion of paradigmatic orientations in entrepreneurship research. They identified four paradigmatic tendencies of research in this area framed around two dimensions. In the first dimension they employed Burrell and Morgan's (1979) framework to identify an objective/subjective dichotomous dimension in entrepreneurship researchers' orientations. According to Burrell and Morgan, the objective/subjective distinction is derived from their observations that researchers' assumptions regarding the nature of the social world can be portrayed as a dichotomy between objective and subjective perspectives. Perren and Ram's (2004) second dimension was based on what they referred to as the 'milieu boundary'. That is, that the boundary in research on the phenomenon is placed around some form of "milieu of social actors" or the individual "entrepreneur/owner manager" (Perren & Ram, 2004 p. 85). In their article they noted that although there were some 'snippets' of some form of paradigmatic transcendence, the general thrust of the articles reviewed appeared to adopt a fairly consistent paradigmatic position. According to Grant and Perren (2002) this paradigmatic position is a functionalist position. Critics of this paradigmatic approach note that it treats the entrepreneur either as a hero who wins against all odds, or provides some narratives "whose plot is rather like an adventure game in which there will be a hero or even a fool (the entrepreneur), who embarks on a quest (to start the business), who acquires competence and tools (skills, resources, ideas) and who engages in a test through some event (the success or failure of the business) (Perren & Ram, 2004, p. 92).

It is only recently that a paradigmatic awareness has entered discussions on entrepreneurship research. Although Aldrich suggested that at least three approaches are present in entrepreneurship, namely (1) a unitary, normal science view; (2) a multiple paradigms view; and (3) a totally pragmatic anti-positivist view (as cited in Steyaert, 1997), it is still difficult to find many supporters of views (2) and (3) in the entrepreneurship field (Perren & Ram, 2004; Steyaert, 2007). Thus, outcome-driven research based on cross-sectional variance methods remains the dominant approach in entrepreneurship research (Brush, Manolova & Edelman, 2008). For instance, Chandler and Lyon (2001) reported that 80%, or 233 out of 291 empirical entrepreneurship studies published from 1989 to 1999 in top-tier academic journals were cross-sectional. Only 20%, or 58 of these 291 empirical studies were longitudinal. The majority of these longitudinal studies, namely 39 of 58, were retrospective case studies in which organizational members were interviewed to reconstruct past situations and events. Only 19 of these 58 studies were truly longitudinal, involving data collection at two or more points in time, real-time case analyses, or multi-year analyses of financial or other data from archival sources. A mere eight of the 58 longitudinal studies, or 2.7% of the 291 empirical studies reviewed by Chandler and Lyon (2001), involved analyses of real-time data on entrepreneurial process events.

What one notices from the above discussions is that this literature is dominated by variance-approach explanations (Poole et al., 2000; Van de Ven et al. 2004) influenced by a functionalist paradigm (Burrell & Morgan, 1979), driven by an objectivist[3] perspective, which pervades contemporary discourse of research in leading journals (Grant & Perren, 2002; Perren, Berry, & Blackburn, 2001). As Perren and Ram (2004) pointed out, the consequence of such an objectivist approach is that research issues are defined and expedited in line with the investigators' interests and models, rather than those of the entrepreneur or other actors, and there is a danger of underplaying the importance of social relationships that could be important in constituting the process of entrepreneurship. In fact, on the dominance of the functionalist paradigm Grant and Perren (2002) even suggested that such dominance acts as a potential barrier to other perspectives that seem particularly suited to examining particularities of change processes and entrepreneurial opportunities.

[3]According to Burrell and Morgan (1979, p. 3) objectivist researchers view the social world as "if it were a hard, external, objective reality" and as such, they search for external laws to explain reality.

PROCESS PERSPECTIVE ON ENTREPRENEURSHIP

It has been suggested that research adopting the process perspective recognizes that entrepreneurship is a dynamic process aimed at bringing about change and making a difference (Van de Ven & Engleman, 2004). In addition, the entrepreneurial process results from the actions of the entrepreneur. According to Van de Ven and Engleman (2004), the process perspective takes an event-driven approach that is often associated with a 'process theory' explanation. They argue that this approach is concerned with the temporal order and sequence of a change of events occurring, and that it is based on an account of historical narratives. In this usage, the issue of 'how change unfolds' is addressed by narrating the temporal sequence of events that unfold in an institutional arrangement (Van de Ven & Engleman, 2004). It is suggested that the 'process approach' employs a narrative explanation to note what effect the contributing actions and events have on a particular outcome, and then configures these parts into a whole episode (Polkinghorne, 1988). This enables researchers to describe and explain both qualitative and quantitative aspects of change. Thus, as Polkinghorne (1988) argued, narrative process explanation involves fundamentally different assumptions about the relationships among constructs and the nature of explanation than does a variance explanation.

Scholars adopting such an approach have presented explanations that tell a narrative story about how a sequence of events unfolds to produce a given outcome (Van de Ven et al., 2004). Indeed, Van de Ven et al. (2004) suggested that similar event-driven process research is needed to develop explanations of entrepreneurial dynamics.

Focusing on process in studying gender, culture and entrepreneurship

In the earlier discussions in this paper, references to problems involving culture and gender have been made regarding the entrepreneurial experiences of entrepreneurs in contexts different from those on which much of the dominant discourses are based. The case for linking gender and culture in the analysis of activities of entrepreneurs is a compelling one. The argument has long been made that gender is culturally determined. For example, distinction between sex and gender has been made in which it has been argued that sex refers to basic physiological differences between men and women, while gender refers to culturally specific patterns of behaviour which may be attached to the sexes. In other words, gender refers to a set of assumptions about the nature and character of the biological differences between males and females; assumptions that are manifest in a number of ideas and practices which have a determinant influence

upon the identity, social opportunities and life experiences of human actors. In respect to entrepreneurship, they are assumptions, however, that have tended to be developed and refined in contexts dominated by males and, hence, have been disadvantageous to females (Moore, 1990; Stevenson, 1990). Specifically in Africa, as Diagne and Ossebi (1996) suggested, beyond the visible social position(s) of women, reflections on the gender issues need to be directed at the different cultural modalities of social assignation. For purposes of conceptual clarity, the next section discusses gender and culture in research practice generally, and then in entrepreneurship practice specifically.

Gender and culture in research and practice

Feminist movements have been noted to have contributed strongly towards contemporary cultural analysis in pushing for the inclusion of issues related to gender in social research (Reinharz, 1992; Calàs & Smircich, 1992, 1996). Calàs et al. (1996) noted that in pushing for their concerns, feminists argued that there had been insufficient recognition of how differences in the experiences of women and men, together with changes in the relationships between them, could have significant implications for the ways in which social phenomena are conceptualized and investigated. In this respect, the initial purpose of feminist research was to bring women's experiences more fully into view because it was argued that the social world had been studied from the perspective of male interests and concerns, and in ignorance of the different picture that emerged when focusing on women's lives and ways of seeing (Maynard, 2004a). Accordingly, knowledge which was presented as neutral, objective and value-free was instead seen as partial and gendered.

Gender in research practice

According to Calàs and Smircich (1992, 1996), feminist concerns continue to intersect with organizational issues. Moreover, and equally important to note here is that feminist theories are not only about 'women's' issues (i.e., studying women *qua* women) (Maynard, 2004a). Rather, by using feminist theories as conceptual lenses, a more inclusive social research practice, one that brings in the concerns of others, not just women, who are directly effected by global social and cultural practices and discourses, can be created (Maynard, 2004a, b).

In Africa diverse perspectives on feminism can be found in the contemporary literature (Lewis, 2001). Indeed a range of perspectives are encompassed by feminist scholarship in Africa (Arnfred, 2004; Lewis, 2001; Sadiq, 2002). Recurring themes include the divide between continental Africans and those in the diaspora,

the diversity in 'African' feminisms which includes womanists (Kolawole, 1997), black feminists, African feminists, or post-colonial feminists (Pereira, 2002; Touré, Barry, & Diallo, 2003); and varying forms of engagement with 'Western' feminism. However, what is crucial to the question of how women in different socio-cultural and historical locations organize, around what kinds of issues, whether or not they view their activities as feminist, and if so, how they formulate their relations to feminism, is that their struggles have been not only a response to oppressive features of their own societies, but also a fight against the imposition of Western norms (Pereira, 2002). Moreover, in the context of work and organizing, as Bruni, Gherardi and Poggio (2004) suggested, entrepreneurship seems to be an interesting field for the study of gender processes shaped by particular relations of subordination. In addition, such a focus is compelled by two arguments regarding what Ogbor (2000) believed to be reification in entrepreneurial studies. Ogbor (2000) argued that in the discourse, entrepreneurial action is an archetype of social action. Moreover, the discourse is historically located in the symbolic universe of the male and, as such, is intrinsically connected with the concept of hegemonic masculinity (articulated by Bruni and Poggio (2004, p. 2) when they described the entrepreneur as "conqueror of unexplored territories, lonely hero, patriarch").

In this paper the emphasis is on considering the ways in which gender is created and maintained. This emphasis is similar to the perspective which takes 'doing' and 'saying' gender as a social practice. Such a perspective was suggested by scholars theorizing gender in everyday organizational lives such as Gherardi (1994), Bruni, Gherardi and Poggio (2004) and Acker (1990). According to this perspective, gender does not reside within the person. Instead, it is constituted by what Bruni and Poggio (2004) described as the many ways in which we 'do', rather than 'have' gender. In other words, that gender is something we enact, not an inner core or constellation of traits that we express. Similarly, West and Zimmerman (1994) defined it as a pattern of social organization that structures the relations, especially the power relations, between women and men. They argued that in practice, in doing gender, men are also doing dominance and women are doing difference. Moreover, membership in the category of 'male' or 'female' must be affirmed continuously through social behaviour. According to this perspective, we validate our membership in a particular gender category through such interactional processes.

As has already been argued in this paper, the literature on entrepreneurship to date has focused on ways in which studies of male entrepreneurs can be used as a yardstick through which points by which women-owned businesses are advantaged or disadvantaged can be identified. The social construction

of the female sex (the assumption for example, that women have a 'natural' propensity towards 'small and stable' businesses) leads to the gendering of certain business activities (such as small business activities, which are predominated by women). Thus, although women have been included in a number of studies on entrepreneurship in recent years, there has been little focus on challenging traditional definitions of entrepreneurship or in developing new methods to collect information on entrepreneurship. As such, while there has been some reflection on the difference which the sex of the business owner makes, this reflection has not been contextualized within theoretical understandings of the ways in which entrepreneurial work is socially constructed, i.e., the ways in which entrepreneurial work is situated within gendered processes which form and are formed through relationships between work, organizational structure and the sex of the worker.

IMPLICATIONS FOR THEORY AND PRACTICE

While studying women is not new, studying them from the perspective of their own experiences so that women can understand themselves and the world is still in an initial stage of paradigm development. That is, it is still novel to study gender - the idea of a systematic social construction of masculinity and femininity - that is barely, if at all, constrained by biology. Against this background, an alternative approach that takes 'women's experiences', as empirical and theoretical resources for research about the entrepreneurial process, is in order. This meant that the specific processes regarding how gender and entrepreneurship are produced and reproduced in social practices need to be investigated. Ultimately, examination of these processes is useful in studying entrepreneurship as a practical accomplishment, just as gender and other such forms of social positioning are practical accomplishments.In this respect,research is needed to examinethe process that positions people within entrepreneurial practices as 'men' and 'women' who are complementary opposites (assuming not rank or chronology, but complementary positioning) as seems the case when one looks at an African family in which a man and his wife are engage in business activities. Such research will be useful for shedding light, not only on experiences of female entrepreneurs, but also on the experiences of all entrepreneurs, as well as on the notion of entrepreneurship itself.

A review of the literature suggests that traditional approaches to women and entrepreneurship are more steeped in variance-type explanations than narrative explanations. Indeed, the shortcomings of traditional methods, (e.g. experimental and survey research) have been highlighted, as has the need for new approaches. From the criticisms of traditional approaches, the methodological challenge for researchers interested in exploring questions relating to meaning-making, social

identities, culture and so on is to come up with a research approach in which methods match theoretical perspectives. Some efforts, albeit still few, have been made to find a research methodology that would be useful in learning about entrepreneurship as meaning-making in action, and in developing insights about entrepreneurship. For instance, Kikoma (2007) employed a narrative inquiry approach, in part because its theoretical assumptions have resonance with the definition of entrepreneurship used in that study. That is, both entrepreneurship and narrative were viewed as socially constructed and the researcher begun with the understanding that entrepreneurial narratives do not objectively mirror reality, but are constructed in interaction.

Although in the recent past there has been interest in gender and entrepreneurship (as symbolic spaces of intertwined practices), the social formation of the entrepreneurial self is still an underdeveloped topic of research. Studies are needed that elicit stories about doing gender and entrepreneurship as practical social accomplishments. Such research contrasts with traditional entrepreneurship research, which favours surveys and in-depth interviews as a way of learning about entrepreneurs. By focusing on the way entrepreneurs make meaning of the experience of entrepreneurship, such research will not only helps us learn something new from entrepreneurs' stories about their experiences, but the stories themselves also have knowledge that can be generalized to other contexts.

CONCLUSIONS

While there is burgeoning literature on entrepreneurship, the studies reporting on this literature have been criticized for deficiencies in their account of the phenomenon. For instance, critics argue that individual studies appear fragmented, unrelated, and seem to describe small segments of the entrepreneurial population, and more frequently than not apply theoretical tools developed in other areas which are neither reliable nor valid. Moreover, feminist critics point to the omission and under-representation of women as research subjects, the concentration on masculine dominated sectors of social life, as well as the use of paradigms, concepts, methods, and theories which more faithfully portrayed men's more than women's experiences, as major problems associated with research in this area.

Against that background, detailed theoretical reflections on the social construction of entrepreneurship are recommended in future research. It is expected that such an approach to women and entrepreneurship will shed light not only on the experiences of women, but also on experiences of all entrepreneurs, as well as on the notion of entrepreneurship itself.

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